

## EVALUATION REPORT

### EXTERNAL FINAL EVALUATION

**Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus –  
Phase II (August 2021 to July 2024)  
A Regional Project of UN Women**



**Submitted to:  
UN Women Georgia Country Office by**



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Cover Photo: Stock images clockwise from upper left: Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Bottom left, women from Qusar and neighbouring villages participating in WEESC, Azerbaijan, UNDP Azerbaijan.

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## ACRONYMS

ADA	Austrian Development Agency
AGBU	Armenia General Benevolent Union
ARMSTAT	National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia
Bpfa	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EIEC	Environmental Information and Education Centre (Georgia)
EMG	Evaluation Management Group
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group
ET	Evaluation Team
ETL	Evaluation Team Leader
EU	European Union
FBP	Family Benefit Programme
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBA+	Gender-Based Analysis Plus (re: intersectionality)
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GE	Gender Equality
GERAAS	Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis System
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GIA	Gender Impact Assessment
GM	Gender Mainstreaming
GRB	Gender Responsive Budgeting
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information Communication and Technology
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IFI	International Finance Institution
ILO	International Labour Organization
ITT	Indicator Tracking Table
KII	Key Informant Interview
KRDF	Kakheti Regional Development Foundation
LIO	Labour Inspectorate Office (Georgia)
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MEPA	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (Georgia)
MFI	Microfinance Institution
MLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Armenia
MoESD	Ministry of Education and Social Development
MoIDPOTLHSA	Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health, and Social Affairs of Georgia
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization

OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development - Development Assistance Committee
PGA	Participatory Gender Audit
RBM	Results-based Management
RDA	Rural Development Agency
RRF	Results and Resources Framework
SESA	State Employment Support Agency (Georgia)
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
ToC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNJP4GE	United Nations Joint Programme for Gender Equality
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WEESC-II	Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus Phase Two
WEPs	Women's Empowerment Principles
WRC	Women's Resource Centres

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women's economic empowerment (WEE) is increasingly considered a prerequisite for realizing gender equality, strengthening women's agency and achieving the sustainable development goals agreed in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

Since independence in 1991, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have made progress in reducing gender inequality. Yet, several international indices show that work remains to be done to achieve the full and equal participation of women in society. Social and cultural barriers, gendered division of labor 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.

### Programme Being Evaluated

To address these challenges, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) Georgia launched the first phase of the *Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus* (WEESC) project in August 2018 followed by Phase II starting in 2021. WEESC's goal is to ensure that women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are economically empowered and participate in relevant decision-making. WEESC-II is a 3-year, US\$4.7 million, project which is being implemented by UN Women Georgia, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Armenia and Azerbaijan from August 2021-July 2024. Both phases of WEESC are funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

### Evaluation Objectives, Scope and Approach

The primary purpose of this evaluation is to assess 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 the third and final phase of the project.

The information generated by the evaluation will be used by stakeholders including UN Women and UNDP, the donors, and participating government and non-government organizations to support: 1) strategic learning and decision-making and 2) enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning from experience.

The overall structure of the evaluation is based on a theory-based, utilization-focused and mixed methods approach that examined the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. This approach takes into account both the existing project Theory of Change (ToC) 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 considered the broader WEE policy and legal systems both regionally and nationally which the WEESC project is seeking to influence.

## Evaluation Findings

### Relevance - Is the Intervention Doing the Right Things?

Globally, there is increasing recognition of the importance of supporting WEE and this is being reflected at the country level. The project outputs are informed by relevant international commitments to women's empowerment, and they are directly linked to existing agreements between the UN system and the Governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, thereby improving each country's international human rights commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)<sup>1</sup> and other legal instruments, particularly those related to equitable economic development. The project goals contribute to national priorities and various national plans that underline the importance of gender mainstreaming in development. WEESC-II is relevant to the needs of the target beneficiaries, the priorities and policies of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and supports national structures. It is also aligned with UN Women's strategic note for Europe and Central Asia and the design is adequate to achieve its objectives, based on analysis of the regional and national contexts.

### Coherence: How Well Does the Project Fit?

As noted above, WEESC-II is aligned with UN Women and UNDP priorities in the region as well as national government plans and priorities. The evaluation found synergies between the project and other UN interventions, for example UN Women's work with Norway on the Good Governance for Gender Equality Programme. While there are other programmes working on WEE and Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB), stakeholders believe WEESC-II is unique and does not duplicate but complements other programmes. Stakeholders believe it fills in gaps by taking a holistic approach to women's economic empowerment and that UN Women and UNDP have a comparative advantage in this area.

### Effectiveness: Is the Intervention Achieving Its Objectives?

At the regional level WEESC-II is achieving its objectives, as shown in Table 1 below. At the local level it has exceeded its life of project targets with six months remaining in the programme. It has also reached its targets at the policy and legislative level and has achieved most of its targets at the institutional level. However, there is significant variation between achievements at the country level, with Georgia achieving more than Armenia and Azerbaijan.

While capacity has been built at all levels, from the grassroots to the national government, institutionalizing gender mainstreaming, which requires changing institutional cultures as well as increasing resources allocated to gender equality and women's empowerment has been the slowest of the strategies to achieve targets. Nonetheless, interventions are supporting the implementation of global norms for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) at municipal and national government level and with public and private institutions.

In addition to the intended improvement in their incomes, WEESC-II women reported improved social capital, awareness of their rights and confidence and some reported improved

<sup>1</sup> Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are all parties to the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), as well as to the Optional Protocol.

perceptions of men and other household members of their role in economic activity as well as a reduction in Gender Based Violence (GBV) as a result of their economic activity, which were not explicit targets of the programme.

Table 1: WEESC-II Targets and Achievements

Outcomes	End of Project Targets	Achievements at December 2023
<b>1:</b> Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, use skills, economic opportunities, relevant information, network and support to become farmers/entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia ( <i>grass-roots level</i> )	900 Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, obtain skills and access information, networks, economic opportunities and support services	1,405 mostly poor and socially excluded women obtain skills and access information, networks, economic opportunities and support services
	480 women become farmers (210), entrepreneurs (180) or join the formal labour sector (90)	476 women become farmers (184), entrepreneurs (147) or joined the formal labour sector (145)
	200 women are empowered to participate in local planning and budgeting discussions and advocacy for women's issues in their communities	296 women are empowered to participate in local planning and budgeting discussions and advocacy for women's issues in their communities
	90 Successful advocacy initiatives	122 successful advocacy initiatives
	Businesses have an increased understanding of the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) and have the skills to implement measures that benefit women, specifically in rural areas	251 private enterprises have signed the UN Women/UN Global Compact Women's Economic Empowerment Principles (WEP)
<b>2:</b> Armenia and Georgia implement adequate legislative and policy reforms and frameworks to enable women's economic empowerment ( <i>policy and legislation level</i> )	3 changes in legal and/or regulatory frameworks aligned with international standards	3 changes in legal and/or regulatory frameworks aligned with international standards
	4 changes in gender-responsive policies or programmes enabling WEE	10 changes in gender-responsive policies or programmes enabling WEE
<b>3:</b> The government, public and non-governmental institutions are strengthened to develop and deliver gender-responsive programmes, policies and services for women's economic empowerment in Armenia and Georgia ( <i>institutional level</i> )	4 government and public institutions develop and institutionalize internal gender mainstreaming tools	3 government and public institutions develop and institutionalize internal gender mainstreaming tools
	3 government and public institutions development grant programmes, employment stimulating programmes and programmes/structures monitoring the labour rights in which gender is visibly mainstreamed	2 government and public institutions development grant programmes, employment stimulating programmes and programmes/structures monitoring the labour rights in which gender is visibly mainstreamed
	Share of Gender Impact Assessment recommendations implemented by relevant government/public entities	7 out of 10

## Efficiency: How Well Are Resources Being Used?

Human resources and management systems are adequate for WEESC-II to deliver most of its intended results by the end of the project at a regional level. As noted above, the level of achievement varies by country, but overall the outputs and outcomes are being achieved as planned. Stakeholders have been engaged in planning and implementation under the leadership of UN Women. While there were some concerns expressed about monitoring and reporting requirements, which implementing partners found resource intensive and donors felt did not always meet their needs, overall these mechanisms allow UN Women to manage the programme. It is difficult to assess cost efficiency as it has been hard to get a clear understanding of how financial resources have been allocated over the life of the program but the programme appears to be on time and on budget.

## Sustainability: Will the Benefits Last?

At the grassroots level changes in human capacities are rarely lost: many people retain and use at least some of what they learn. For the 145 women who have gained formal employment, many will likely continue to be employed and enjoy higher incomes as a result. For the 147 who are engaged in entrepreneurial and the 184 in agricultural activities, there is likely a need for ongoing business development and/or agricultural extension services and access to financing for these businesses to thrive. Women's networks and advocacy efforts are bearing fruit and in some municipalities consultations with women are being institutionalised. There are good reasons to expect that larger companies will implement their Women's Economic Empowerment Principles (WEP) plans. Policy and regulatory changes will likely be maintained, but few government or public entities have institutionalized and mainstreamed gender. Nor are the required budget allocations assured.

## Conclusions

WEESC's approach to addressing women's economic empowerment was 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.

WEESC-II is clearly aligned with UN Women's Strategic Note and the priorities of UNDP in the South Caucasus Region. Efforts are being made to ensure synergies within the UN system, including UN Country Teams (UNCTs), and other projects under UN Women and UNDP, while also collaborating closely with government entities in each country to prevent duplication. UN Women and UNDP are recognized for their unique expertise in gender equality and sustainable development, providing them with a distinct advantage in the region concerning WEE. However, UN Women is more involved in Georgia and UNDP in Azerbaijan.

At the grassroots level all three countries have exceeded their targets in mobilizing women, particularly in enhancing their skills. Women beneficiaries shared positive feedback on the training, grants for start-up businesses and GRB and experienced both financial and non-financial benefits as a result of project support. However, women reported that inadequate grant amounts, limited or absent availability of alternative finance, limited economic

opportunities, mobility challenges, unpaid care responsibilities, and social norms are still significant barriers. This was particularly emphasised in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The private sector across Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia has shown increased commitment to gender equality through initiatives like signing the UN Women/UN Global Compact WEP and developing implementation plans. This indicates a growing recognition among companies of the importance of gender-responsive policies and practices. Despite the positive trends, there are challenges hindering the private sector's full engagement in gender equality efforts.

Georgia has made significant progress compared to Armenia in influencing legislative and regulatory frameworks to support women's economic empowerment. While progress has been made, there are challenges in institutionalizing gender mainstreaming efforts, including high staff turnover affecting continuity, inadequate budgets and poor coordination and information exchange between ministries and agencies, as well as limited awareness among decision-makers.

All stakeholders were happy with WEESC-II's results especially in the context of the difficult external environment (e.g. COVID 19, war between Armenia and Azerbaijan). The Evaluation Team considers the human resources allocated to project implementation were adequate to achieve expected outputs and outcomes but were stretched for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and reporting. Stakeholders also feel WEESC-II has been implemented in a cost-effective manner, given the size of the budget and the expected outcomes to be achieved. Project efficiency has been affected by tensions among implementing partners, which should be addressed.

There is continued commitment and willingness to institutionalise across all levels, however, progress has been variable. Capacity development and institutionalisation need additional time and continued reinforcement. This has been varied across different agencies and in most cases although good practices are included in the strategies, there are not enough resources. Greater attention to sustainability is needed in the next phase.

## Lessons

The key lessons learned emerging from WEECS-II include:

1. When designing and implementing a project it is essential to collaborate with key stakeholders representing all potential beneficiaries to ensure both relevancy to and ownership by the recipients.
2. Projects must be flexible in their design and implementation to respond positively and in a timely manner to both internal and external unforeseen changes in conditions.
3. All women are exposed to at least one type of vulnerability and the more the number of vulnerabilities, the more it affects their ability to utilize the training and financial support provided by a project.
4. It is critical to ensure that there are potential markets for the beneficiaries' products or services; that alternative sources of finance are available; and all vulnerabilities have been identified and thoroughly understood.

5. When providing training, the process should be provided with sufficient time to follow the training cycle of: needs assessment; training design and delivery; follow-up and reinforcement; and impact assessment.
6. It is important to target socialisation activities to men and other household members, possibly through public awareness campaigns on issues related to GEWE, as it helps build trust and reduces the risk of men feeling excluded and reacting negatively to women's engagement in the project.
7. Chances for success are increased when projects work in a manner that respects the local structures.
8. Success in institutionalising long term gender responsive practices in companies happens when the decision-makers are bought into the process of WEP.
9. The progress achieved in policy reforms is fragile and susceptible to external factors, such as changes in political dynamics.
10. To ensure sustainability, the institutionalization of project results must be prioritized well before the project ends.

## Recommendations

Key recommendations emerging from the findings and conclusions include:

1. UN Women should ensure that there are adequate monitoring resources available at all levels of implementation and follow up with partners to understand the issues they are having with the reporting templates and jointly determine corrective action.
2. When funding UN Women's projects, donors should ensure that UN Women's reporting procedures are rationalized with the requirements of the donor; this may require negotiation with UN Women Headquarters (HQ).
3. UN Women should reconsider their strategy of grants and training to the micro-subsistence group and the micro-semi-commercial women, directing it differently towards the two groups, and assisting the latter group of women to acquire alternative sources of finance.
4. UN Women should take a systemic approach to providing support to companies implementing WEP activities, aligned with the financial and non-financial benefits to companies, and increase coordination between the public and private sector.
5. UN Women should ensure that the final exit phase of WEESC be considered the sustainability phase and is used to consolidate the gains made in the first two phases, reinforce the achievements of results, institutionalize the results, and not begin any new initiatives, or expand existing activities.

# EVALUATION REPORT

## Final Evaluation of the Women's Economic Empowerment in South Caucasus Regional Project – Phase II

This evaluation report is structured according to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)'s Guidance Note for the *Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis System* (GERAAS) and the formatting comments provided by the UN Women Regional Evaluation Specialist for Europe and Central Asia.

### 1.0 OBJECT AND CONTEXT OF WEESC II

#### 1.1 Objectives of the Project

The main goal of Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus – Phase II (WEESC-II) is to ensure that women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are economically empowered and participate in relevant decision-making. To achieve this goal, UN Women is implementing the second main phase of the project (\$4,700,000) with financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Austrian Development Agency (ADA). The first main phase was implemented from August 2018 to July 2021. This second main phase of the project builds upon the achievements of the first main phase and was implemented from August 2021 to July 2024. It will be followed by a final exit phase.

In order to contribute to the goal of WEESC-II, the project has the following three outcomes and seven outputs:

Table 2: WEECS II Outcomes and Outputs

Outcomes	Outputs
<p><b>1:</b> Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, use skills, economic opportunities, relevant information, network and support to become farmers/entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia (<i>grass-roots level</i>)</p>	<p><b>1.1:</b> Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, obtain skills and access information, networks, economic opportunities and support services to become farmers/entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector</p> <p><b>1.2:</b> Women and women's groups are empowered to participate in local planning and budgeting (e.g. Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) discussions), and greater awareness around the harmful social norms is created in the communities</p> <p><b>1.3:</b> Businesses have an increased understanding of the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) and have the skills to implement measures that benefit women, specifically in rural areas</p>
<p><b>2:</b> Armenia and Georgia implement adequate legislative and policy reforms and frameworks to enable women's economic empowerment</p>	<p><b>2.1:</b> Data and evidence is generated to develop legislative and policy frameworks that enable women's economic empowerment in Armenia and Georgia</p>

Outcomes	Outputs
<i>(policy and legislation level)</i>	<b>2.2:</b> The national gender machineries of Armenia and Georgia are supported to carry out changes in policy and legislative frameworks enabling women's economic empowerment
<b>3:</b> The government, public and non-governmental institutions are strengthened to develop and deliver gender-responsive programmes, policies and services for women's economic empowerment in Armenia and Georgia <i>(institutional level)</i>	<b>3.1:</b> Targeted government, public and non-governmental institutions are strengthened to mainstream gender in their operations, and their personnel have adequate knowledge and skills  <b>3.2:</b> Targeted government and public institutions develop specific programmes and institutional amendments to support women's economic empowerment

## 1.2 WEESC-II's Theory of Change

The theory of change (ToC) of how the outcomes contribute to the goal of the project is as follows: if (1) women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, are provided with skills, economic opportunities, relevant information, network and support to become farmers / entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector; and (2) adequate legislative and policy frameworks are in place and implemented to enable women's economic empowerment; and (3) government, public and non-governmental institutions develop and deliver gender-responsive programmes, public services, strategies and plans for women's economic empowerment; then (4) women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are economically and socially empowered and exercise their civil rights to participate in relevant decision-making, because (5) the key structural barriers for women's economic empowerment will be dismantled and through economic empowerment the enabling environment for their civil and social empowerment will be created. Please see Annex I for the diagram showing the *Theory of Change*.

During Phase II, the WEESC project aims to increase economic security and improve access to livelihood and development opportunities for women, particularly the poorest and most excluded in the South Caucasus countries. The project outputs are informed by relevant international commitments to women's empowerment, and they are directly linked to the existing agreements between the UN system and the Governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, thereby improving each country's international human rights commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)<sup>2</sup> and other legal instruments, particularly those related to equitable economic development. The project goals contribute to national priorities and various national plans that underline the importance of gender mainstreaming in development.

The Evaluation Team found no significant changes to the WEESC-II implementation plans.

<sup>2</sup> Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are all parties to the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), as well as to the Optional Protocol.

### 1.3 WEESC-II Stakeholders

In addition to the donors, ADC and SDC, the beneficiaries and the partnership between UN Women and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for implementation in Armenia and Azerbaijan, WEESC-II has multiple stakeholders across the region, including national and local government bodies, and local organizations helping to implement activities at the grassroots level.

Activities related to the first outcome are carried out in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia with a specific focus on the poor and socially excluded groups of women in rural areas, including women engaged in agriculture. Activities aim to increase women's access to income-generating opportunities, knowledge and training, including strengthening their capacities to organize and participate in decision-making at the national and local levels. In this phase, the project also reaches out to women employed in the informal sector as domestic workers in the capitals of Armenia and Georgia, supporting their mobilization into professional networks and associations. The private sector is also provided with technical support to uphold their corporate social responsibilities and promote gender equality in the workplace, marketplace and community in Armenia and Azerbaijan; and the general population is engaged through public awareness campaigns on issues related to gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

The second and third outcome activities support the government officials and public servants in Armenia and Georgia who are benefiting from technical support and capacity development. The indirect beneficiaries of the interventions within the framework of the second and third outcomes are women who are engaged in both the formal and informal economies as this work results in their increased access to decent work opportunities, revised and strengthened gender-responsive policies and services, and increased access to information, skills development and decision-making spaces. Herewith, the general population, women and men are engaged through public awareness campaigns on issues related to gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

### 1.4 Geographic Coverage of WEESC-II

For the grass-roots level work with women (Outcome 1) in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia as well as on the institutional level with local authorities (Outcome 2) in Armenia and Georgia, the following are the target geographic areas:

- Eleven consolidated municipalities are targeted in Armenia: four in Gegharkunik (Chambarak, Geghamasar, Shoghakat, Vardenis) and seven in Shirak (Akhuryan, Amasia, Ani, Arpi, Ashotsk, Marmashen, Sarapat)
- Four regions have been identified in Azerbaijan: Baku-Khazar, Fuzuli, Gusar and Sabirabad
- Twelve municipalities are targeted in selected regions in Georgia: three municipalities in Kakheti (Akhmeta, Lagodekhi, Telavi); three in Kvemo Kartli (Bolnisi, Marneuli, Tetri Tskaro); three in Mtskheta-Mtianeti (Dusheti, Kazbegi, Tianeti) and three in Samtskhe-Javakheti (Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, Aspindza)

## 1.5 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. The goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to reduce inequalities and to "leave no one behind". This will require (a) identifying groups who have been left behind; (b) understanding the causes behind their exclusion; and (c) developing and implementing strategies of inclusiveness.

The economic empowerment of women – to succeed and advance economically and to make and act on economic decisions – is a prerequisite for realizing gender equality and empowering women in all areas of life. It is also a cornerstone for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda. At the global level, there is widespread consensus that, all too often, discriminatory social norms constrain women's ability to find economic opportunities, including decent jobs on an equal footing with men. Multiple disadvantages – poverty, disability, age, geography and migratory status, to name a few – remain critical obstacles to equal rights and opportunities for hundreds of millions of women.<sup>3</sup>

There has been progress in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in terms of reducing gender inequalities since gaining their independence in the 1990s. Yet, much work remains to achieve the full and equal participation of women in society and in the economy. According to the 2023 *Global Gender Gap Report*, among 146 economies, Armenia ranked 52<sup>nd</sup>, Azerbaijan 27<sup>th</sup> and Georgia 68<sup>th</sup> under the women's economic participation and opportunity sub-index.<sup>4</sup> In the 2023 *Women, Business, and the Law* analysis of barriers to women's economic participation, Armenia received 87.5, Azerbaijan 78.8, and Georgia 88.1, where a score of 100 represents the most favourable environment for women's economic empowerment.<sup>5</sup> The results of these studies suggest that women's economic opportunities in the South Caucasus region continue to be limited.

The 2018 study commissioned by UN Women to the Caucasus Research and Resources Centers in the framework of the SDC supported inception phase of this project concluded that the primary drivers of women's economic inactivity in the region are traditional gender roles and the accompanying burdens associated with unpaid care work; women who are not working explicitly cite family-related reasons for not working. In Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, having children, being married, and/or having left or not sought out work for family-related reasons are strong predictors of whether or not a woman participates in the labor force. In Armenia, married women are 16 percentage points less likely to participate in the labor force. In contrast, married men are 19 percentage points more likely to participate in the labor force, controlling for other relevant factors. Children are associated with a six-percentage point lower level of labor force participation among women in Georgia. In Azerbaijan, a woman's chances of being in the labor force are 12 percentage points lower if married, all else equal. Women who

<sup>3</sup> Report of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, *Leave No One Behind: A Call to Action for Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment* (2016), 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report*. Available from <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2023/> of the 146 countries, the overall 2023 Global Gender Gap rankings are as follows: Armenia is 52<sup>nd</sup>, Azerbaijan 27<sup>th</sup> and Georgia 68<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> The World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law* (2023), p. 4. Available from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/b60c615b-09e7-46e4-84c1-bd5f4ab88903/content>.

have at any point in their life left a job or not sought one out for family related reasons are 11 percentage points less likely to be in the labor force. In Georgia, if a woman has ever left a job or not sought one out for reasons related to family, she is 18 percentage points less likely to be in the labor force.<sup>6</sup>

As in other contexts, a persistent gender pay gap affects women in the region. According to project documents, the unadjusted pay gap stands at 28.4 per cent in Armenia<sup>7</sup>, 39 per cent in Azerbaijan<sup>8</sup> and 17.7 per cent in Georgia.<sup>9</sup> As in other contexts, de facto educational segregation is likely to lead to pay gaps as well as lower rates of economic engagement. In Georgia, more men enter science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields than women. In Azerbaijan, the majority (58 percent) of respondents thought that women should not pursue technical fields due to a lack of job opportunities.<sup>10</sup> Educational segregation, in turn, can encourage occupational segregation; there is ample evidence of a variety of sectors being gender-skewed. For instance, women are overrepresented in the education and social work sectors and men in construction, mining and manufacturing. Despite women's overrepresentation in some sectors, men in each of these sectors make more money. Notably, this pattern appears to be present in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.<sup>11</sup>

The lack of women's participation in the economy is likely hurting economic growth. Some research suggests that enhancing women's economic empowerment by improving entrepreneurship and leadership contributes to economic growth, job creation and prosperity.<sup>12</sup> In the region, the World Bank has estimated that lower levels of economic engagement by women depresses GDP by 12 percent in Georgia and 14 percent in Armenia.<sup>13</sup> Other research suggests economies and firms become more efficient as women's economic engagement increases.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, barriers to women's economic participation are likely to slow innovation since the best talent is not efficiently allocated. In Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, this issue is likely to be particularly problematic as women attain levels of education equal to that of their male peers.

<sup>6</sup> UN Women, *Women's Economic Inactivity and Engagement in the Informal Sector in the South Caucasus: Causes and Consequences* (2018). Available from: <https://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/12/womens-economic-inactivity-and-engagement-in-the-informal-sector-in-georgia>

<sup>7</sup> UN Women, *Analysis of the Gender Pay Gap and Gender Inequality in the Labor Market in Armenia* (2020) Available from <https://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/analysis-of-the-gender-pay-gap-and-gender-inequality-in-the-labor-market-in-armenia>

<sup>8</sup> UNECE, *Azerbaijan Statistical Database* (2019 data) Available from <https://w3.unece.org/CountriesInFigures/en/Home/Index?countryCode=031>

<sup>9</sup> UN Women, *Analysis of the Gender Pay Gap and Gender Inequality in the Labor Market in Georgia* (2020) Available from <https://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/analysis-of-the-gender-pay-gap-and-gender-inequality-in-the-labor-market-in-georgia>

<sup>10</sup> UNDP, *Gender Attitudes in Azerbaijan: Trends and Challenges* (2007). Available from <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/nhdr2007/gendereng.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> According to the official data of GEOSTAT (2017) and ARMSTAT (2016). See also: Melanie Hugie-Williams, Marten van Klaveren, Nuria Ramos Martin and Kea Tijdens, "An Overview of Women's Work and Employment in Azerbaijan", *Decisions for Life MDG3 Project Country Report No. 9* (University of Amsterdam/Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies, 2009), 1-13. Available from [https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Country\\_Report\\_No9-Azerbaijan\\_EN\\_short.pdf](https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Country_Report_No9-Azerbaijan_EN_short.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> OECD, *Enhancing Women's Economic Empowerment through Entrepreneurship and Business Leadership in OECD Countries* (2014). Available from [http://www.oecd.org/gender/Enhancing%20Women%20Economic%20Empowerment\\_Fin\\_1\\_Oct\\_2014.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/gender/Enhancing%20Women%20Economic%20Empowerment_Fin_1_Oct_2014.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Mercy Tembon, *Beyond celebrating—Removing barriers for women in the South Caucasus* (World Bank, 2017). Available from <http://blogs.worldbank.org/europeandcentralasia/beyond-celebrating-removing-barriers-women-south-caucasus>.

<sup>14</sup> Rachel Heath, "Women's Access to Labor Market Opportunities, Control of Household Resources, and Domestic Violence", *Policy Research Working Paper*, No. 6149 (World Bank, 2012). Available from <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/11987>.

## 2.0 PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND USE OF THE EVALUATION

The Final Evaluation of WEESC-II is being undertaken in the last year of project implementation as established in the Project Document, as a mandatory final external evaluation commissioned by UN Women. The Evaluation is being conducted by Project Services International (PSI) of Ottawa, Canada, between March 1 and July 14, 2024. See Annex II for the schedule.

### 2.1 Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this final evaluation of WEESC-II is to provide a primarily formative (forward looking) assessment to support the UN Women Georgia Country Office and national stakeholders' strategic learning and decision-making. The evaluation will also have a secondary summative (backward looking) perspective to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning from experience.

The Evaluation Objectives are:

- Analyze the relevance of the implementation strategy and approaches of the WEESC II project;
- Assess organizational efficiency in progressing towards the achievement of the project's results as defined in the intervention;
- Validate the project results in terms of achievements and/or weaknesses toward the outcome and outputs;
- Assess the potential for sustainability of the results achieved by the project;
- Document lessons learned, best practices, and challenges to inform future work of UN Women on women's economic empowerment;
- Identify strategies for replication and up-scaling of the project's best practices;
- Provide actionable recommendations for the implementation of the final exit phase of the project and modalities in the countries covered by the project in order to foster sustainability of the intervention;
- Assess how the project and its results relate and contribute to commitments and achievement of the SDGs in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia with a focus on SDG 5 and SDG 8.

### 2.2 Scope

The evaluation covers the project implementation period from August 2021 to January 2024 in all three countries covered by the project. Evaluation data collection was conducted in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, where the project is being implemented; including in the national capitals and the target project regions to collect the necessary data. The evaluation examined all the relevant documents of the WEESC-II Project, including logical framework of the project, its Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan, annual work plans, semi-annual and annual reports to the donors, and knowledge products produced in the framework of the project.

## 2.3 Use and Users

The information generated by the evaluation will be used by different stakeholders to:

- Contribute to building of the evidence base on effective strategies for the economic empowerment of women in all three countries;
- Facilitate strategic reflection, learning and further planning for programming in the areas of women's economic empowerment at policy, institutional and grassroots levels and promotion of women's participation in decision-making.

Main evaluation users include the UN Women office in Georgia, as well as SDC and ADA (project donors). National stakeholders – UNDP in Armenia and Azerbaijan, Non-government Organization (NGO) partners, parliamentary counterparts, targeted state agencies, and local governments are also expected to make use of the evaluation. All key stakeholders were involved in the evaluation process to increase ownership of findings, draw lessons learned and make greater use of the evaluation results.

The findings, conclusion, recommendations, and lessons of the evaluation are expected to contribute to the final exit phase of the intervention and to overall effective programming on gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) in the South Caucasus. The information generated by the evaluation will moreover be used to engage policy makers and other stakeholders at local, national and regional levels in evidence-based dialogues and to advocate for gender-responsive strategies to economically empower women.

### 3.0 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

PSI adopted an approach that ensures the evaluation is transparent, inclusive, participatory and utilization-focused. The focus throughout the evaluation is on ensuring the information needs of evaluation users are met. It takes into account both the program logic and country specific program results in the second phase, building on the lessons of Phase I. The socio-economic and women's economic empowerment contexts of each country were integrated. Both qualitative and quantitative data, including facts and perceptions, were collected and assessed.

This is a theory-based evaluation where the program logic is at the core of the evaluation, gathering evidence and insights along the theory of change for the purpose of (a) proving results and (b) capturing qualitative insights into the process of causality and behaviour change to understand 'if' and 'how', the program activities are contributing to the overarching goal/impact of the project through the process of the theory of change outlined in section 1.2 above.

A mixed methods approach was taken that included document reviews; Key Informant Interviews (KIs) using semi-structured questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) covering the three outcome areas. These multiple lines of evidence were triangulated in order to provide a user-focused, evidence-based narrative that connects analysis, findings, conclusions and recommendations. See section 3.2 for the five categories of respondents and the numbers and types of KIs and FGD participants.

#### 3.1 Evaluation Matrix

The evaluation matrix operationalized the Terms of Reference (ToR -- see Annex III) and the agreed framework of direct and indirect results into measurable categories. The evaluation questions being covered were aligned with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) and UN evaluation criteria – namely: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coherence and sustainability. As well, in the development of the evaluation matrix, the UN Evaluation Group's *Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation* was taken into account.

The main evaluation questions, summarised from the key questions provided in the ToR, include:

**Evaluation Question 1: Relevance:** Is the intervention doing the right things? – 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.

**Evaluation Question 2: Coherence:** How well does the intervention fit in? – The compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country or institution.

**Evaluation Question 3: Effectiveness:** Is the intervention achieving its objectives? – The extent to which the intervention is expected to achieve its objectives and results, including any differential results across groups.

**Evaluation Question 4: Efficiency:** How well are resources being used? – The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economical and timely way.

**Evaluation Question 5: Sustainability:** Will the benefits last? – The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue.

Based on these questions, the Evaluation Team developed the Evaluation Matrix in Annex IV, which presents the evaluation questions as well as sub-questions, a set of judgement criteria for assessing the evaluation questions and the data collection and measurement tools that were used to answer these questions. The Evaluation Matrix was used throughout the evaluation including in developing the data collection tools and instruments included in Annex V.

### 3.2 Evaluation Tools

The evaluation methodology relied on three data collection tools.

**Document Review** – This includes review of WEESC II Project logical framework, M&E plan and progress reports. In addition, selected UN Women and UN documents were reviewed on strategic frameworks for the region and each country, as well as broader GEWE agreements. Other country specific documents were also reviewed for Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, including country specific reports, knowledge products attributable to the WEESC project, and work plans such as macro-statistical reports indicating influence of WEESC activities to impact level changes. More than 31 documents were reviewed by the evaluation team, see Annex VI.

**Key Informant Interviews** – A main source of qualitative data was interviews with implementers and key stakeholders across the following groups:

1. Implementers – A total of ten interviewees from UN Women Georgia, UNDP-Azerbaijan, UNDP-Armenia at the country office levels that are involved in WEESC including officers, Steering Committee, and Evaluation Management Group (EMG).
2. Donors- A total of six representatives from the two donors, SDC and ADA were interviewed as part of the evaluation.
3. Stakeholders or Change Agents– A total of 78 representatives were interviewed from the public and private sector agencies or organizations benefiting directly or indirectly from WEESC support including national and local government authorities, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), financial institutions, business service providers, Women's Resource Centers (WRCs), and other local groups, private sector partners, organisations representing the interests of women and vulnerable groups.

Interviews were conducted in person, via telephone/online platforms and included both descriptive questions, seeking quantitative data, factual insights related to programming context, and normative questions, seeking perceptions on program planning, implementation and results against expectations and the behavior change or application of changes to practices as a result of the project activities.

**Focus Group Discussions** – 22 FGDs were conducted with 142 beneficiaries at the grassroots level primarily with three groups

1. Small-holder female farmers

2. Self-employed women engaged in non-agriculture entrepreneurial activities (non-agriculture)
3. Wage employed women who secured new employment and/or have received job placement/internship through WEP signatories

These groups were further stratified in terms of:

- a. Economically active and reported increased income.
- b. Trained, economically active, reported increased information, strengthened capacities and skills but did not experience or report any income increase.
- c. Trained but economically inactive, that is, they have not yet secured employment nor established businesses.
- d. In countries where Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting training has been provided, an FGD was also conducted with the women who received this specific training and have been involved in local planning and budgeting.

A fifth group of indirect beneficiaries who are formally employed, are unemployed and seeking a job, or are employed as a result of interventions in Outcomes 2 and 3, are not included in the data collection process of this evaluation, however, the contribution of Outcomes 2 and 3 on this group was assessed through KIIs and FGDs with public and private sector stakeholders and document reviews, were used to establish a correlation.

The intent was to have a combination of beneficiaries who were part of Phase II and also have been engaged with the program in Phase I to be able to gather evidence of 'sustainability'. See Annex VII for the final, detailed list of KIIs and FGDs conducted.

### 3.3 Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy is based on the extent of work with different stakeholders and impact reported across the three outcome levels in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, as of December 2023. It has also been informed by the initial discussions with UN Women to identify the priority areas for query, given the scope and time limitations.

The Evaluation Team used a purposive sampling approach, taking into account the spread of beneficiaries and partners across different regions. The sampling strategy defines the sampling framework (the area, the programming types and the populations represented) and sets out the rationale for, and mechanics of, sample selection. Sampling also addressed the diversity of stakeholders based on Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) which included intersectionality. This was to help identify key respondents and ensure that the evaluation was inclusive, participatory and respectful of all stakeholders (rights holders and responsibility bearers).

### 3.4 Data Analysis Methods

All data gathered from primary and secondary sources were triangulated, that is cross-checked across sources. The evaluation matrix and the ToC are the basis for the GBA+ and were used throughout the evaluation. As the data were gathered from primary and secondary sources, they were linked to the specific evaluation questions and the ToC. Documents, interviews, FGDs

and meeting notes were analysed to identify trends, themes, and patterns. Attention was paid to the differing contexts within which the project is being implemented.

The totality of evaluation data collected from literature reviews, programme document reviews, KIIs and FGDs, disaggregated by sex and other diversity criteria where possible, was subsequently aggregated by countries and at an overall regional level. The data were analyzed, synthesized, and incorporated into the draft evaluation report.

### 3.5 Evaluation Ethics

The evaluation team engaged with target beneficiary groups, to learn directly from their experiences and gave special attention to ensuring the voices of marginalized women and girls were heard and gender equity and vulnerability considerations were emphasized throughout the evaluation. In developing the evaluation methodology, the team integrated gender equality and diversity to ensure that lines of inquiry (based on the evaluation matrix, Annex IV) were unbiased and that key informants, regardless of gender, age, physical ability and ethnicity, had easy access to the evaluation. The team also ensured the collection of sex-disaggregated data to allow for appropriate Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+).<sup>15</sup>

The following ethical principles were applied to this evaluation:

- **Independence:** The evaluators were not involved in or by any means linked to the program, or organization to be evaluated, nor have a pecuniary or other interest in the evaluation outcome.
- **Respect, protection, safety, anonymity and confidentiality** so that all respondents can feel confident that they will not be compromised through their participation and can decline to participate without fear. As the data collection instruments (Annex V) show, each data collection activity starts with an explanation of the evaluation purpose, a guarantee that all information will be confidential, and that participation in the evaluation is voluntary and will have no bearing on the ability to participate in future programmes.
- **Diversity and inclusion** to ensure that all stakeholders have a voice, especially marginalized groups. In selecting samples, the evaluation team ensured that participants included women and socially excluded groups as much as possible within the evaluation constraints.

### 3.6 Limitations

The evaluation faced the challenges and limitations in the following table which were addressed where possible.

Table 3: Evaluation Challenges and Limitations

Limitation	Description	Mitigation
Restricted time available	UN Women are constrained by time, with the rapidly approaching end to WEESC II and the beginning of WEESC's third and final phase. Thus, needing the information from	UN Women and PSI agreed to a condensed timeline for deliverables, e.g., one week for the initial documentation review and preparation of the draft Inception Report,

<sup>15</sup> GBA+ is an analytical process used to assess how diverse groups of people may experience policies, programs and initiatives. The “plus” in GBA+ includes biological (sexes) and socio-cultural (genders) as well as factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, age, and mental or physical disability and how the interaction between these factors influences the way we might experience initiatives.

Limitation	Description	Mitigation
	the evaluation to inform the design of WEESC III. The reason for the constrained timeline was the delay experienced by UN Women in the recruiting process for an evaluator.	and working simultaneously on some deliverables, e.g., beginning data analysis and report writing while completing data gathering.
Incomplete debriefing of UN Women	A virtual debriefing was held by PSI for UN Women before the completion of the data gathering phase and with only a rudimentary analysis having been carried out.	UN Women and PSI agreed PSI would produce a "0" Draft Evaluation Report to be shared with UN Women. This would inform them, as well as have them verify and offer input into the Team's preliminary findings. This would also allow UN Women to clarify any points, provide any additional insights or information, and correct any factual errors. The results of this process would inform the preparation of the first draft Evaluation Report to be shared with WEESC II stakeholders.
Availability of some respondents	Because of the compressed time frame for the evaluation, some respondents were not available for interviews.	The Evaluation Team ensured that a significant number of similar types of respondents, e.g., donor representatives, were interviewed so that a representative sample was sufficient even if a total population sample was not available.
Some women unable to attend FGD	Some beneficiary women were not able to travel to the site of in-person FGDs, while others were unavailable during the data gathering phase.	The Evaluation Team conducted most FGDs meetings virtually to enable women to participate from their homes. Also, the Team accepted smaller number of participants per each FGD than originally planned for, however, the numbers are considered significant for the purposes of the evaluation.

## 4.0 FINDINGS

This section presents the Evaluation Team's findings according to the evaluation criteria and each of the evaluation questions posed in the ToR. Overall, the evaluation found WEESC-II was doing the right things to address the identified problems for WEE in the south Caucasus, that the program was aligned with UN and national plans and priorities and complemented other initiatives in the region, and was achieving its targeted results in an efficient manner. More work is needed on sustainability.

To meet GERAAS requirements for brevity, this section summarizes the findings and evidence. For the detailed evidence, providing further support of these findings, and additional detail by country, please refer to the Technical Annex, Annex VIII.

Findings by country are summarized in the Country Case Studies at Annex IX.

### 4.1 Relevance - Is WEESC-II Doing the Right Things?

**Finding 1** - Globally, there is increasing recognition of the importance of supporting WEE and this is being reflected at the country level. The project outputs are informed by relevant international commitments to women's empowerment, and they are directly linked to existing agreements between the UN system and the Governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, thereby improving each country's international human rights commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other legal instruments, particularly those related to equitable economic development. The project goals contribute to national priorities and various national plans that underline the importance of gender mainstreaming in development. WEESC-II is relevant to the needs of the target beneficiaries, the priorities and policies of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and supports national structures. It is also aligned with UN Women's strategic note for Europe and Central Asia and the design is adequate to achieve its objectives, based on analysis of the regional and national contexts.

Figure 1: Summary of Findings on Relevance

In assessing the relevance of WEESC, the evaluation team reviewed documents including project documents, regional and or country plans, policies and/or strategies for UN Women, UNDP, SCD and ADA, the most recent UN CEDAW Committee findings, existing agreements between the UN system and the Governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and the country's plans and priorities under the SDGs. In addition, national laws and regulations were reviewed including:

1. Armenia Country Strategic Plan (2019–2024), Decent Work Country Program (2019-2023 and the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Armenia 2021-2025
2. Azerbaijan's National Gender Policy, State Program on the Development of Official Statistics, Azerbaijan 2020: Vision for the Future and Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-economic Development Strategy, State Programme for the Socioeconomic Development of the Regions of Azerbaijan (2019), Order No. 602 (2018) on the employment strategy for 2019–2030 and Azerbaijan's commitments to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 5, and 8.

3. Georgia's Human Rights Strategy 2021-2030 (in development), National Human Rights Action Plan 2018-2020, National Strategy 2019-2023 for Labour and Employment Policy of Georgia, Action Plan 2019-2021 of the National Strategy for Labour and Employment Policy, National Strategy for the Development of Official Statistics of Georgia 2020-2023, and National Strategy for the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises in Georgia 2021-2025 (in development)

The textual alignment between WEESC objectives and the GEWE objectives set out in these documents was confirmed by KIIs with representatives of UN Women, UNDP, SDC, ADA and national governments. This triangulated evidence indicates that WEESC-II is well aligned with international, regional and national gender equality policies of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

The project is guided by existing UN-government agreements and supports each country's commitments under CEDAW and other legal frameworks related to equitable development (e.g. the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), Rio Conventions, SDGs, and the Paris Agreement). It also aligns with national priorities and plans emphasizing gender mainstreaming and enhancing economic security and access to livelihood opportunities for vulnerable women. All three countries in the South Caucasus region have committed to advancing WEE and WEESC-II builds on the interconnectedness between Gender Equality (GE) and Sustainable Development (including economic, social, and environmental sustainability), in alignment with the host country governments' commitments.

Although this is a regional program, it is well contextualised and aligned with the needs of the individual countries. WEESC-II strategically engaged with government entities at national and local levels in Armenia and Georgia, leveraging UN Women's expertise to navigate regional complexities. WEESC-II worked with national structures and forged local partnerships with NGOs to mobilise the target group. WEESC-II has been respectful of the local context and structures and ensured consultation as much possible with all key actors. In Azerbaijan where the program did not engage with the government directly, WEESC-II ensured that local community leaders and WRCs are involved.

The project objectives are also aligned with and contribute to UN Women Strategic Plan (2022-2025) and the Strategy Note for Europe and Central Asia which aims to achieve gender equality, empowerment of all women and girls, and the full enjoyment of their human rights.

In FGDs all women beneficiaries confirmed that WEESC-II met their needs. The combination of technical assistance and capacity building coupled with grants was highly valued by women. The grants were sufficient to support women to supplement or expand existing businesses or to purchase assets to improve their productivity or efficiency but one-time, small value grants do not provide sustainable sources of financing for young businesses. In addition, the grant mechanism assumed that all women would benefit from the same type of support but the pathway toward viable business is not the same for the more vulnerable as it is for women with semi-commercial or commercial business activities.

The project design of WEESC-II included a thorough analysis to ensure quality and relevance. Initial assessments such as the "Gender Analysis of Labour Market Regulations" and the

"Women's Economic Inactivity and Engagement Study" informed program development across Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The evaluation of WEESC-I also influenced adjustments in Phase II. The WEESC-II project consulted stakeholders at the grassroots, local and national government levels as well as private sector firms to ensure that the demands and needs of the target beneficiaries were understood. In addition, a brief assessment is done of all beneficiaries to understand their status against WEESC-II criteria. This provided a profile of beneficiaries and helped identify the types of vulnerabilities that the program can address.

While the project was based on quality analysis and addresses the need of the target beneficiaries, the Evaluation Team felt that local value chain analysis could help in understanding economic opportunities for women and more thought could be given to linking women to the private sector as many women were interested in paid employment. In addition, FGD participants highlighted the need to address mobility concerns and to integrate some social activities, as networking is vital to the success of women's businesses.

See Annex VIII, pp. 101-107 for additional details.

#### 4.2 Coherence – How Well Does WEESC-II Fit?

**Finding 2:** WEESC-II is aligned with UN Women and UNDP priorities in the region as well as national government plans and priorities. The evaluation found synergies between the project and other UN interventions, for example UN Women's work with Norway on the Good Governance for Gender Equality Programme. While there are other programmes working on WEE and Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB), stakeholders believe WEESC-II is unique and does not duplicate but complements other programmes. Stakeholders believe it fills in gaps by taking a holistic approach to women's economic empowerment and that UN Women and UNDP have a comparative advantage in this area.

*Figure 2: Summary of Findings on Coherence*

As noted above, triangulated evidence from documents and KIIs showed WEESC-II is aligned with UN Women and UNDP priorities in the region as well as national government plans and priorities. The WEESC project is central to UN Women's Strategic Plan and is very well aligned with the mandate of both UNDP and UN Women. The majority of UNDP programs are focused on economic empowerment and this is well aligned with WEESC-II.

The evaluation found synergies between the project and other UN interventions, for example UN Women's work with Norway on the Good Governance for Gender Equality Programme, the UN Joint Programme for Gender Equality (UNJP4GE) in Georgia, a USAID-funded initiative, addressing gender-based violence (GBV) in Azerbaijan and in Armenia UN Women, in partnership with the Caucasus Regional Research Centre Armenia and the Human Rights Research Center, has been coordinating with partners and stakeholders to raise awareness of the issues faced by domestic workers, as inputs to their research and advocacy activities. In locations where donors support UNDP to address gender-based violence, UNDP has rolled this out with WEESC-II program beneficiaries.

While there are other programmes working on WEE and Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB), stakeholders believe WEESC-II is unique and does not duplicate but complements other programmes. For example, in Armenia WEESC-II is actively engaged in the working group to coordinate with different stakeholders and develop the Armenia Gender Strategy 2024-2026. This is only one example of the program working on coordination with national governments and partners, for example by bringing together public, private sector and development partners through mechanisms such as working groups.

KIIs with key stakeholders across the three countries indicate that they consider UN Women as the key development agency focused primarily on promoting gender-equality (GE) and women's economic empowerment (WEE). Stakeholders believe UN Women has the most expertise and largest network in this field. While they identified other donors and programs working on WEE, stakeholders stated this was more as a cross-cutting issue or as one priority amongst others, while UN Women is driven solely by the purpose of promoting GE and WEE. UNDP is seen as an important agency to promote economic development and a program jointly implemented by UN Women and UNDP is seen as a strong partnership to foster the economic empowerment of women.

As discussed above (p. 26) both documents and KIIs show that WEESC-II is aligned with national plans, including UN Partnership and national SDG priorities. While WEESC has been actively participating and coordinating across different programs, interviews with key stakeholders also indicated the program can leverage its reputation and role to further improve coordination within ministries and development partners on the issues of gender-equality and women's economic empowerment.

See Annex VIII, pp. 107-112 for additional and country specific details.

#### 4.3 Effectiveness – Is WEESC-II Achieving its Objectives?

**Finding 3:** At the regional level WEESC-II is achieving its objectives, as shown in Table 1 below. At the local level it has exceeded its life of project targets with six months remaining in the programme. It has also reached its targets at the policy and legislative level and has achieved most of its targets at the institutional level. However, there is significant variation between achievements at the country level, with Georgia achieving more than Armenia and Azerbaijan.

While capacity has been built at all levels, from the grassroots to the national government, institutionalizing gender mainstreaming, which requires changing institutional cultures as well as increasing resources allocated to gender equality and women's empowerment has been the slowest of the strategies to achieve targets. Nonetheless, interventions are supporting the implementation of global norms for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) at municipal and national government level and with public and private institutions.

In addition to the intended improvement in their incomes, WEESC-II women reported improved social capital, awareness of their rights and confidence and some reported improved perceptions of men and other household members of their role in economic activity as well as a reduction in Gender Based Violence (GBV) as a result of their economic activity, which were

not explicit targets of the programme.

Figure 3: Summary of Findings on Effectiveness

At the regional level WEEC-II is achieving its objectives, as shown in Table 4 below. At the local level it has exceeded its life of project targets with six months remaining in the programme. It has also reached its targets at the policy and legislative level and has achieved most of its targets at the institutional level.

Table 4: WEEC-II Outcomes, Targets and Achievements at December 2023

Outcomes	End of Project Targets	Achievements at December 2023
<b>1:</b> Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, use skills, economic opportunities, relevant information, network and support to become farmers/entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia ( <i>grass-roots level</i> )	900 Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, obtain skills and access information, networks, economic opportunities and support services	1,405 women, most poor and socially excluded, obtain skills and access information, networks, economic opportunities and support services
	480 women become farmers, entrepreneurs or join the formal labour sector	476 women become farmers, entrepreneurs or joined the formal labour sector
	200 women are empowered to participate in local planning and budgeting discussions and advocacy for women's issues in their communities	296 women are empowered to participate in local planning and budgeting discussions and advocacy for women's issues in their communities
	90 Successful advocacy initiatives	122 successful advocacy initiatives
	Businesses have an increased understanding of the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) and have the skills to implement measures that benefit women, specifically in rural areas	251 private enterprises have signed the UN Women/UN Global Compact Women's Economic Empowerment Principles (WEP)
<b>2:</b> Armenia and Georgia implement adequate legislative and policy reforms and frameworks to enable women's economic empowerment ( <i>policy and legislation level</i> )	3 changes in legal and/or regulatory frameworks aligned with international standards	3 changes in legal and/or regulatory frameworks aligned with international standards
	4 changes in gender-responsive policies or programmes enabling WEE	10 changes in gender-responsive policies or programmes enabling WEE
<b>3:</b> The government, public and non-governmental institutions are strengthened to develop and deliver gender-responsive programmes, policies and services for women's economic empowerment in Armenia and Georgia ( <i>institutional level</i> )	4 government and public institutions develop and institutionalize internal gender mainstreaming tools	3 government and public institutions develop and institutionalize internal gender mainstreaming tools
	3 government and public institutions development grant programmes, employment stimulating programmes and programmes/structures monitoring the labour rights in which gender is visibly mainstreamed	2 government and public institutions development grant programmes, employment stimulating programmes and programmes/structures monitoring the labour rights in which gender is visibly mainstreamed
	Share of Gender Impact Assessment recommendations implemented by relevant government/public entities	7 out of 10

WEESC-II has over-achieved its targets for reaching women with training and social mobilization activities as well as GRB, and virtually met its target for women increasing their incomes. There has been a major increase in the number of firms signing on to WEPs. The strategic, regulatory and policy level changes at the Ministerial level (Outcomes 2 and 3) has had some influence on the local municipality level in terms of prioritising GRB and taking into account women's needs when conducting local planning and budgeting. In addition, better employment practices are being introduced in certain public offices.

However, there is significant variation between achievements at the country level, with Georgia achieving more than Armenia and Azerbaijan as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Outcomes, Targets and Achievements by Country

Outcome Targets	Target				Achieved as of Dec. 2023			
	Indicators of Success	Target	Target	Total	Indicators of Success	Target	Target	Total
Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, obtain skills and access information, networks, economic opportunities and support services	300	300	300	900	521	388	496	1405
Women farmers, entrepreneurs or in the formal labour sector improve incomes	160	160	160	480	148	137	191	476
Women are empowered to participate in local planning and budgeting discussions and advocacy for women's issues in their communities	100	n/a	100	200	93	n/a	203	296
Successful advocacy initiatives	45	n/a	45	90	15	n/a	107	122
Businesses have an increased understanding of WEPs and have the skills to implement measures that benefit women, specifically in rural areas	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	15	21	215	251
Changes in legal and/or regulatory frameworks aligned with international standards	1	n/a	2	3	0	n/a	3	3
Changes in gender-responsive policies or programmes enabling WEE	2	n/a	2	4	1	n/a	9	10
Government and public institutions develop and institutionalize internal gender mainstreaming tools	1	n/a	2	3	1	n/a	2	3
Government and public institutions development grant programmes, employment stimulating programmes and programmes/structures monitoring the labour rights in which gender is visibly mainstreamed	1	n/a	2	n/a	0	n/a	2	2
Share of Gender Impact Assessment recommendations implemented by relevant government/public entities	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	n/a	7/10	7/10

Key:  Armenia,  Azerbaijan,  Georgia

As shown above, WEESC-II effectively reached a total of 1,405 women with social mobilisation activities and training which includes but is not limited to, improved business acumen, financial management, agriculture/farm management, job search and employability skills, improved awareness of their rights and the ability to engage in gender-based budgeting discussions and planning. The following points provide evidence from documents, KIIs and FGDs of the effectiveness of WEESC-II programme strategies and approaches in supporting progress towards achieving programme results:

- Women confirmed they obtained a range of different skills sets but application and effectiveness of the skills acquired has been varied depending on the type of skills learned, the nature and stage of business or economic activities that women are

involved in, and by their level of vulnerability, with those experiencing multiple vulnerabilities (e.g. lack of economic opportunities, unpaid care responsibilities, far from training centres, strongly paternalistic gender-based norms and gender stereotypes in area) benefiting less.

- For the most vulnerable and subsistence women, the program's activities have been able to reduce their vulnerability by sustaining their livelihood, providing them with access to services, improving their skills to engage in economic activities. For the more semi-commercial group the program's ability to provide supplementary financing helped them to expand existing activities. Both groups benefited from gender awareness, which improved their ability to advocate for their rights and increased their voice and engagement at the local level.
- Women reported the grants were an important source of supplementary capital for start-ups and boosting existing economic activities since they have very few alternative sources of finance. While many women felt the size of grants was insufficient, the grants were still useful in reducing vulnerability for women particularly those who rely on subsistence income.
- Relative to targets WEESC-II was more successful in building women's capacity and skills for joining the formal labour market (145 women vs a target of 90 women) than for building their capacities and skills to become farmers (184 women vs a target of 210) or entrepreneurs (147 women vs a target of 180).
- Georgia has surpassed the targets for income benefits closely followed by Azerbaijan and Armenia respectively.
- Reports of increased effectiveness of GRB activities in Georgia and Armenia were validated by FGDs with women and KIIs with local authorities and NGOs. In Georgia, women are increasingly attending roundtables and meetings with the government and there is greater willingness and signs of commitments to address women's needs in certain municipalities. In Armenia the GRB component was seen as very valuable by women and women are starting to engage in local decision-making processes in some places but there is need to further the positive changes at the municipality level in terms of addressing women's needs.
- There is increased willingness and signs of commitment by the private sector to improve gender-responsive corporate practices/policies and some action on WEP commitments in relation to training, awareness raising and introducing better practices in relation to recruitment. However, there are opportunities for WEESC to increase institutionalization by demonstrating of the business case for WEP and leveraging the private sector commitment to support grassroots level activities by creating more employment and markets for women and their products.
- Armenia and Georgia implemented legislative and policy reforms and frameworks to enable women's economic empowerment. WEESC-II interventions are supporting the implementation of global norms for GEWE at municipal (consultations with women, GRB) and national government (labour rights, maternity benefits, minimum wages/equal pay) level and with public (collection and analysis of gender disaggregate data to support policy) and private institutions.
- Women also reported significant non-financial benefits, discussed below.

In addition to the intended improvement in incomes, WEESC-II women reported improved social capital, increased understanding of their rights and confidence to engage in economic activities and participate in local budget discussions. FGDs identified the following unintended results:

- Women have experienced greater social networking leading to empowerment and confidence as a result.
- The program was able to foster increased positive engagement between different ethnic groups. For example, In Georgia, ethnic Azerbaijani and Armenian women have been collaborating, meeting and exchanging practices throughout the project, despite ongoing conflict in Karabakh.
- The program was able to facilitate a safe space for women. In Azerbaijan some women reported on positive outcomes related to GBV (reduced GBV as a result of economic activity) and WRCs are seen as a reliable place for support.
- Women mentioned that the project has helped improve perception of men and other household members of women's role in economic activity, creating a sense of trust on women's engagement in such social network as seen as valuable.

As shown in Figure 4 on the next page, Armenia and Georgia implemented legislative and policy reforms and frameworks to enable women's economic empowerment and advance legislative and regulatory frameworks aligned with international labour standards. Statistical agencies in the two countries have been strengthened in gender-sensitive data collection and usage for evidence-based policy development. Georgia has implemented more reforms than Armenia, likely reflecting in part Georgia's candidacy to join the European Union. At the institutional level, political will and resource allocation influences the extent and continuity of application of practices.

Capacity has been built at all levels, from the grassroots to the national government. Evidence to support this finding includes the work done to build the capacity of the statistics agencies in Armenia and Georgia which now provide gender disaggregated data and analysis to government policy makers. There is increased understanding and capacity of targeted local and national government agencies on gender-issues. Tools and processes are also in place to improve greater gender integration, with some success in the Rural Development Agency (RDA) in Georgia. Success with the gender-responsive program at RDA, led them to organize scaling up the model in other places with their own budget.

However, institutionalizing gender mainstreaming, which requires changing institutional cultures as well as increasing resources allocated to gender equality and women's empowerment, has been the slowest of the strategies to achieve targets.

WEESC-II's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) was deemed adequate for measuring and informing management of project performance and progress towards targets, and monitoring data gathered in WEESC-II was used for management action and decision making. M&E mechanisms are discussed in more detail under efficiency in section 4.4 below.

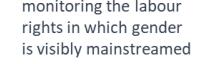
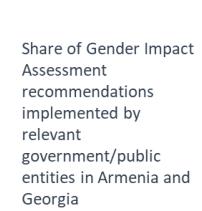
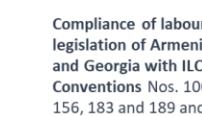
 Government and public institutions develop and institutionalize internal gender mainstreaming tools and policies in Armenia and Georgia	<p><b>1 government agency</b> developed and institutionalized internal gender mainstreaming tools and policies. (50% of target achieved)</p> <p>The Deputy Prime Minister's Office Created a Position of the Deputy Prime Minister's Adviser, for gender mainstreaming in all Government's policies</p>	 <b>2 government agencies</b> developed and institutionalized internal gender mainstreaming tools and policies. (Target achieved) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. RDA Gender Equality Strategy is finalized and adopted.</li> <li>2. MoldPOTLHSA has appointed the staff member responsible on gender equality in newly established Research and Analysis Unit.</li> <li>3. Gender Equality Strategies of the Labor Inspectorate Office, EIEC, SESA, State Laboratory of Agriculture and MEPA are currently under development.</li> </ul>
 State-funded economic development grant programmes, employment stimulating programmes and programmes/structures monitoring the labour rights in which gender is visibly mainstreamed	<p><b>1 State-funded agency, HILB</b> has launched Communications Campaign on Women's Labor Rights. (Target achieved)</p>	<p><b>1 (against a target of 2)</b> state-funded economic development grant programmes, employment stimulating programmes and programmes/structures monitoring the labour rights in which gender is visibly mainstreamed. (50% of target achieved and on track)</p> <p>This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. RDA's stand-alone programme which has been launched by the government and upscaled with the state resources for 2024</li> <li>2. Institutional Reforms in LIO are under way on gender pay gap inspection mechanism, institutionalized course on risk-based assessment of health factors for pregnant and nursing mothers.</li> </ul>
 Share of Gender Impact Assessment recommendations implemented by relevant government/public entities in Armenia and Georgia	<p>GIA has been finalized and results have been incorporated in Employment Strategy, approval is expected in 2024. (Target partially achieved)</p>	<p><b>7 out of 10 recommendations</b> of Plant the Future GIA have been adopted and GIA's recommendations on Gender Pay Gap (EPPR mechanism for the labor inspectorate) have been incorporated in the upcoming instruction for the inspection of GPG which is expected to be institutionalized in 2024. (Target has been overachieved)</p>
 Change in legal and/or regulatory frameworks aligned with international standards creating decent work for women	<p>No change has been made in the <b>legal and/or regulatory frameworks</b> aligned with international standards creating decent work for women. (Activities in progress; target yet to be achieved)</p>	 <b>3 legal and/or regulatory frameworks</b> aligned with international standards creating decent work for women developed and/or implemented. (Target achieved by 100%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The maximum ceiling of GEL 1000 for state provided <b>maternity benefit</b> was removed from the Labour Code</li> <li>2. The <b>state-provided maternity benefit</b> was doubled through Ministerial Decree and teachers' maternity leave was equated to the public servant standard (100% of salary for 6 months)</li> <li>3. The <b>occupational minimum wage</b> was introduced for certain roles in state-funded healthcare facilities</li> </ul>
 Change in gender-responsive policies or programmes enabling WEE	<p><b>1 new and/or improved gender-responsive policy/programme</b> enabling WEE developed and/or implemented. (50% target achieved)</p> <p>This involved the HILB advocacy campaign / program on women's labor rights (maternity, care leave, equal pay).</p>	<p><b>9 (against a target of 2)</b> new and/or improved gender-responsive policies or programmes enabling WEE developed and/or implemented. (Target overachieved)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Georgia has formally joined EPIC.</li> <li>2. Project contributed to the Parliamentary Thematic Inquiry.</li> <li>3. Project contributed to MoESD Action Plan on SME Development.</li> <li>4. RDA developed a stand-alone programme for women in Georgia.</li> <li>5. RDA's gender equality strategy and action plan approved and adopted.</li> <li>6. RDA's stand-alone program for women has been extended for 2024 with the state resources and has been institutionalized.</li> <li>7. The state provided maternity benefit was doubled through the Ministerial Decree and the teachers maternity leave was equated to public servant's standard (100% of the salary for 6 months).</li> <li>8. The occupational minimum wage was introduced for certain roles in the state-funded healthcare facilities.</li> <li>9. UN Women contributed to the Parliamentary Thematic Inquiry on State Agricultural Policy and the project is supporting the Employment Strategy and Action Plan of the MoldPOTLHSA.</li> </ul>
 Compliance of labour legislation of Armenia and Georgia with ILO Conventions Nos. 100, 156, 183 and 189 and corresponding EU Directives	<p>In Armenia MLSA is developing a new employment strategy and umbrella Social Strategy with the support of the project</p>	<p>Tripartite commission has issued the non-objection for ratification of ILO C 183 (Maternity Protection) and negotiations are ongoing to improve coverage.</p>

Figure 4: WEESC-II Targets and Achievements Outcomes Two and Three

WEESC-II responded and adapted to opportunities and challenges in its environment, including supporting more women than planned find paid employment. In Armenia, the project was not able to engage with the Ministry of Economy but established a good working relationship with the Ministry of Labour. Georgia being granted European Union (EU) candidate status opened up some opportunities for greater cooperation between government and development actors, around WEE, that seems to be reflected in achievements on outcomes two and three.

In addition to adapting to a challenging and changing environment as well as the different contexts in the three countries, the following good practices have been introduced to stakeholders by WEESC-II:

- Forming partnerships (e.g., UN Women with UNDP, with government ministries and agencies, with private sector companies; UNDP and UN Women partnering with NGOs) and worked with partners on planning and implementation.
- Disaggregating statistical data by gender.
- Trained women on GRB and how to advocate with municipal governments, which has been very successful in several places in increasing consultation with women on policies and programming that affect them.

As discussed in section 4.2, WEESC-II fits very well both within UN Women's Strategic Plan and UNDP priorities in the three countries and there are strong synergies between WEESC-II and other interventions of UN Women/UNDP, particularly in Azerbaijan and Georgia.

WEESC-II is reducing poverty. Project documents show, and FGDs confirm, that 34% of the women participating in WEESC-II have increased their incomes, see Table 6.

Table 6: Women Reporting Increased Income by Country and Activity

Activities	Target				Achieved as of Dec. 2023			
				Total				Total
1.1. Smallholder women farmers with increased incomes from agricultural production	70	70	70	210	70	34	80	184
1.2. Women with increased incomes from entrepreneurial (non-agricultural) activities	60	60	60	180	45	34	68	147
1.3. Number of beneficiary women having new or better employment	30	30	30	90	33	69	43	145
Total number of women reporting benefit from increased income	160	160	160	480	148	137	191	476

While the project level target has been virtually achieved, there are differences between countries and activities, with only 28% of Armenia's 521 trained women reporting increases in incomes compared to 35% of Azerbaijan's 388 women and 36% of Georgia's 496 women. By activity, 82% of the target for increased incomes for women engaged in entrepreneurship activities was achieved, 88% of the target for women engaged in farming, and 161% of the target for women in new or better employment was achieved.

For more details, especially by country, see Annex VIII pp. 112 - 137.

#### 4.4 Efficiency – Is WEESC-II Using Resources Well?

**Finding 4:** Human resources and management systems are adequate for WEESC-II to deliver most of its intended results by the end of the project at a regional level. As noted above, the level of achievement varies by country, but overall, the outputs and outcomes are being achieved as planned. Stakeholders have been engaged in planning and implementation under the leadership of UN Women. While there were some concerns expressed about monitoring and reporting requirements, which implementing partners found resource intensive and donors felt did not always meet their needs, overall, these mechanisms allow UN Women to manage the programme. It is difficult to assess cost efficiency as it has been hard to get a clear understanding of how financial resources have been allocated over the life of the program but the programme appears to be on time and on budget.

Figure 5: Summary of Findings on Efficiency

As shown in section 4.3, overall WEESC-II is achieving most of its outcomes as planned, indicating that financial and human resources are adequate for WEESC-II to deliver its intended results. In FGDs beneficiaries stated that the trainings they received were timely, as was the delivery of equipment and materials provided as grants.

However, KIIs in Armenia elicited the feeling that the budget allocation per country is not equitable and that Georgia took most of the budget. Some respondents felt Armenia could not implement some activities due to a lack of funds.<sup>16</sup> The KIIs also raised concerns with adequacy of the human resources allocated to monitoring and evaluation in Armenia and Azerbaijan, discussed below and implementing NGOs noted that the turnover of officers at both UN Women and UNDP has been a problem for them.

UN Women stated the design of the project allocated funds between the countries based on existing partnerships, and that this is why more funding was directed to Georgia. While limited access to financial data makes it difficult to assess these claims, the Evaluation Team notes that Georgia has had a UN Women Country Office for more than a decade and built existing partnerships. In addition, in Georgia, many activities were done with co-funding from other UN Women projects, while in Armenia, this opportunity was lacking. In addition, even in Georgia some activities and initiatives were not implemented because of lack of funds due to a weaker dollar respective to national currencies.

According to UNDP, UN Women paid UNDP in two tranches over the life of WEESC-II, rather than in six tranches as with WEESC-I, which helped UNDP in Armenia and Azerbaijan to mitigate the impact of external events when providing programming for women.

The COVID pandemic, the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, and local politics all affected timely implementation. COVID reduced the ability for face-to-face interactions, lessening the effectiveness of training and capacity building and the war is causing ongoing trauma to beneficiaries and implementing NGO staff as well as slowing implementation. The conflict forced a large number of refugees to flee into Armenia creating a

<sup>16</sup> As Table 5 shows, Armenia mobilized more women than either of Azerbaijan and Georgia and its level of achievement lies between that of the other two.

crisis which took government time, resources and energy away from other activities, while in Azerbaijan, the conflict with Armenia produced a snap-election call for early 2024 which is delaying project implementation. In Georgia, the government introduced the “Foreign Agents” bill in March 2023, which has created mistrust between civil society organizations (CSOs) and parliament/government, so that some CSOs and NGOs are reluctant to partner with government entities and visa versa, especially at the local level. This has slowed down some activities and diminished women’s groups involvement in policy discussions, according to UN Women.

WEESC-II was designed in a collaborative manner with many of the same stakeholders who were involved in implementing WEESC-I. On the implementation side, while the goal of the project is to “ensure that women, particularly the poor and socially excluded . . .,” several NGOs pointed out that in order to meet the project results indicators and appear successful, they needed to go where the opportunities are and when people are ready. This often meant engaging with women who already had some assets or resourcefulness rather than the most vulnerable.

While UN Women is leading and managing the programme, examples of co-funding between UN Women and stakeholders were seen by the Evaluation Team, for example with the Armenia General Benevolent Union (AGBU), an implementing NGO in Armenia, which stated they provided five staff for the implementation of WEESC-II activities but the project funded only two. In Azerbaijan good leveraging and partnership is taking place between the government and the project, where the government provided buildings to house all four WRCs and WEESC-II furnished and equipped them. However, some respondents felt that Component One lacks a UN Women “brand” and, while providing funding to UNDP in two tranches was considered to be more efficient, from a management perspective, it also reduced the control UN Women have over implementation of Component One, as they now had less leverage over UNDP.

UN Women stated that their monitoring process includes continuous contact between UN Women and UNDP for Component One in Armenia and Azerbaijan. It also includes reviewing quarterly reporting, both on implementation progress and financial disbursements, from UNDP; occasional monitoring visits; and frequent Zoom calls and email communication. Reporting templates follow a format set at headquarters for all UN Women Projects. Overall, monitoring and reporting mechanisms allow UN Women to manage the programme, but stakeholders raised the following concerns in KIIs:

- SDC stated that WEESC-II reporting is at the output level not on progress towards the achievement of project outcomes.
- SDC stated that reporting using the UN template does not provide what is required by donors.
- UNDP stated that they do not receive UN Women’s semi-annual regional donor reports and they would like to.
- Some NGOs complained that the reporting templates UN Women provide and require completing are mainly quantitative reports with little room for qualitative results reporting.

- Both the Armenian and Azerbaijani implementing NGOs stated that the demand of reporting obligations and the tracking of indicators was overwhelming for the human resources funded by WEESC-II. They stated they should have additional staff, i.e., a full-time monitoring and evaluation expert, to meet the reporting requirements.
- While WEESC-II is a regional project and has the same project indicators, with specific targets and expectations for each country, both the donors and UNDP stated that the three countries are very different and should have different outcomes and indicators. Neither donor felt that WEESC was really a regional project, partly because of the relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which means few activities take place involving all three countries.

Generally, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) systems are judged by "system in place" and "system in use". WEESC has a good MEL system in place but the system in use has been varied across the three countries. The data that the monitoring system generates should generally influence the decision-making throughout the program cycle although there seems to be variation in how effectively the program countries used the data for decision-making purposes. It would be beneficial to determine how to resolve such issues in the future for phase three.

The assessment of cost-efficiency proved difficult due to a lack of financial data based on a breakdown by budget line item. Without this breakdown the evaluation team was unable to use most cost effectiveness methodologies, however the analysis that was undertaken did not surface any key issues.<sup>17</sup> The programme is on time and on budget, as well as producing the agreed results. In addition, KII's with stakeholders indicated that donors are satisfied that the project is cost effective, although SDC Armenia points out that they give money to UN Women, who pass the money to UNDP, who pass it to NGOs to work with women beneficiaries, and wonder if it would be more cost effective to fund the NGOs directly to carry out the activities, thus eliminating two levels of management fees.

A similar question was raised by UN Women: why use UNDP as an intermediary? Why not fund and manage the NGOs directly in Armenia and Azerbaijan? This is related to the value added of each UN entity and leads to an additional question posed by UN Women during the data gathering phase regarding the relationship between the WEESC-II implementing partners that did not appear in the Evaluation Team's ToR. It is addressed here.

UN Women and UNDP bring value added, as discussed above. Both UN Agencies have strong existing networks in the countries, a capacity to speak directly with top levels of government, and the ability to convene coordination meetings. Donors do fund NGOs directly in other WEE projects, including a plan for the Austrians to do so in Azerbaijan, however, this does not exclude also funding UN Women projects. In addition, UN Women were inexperienced with project implementation in the South Caucasus when WEESC was designed and did not have a presence in Armenia or Azerbaijan. UNDP has the presence and experience needed to implement such projects, and was already working with some of the WEESC NGOs in other

<sup>17</sup> This constraint was also noted in the evaluation of WEESC-I and UN Women states that while they undergo audits they do not release detailed costing data to evaluation teams. UN Women may thus wish to drop this question from future evaluations.

projects, so a mutually beneficial partnership was established between UN Women and UNDP to implement WEESC.

During the second phase of WEESC, there has been growing tension in the implementing partnership between UN Women and UNDP, as UNDP implements and manages Component One in Armenia and Azerbaijan. According to UN Women, this has been brought to the fore front by the unspent funds accumulated near the end of WEESC-II. With little clarity of how this money was going to be spent in the last couple of months of the program and whether there was enough time to track indicators that would apply, UNDP has refused to allow UN Women to reallocate under-spent funds within the region, except for USD 22,000 that was reallocated from Azerbaijan to UN Women. UNDP will go ahead with last minute spending.

There is a need to look at a more strategic project management approach for WEESC III, based on an analysis of the needs of different stakeholders (grassroots, national and local authorities) in each country and identify the strength of each implementing organisation (UN Women and UNDP) to leverage their mandates and capacities, otherwise there is a risk of the implementation being siloed.

For additional evidence and country level discussion please refer to Annex VIII, pp. 137-141.

#### 4.5 Sustainability – Will the benefits of WEESC-II Last

**Finding 5:** At the grassroots level changes in human capacities are rarely lost: many people retain and use at least some of what they learn. For the 145 women who have gained formal employment, many will likely continue to be employed and enjoy higher incomes as a result. For the 147 who are engaged in entrepreneurial and the 184 in agricultural activities, there is likely a need for ongoing business development and/or agricultural extension services and access to financing for these businesses to thrive. Women's networks and advocacy efforts are bearing fruit and in some municipalities consultations with women are being institutionalised. There are good reasons to expect that larger companies will implement their Women's Economic Empowerment Principles (WEP) plans. Policy and regulatory changes will likely be maintained, but few government or public entities have institutionalized and mainstreamed gender. Nor are the required budget allocations assured.

Figure 6: Summary of Findings on Sustainability

There is strong commitment to integrate gender-responsive policies and procedures by government agencies but institutionalisation and implementation of plans in general has been moderate, risking continuity. A number of gender strategies and policies have been initiated with the support of UN Women, however, evidence of continued enforcement of action is not clear, with some exceptions such as RDA in Georgia where resources have been allocated to scale up the gender targeted greenhouse project. KIIs reveal that despite having clear actions in the strategic plans, in many cases sufficient resources (human and financial) have not been put in place to execute them.

The extent of continued WEESC-II results is varied across the grassroots, public and private agencies. At the grassroots level, women who have achieved formal employment will likely

continue with their jobs and semi-commercial female entrepreneurs will continue operations provided they are able to generate profit from their existing business. For start-ups and subsistence women farmers and entrepreneurs there is risk of discontinuity in the absence of alternative sources of funding. Some of the WRCs are showing signs of independence, however, there continues to be dependency on project funding.<sup>18</sup>

Engagement with the majority of the line ministries and local municipal offices has been strategic in WEESC-II. For the most part the project has been able to identify partners that have the strategic objective to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment and have the influence to push the agenda through their line ministry to respective agencies.

Across all three countries the strategic importance of partnering with the private sector is not strongly demonstrated and the private sector companies are critical agents of change to boost market and economic opportunities for women. Interviews with the private sector entities indicate signs of continuity as they see the value of gender-integration for their business purposes. Continuity for public sector is highly variable as they are dependent on political will and resource allocation. Inclusion of gender-integration in organisational strategic plans is indicative of continuity but implementation needs to be monitored.

There are positive indications of institutionalization and leadership commitment among selective public agencies and private sector actors across Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. However, the Evaluation Team found there was a weakness in the institutionalisation of some project activities at a broader level. In Georgia, for example, there is ongoing commitment to initiatives like the pay-gap methodology review and the expansion of projects such as the greenhouse initiative by RDA. Similarly, Armenia shows progress with the creation of positions focused on gender mainstreaming and the integration of gender impact audits (GIA) into regulatory impact assessments. At the municipality level, there is evidence of GRB being integrated into local budgetary processes, albeit with varying degrees of success across the countries. Furthermore, the private sector demonstrates significant interest in adopting gender-sensitive workplace practices, although implementation varies and requires ongoing support and monitoring. While there are promising signs of replication and sustainability, continued monitoring and support are essential to ensure long-term effectiveness and integration of these activities beyond project timelines.

In Georgia RDA has demonstrated ongoing commitment and replication efforts through the scale up of the greenhouse project in three additional municipalities. Gender equality strategies across a number of agencies such as the Environmental Information and Education Centre (EIEC), State Employment Support Agency (SESA), State Laboratory of Agriculture and Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA) are under development indicating the scale within the public sector of Georgia. In addition, the general assemblies and roundtables for local level budgeting are signs of successful demonstration that needs to be monitored to capture the scale of replication. In Armenia, seven communities integrated elements of GRB, including the collection of sex-disaggregated data and conducting gender analyses of the programmes. Based on 2022 advocacy cycle, 28% of the seven target communities local action plans were gender

<sup>18</sup> Subsequent to the completion of data collection activities UNDP entered discussions with the Government of Azerbaijan to transfer 15 WRC to them. These discussions are at the exchange of official letters stage in July 2024.

mainstreamed and budgeted which indicates that the success is being scaled up. In Azerbaijan, efforts to expand operations of existing WRCs and establishment of new ones is indicative of a successful model which serves as a one-stop solution for women in the absence of any other service providers.

Annex VIII pp. 141-147 contains additional information and country level details.

## 5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS

The following conclusions and lessons address the objectives of the evaluation and are drawn from the findings presented above.

### 5.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1 - WEESC-II's implementation strategy and approaches were highly relevant to all stakeholders of WEE in the South Caucasus. WEESC-II's three-pronged approach to addressing women's economic empowerment was 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. However, moving forward to Phase III, there is scope for strengthening the linkages between Outcome 1 with Outcomes 2 and 3 and adopting a more strategic approach to targeting priority economic sectors for women's economic activity and similarly, for engagement with the private sector.

Conclusion 2 - WEESC-II has achieved its expected outcomes and outputs, although a few weaknesses have been noted that can be addressed in Phase III. WEESC-II results relate to commitments and contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals #5 and #8 in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

At the grassroots level all three countries have exceeded their targets in mobilizing women for training and information, which enhanced their skills as farmers and entrepreneurs as well as in seeking formal employment. However, success in applying acquired skills varied based on the nature of training, existing stage of the economic engagement, availability of opportunities in the region and the degree of vulnerability experienced by women. Those women in areas with limited economic opportunities, remote locations or affected by mobility challenges, unpaid care responsibilities and restrictive social norms, particularly in Armenia and Azerbaijan benefited less than others.

Activities on GRB was seen as highly effective by women as it improved their ability to understand their rights, improve their confidence to speak from a place of increased knowledge, and enhanced their ability to engage actively with the local authorities and advocate for their socio-economic concerns. Both Armenia and Georgia have undertaken work on GRB and the effectiveness of advocacy was higher in Georgia but the positive impact on women's self-esteem was seen in both countries.

The private sector across Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia has shown increased commitment to gender equality through initiatives like signing the UN Women/UN Global Compact Women's Economic Empowerment Principles. This indicates a growing recognition among companies of the importance of gender-responsive policies and practices. Despite the positive trends, there are challenges hindering the private sector's full engagement in gender equality efforts. There is significant potential for WEESC to leverage the current willingness and commitment and support in the enforcement or implementation of the changes.

Georgia has made significant progress compared to Armenia in influencing legislative and regulatory frameworks to support women's economic empowerment. Partner agencies in both countries have expressed strong appreciation for the value added by UN Women's engagement. UN Women's involvement has been instrumental in shifting perceptions, improving understanding of gender issues, and informing policy development. While progress has been made, there are challenges in institutionalizing gender mainstreaming efforts. Weak institutionalization, insufficient resources, and high turnover affect continuity in implementing the change in the long run. There is a need for sustained efforts to embed gender-sensitive practices within government institutions beyond the project's duration. In addition, poor coordination and information exchange between ministries and agencies, as well as limited awareness among decision-makers, hinder effective implementation of gender mainstreaming initiatives.

**Conclusion 3** - Overall, the organizational efficiency of WEESC-II was adequate in progressing towards the achievement of the project's results, however, conditions both within the control of UN Women and those outside their control created lesser efficiencies.

Some stakeholders felt that limited resources reduced their ability to carry out some planned activities. As well, the COVID pandemic and the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan caused delays in project implementation. Even so, WEESC-II was planned and implemented with the collaboration of WEE stakeholders, which helped UN Women to respond reasonably well to both these external variables and to those more under their control. Donors expressed some difficulty with the reporting system, as UN Women's centralized templates did not match their requirements. Similarly, the partner NGOs complained about the burdensome reporting requirements and the lack of monitoring resources. The Evaluation Team noted tensions were present between the two main implementers of WEESC-II, UN Women and UNDP.

**Conclusion 4** - There is good potential for WEESC-II results to be sustainable as national and local institutions in the three countries are committed and have the technical capacity, however, the political will is questionable and the institutionalization of the project's results is weak.

There is continued commitment and willingness to institutionalise across all levels, however, progress has been variable. At the grassroots level evidence suggests an increase in income of women who have been able to secure grants for their economic activities and wage employment, however, continuity is affected by availability of alternative finance and the availability of markets and economic opportunities in the region. There is commitment at the local and national level to adopt gender integrated policies and practices and there are already signs of adoption both at the municipal and national government level. However, capacity development and institutionalisation need additional time and continued reinforcement across different levels (as in Phase III). This has been varied across different agencies and in most cases although good practices are included in the strategies, there are not enough resources or signs of institutionalisation to action them. Sustainability is further affected by issues external to project control such as change in political ideology or agenda.

In terms of the private sector there is significantly higher commitment and willingness compared to Phase I, to be more gender inclusive in practices at the organisational level. Some

companies are also taking action on the changes and it will be useful for the project to support and demonstrate the actioning of WEP principles.

## 5.2 Lessons

The following lessons are offered by the Evaluation Team as a contribution to general knowledge, being strategic in nature, and applicable to other development interventions.

1. When designing and implementing a project it is essential to collaborate with key stakeholders representing all potential beneficiaries to ensure both relevancy to and ownership by the recipients.
2. Projects must be flexible in their design and implementation to respond positively and in a timely manner to both internal and external unforeseen changes in conditions.
3. All women are exposed to at least one type of vulnerability and the more the number of vulnerabilities, the more it affects their ability to utilize the training and financial support provided by a project. Project designers need to identify and understand the totality of vulnerabilities of their target population, including how multiple vulnerabilities compound one another.
4. In economic development projects, it is critical to ensure that there are potential markets for the beneficiaries' products or services; that alternative sources of finance are available; and that all vulnerabilities have been identified and thoroughly understood.
5. When providing training, the process should allow sufficient time to follow the training cycle of: needs assessment; training design and delivery; follow-up and reinforcement; and impact assessment.
6. It is important to target socialisation activities to men and other household members, possibly through public awareness campaigns on issues related to GEWE, as it helps build trust and reduces the risk of men feeling excluded and reacting negatively to women's engagement in projects.
7. Chances for success are increased when projects work in a manner that respects the local structures.
8. Success in institutionalising long term gender responsive practices in companies happens when the decision-makers are bought into the process of WEP.
9. Projects need to be aware that progress achieved in policy reforms is fragile and susceptible to external factors, such as changes in political dynamics.
10. To ensure sustainability, the institutionalization of project results must be prioritized well before the project ends.

## 6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations flow from the conclusions presented by the Evaluation Team in Chapter 5 above. These recommendations were presented to the stakeholders in two draft evaluation reports and were discussed at the evaluation debriefing meeting.

**Recommendation 1** – UN Women should ensure that the final exit phase of WEESC be considered the sustainability phase and is used to consolidate the gains made in the first two phases, reinforce the achievements of results and institutionalize the results.

**Targeted Party:** UN Women

**Priority:** High

**Action Points:**

Develop sustainability and hand over plans as part of the development of WEESC-III

There is good potential for WEESC-II results to be sustainable, however, progress has been variable. As WEESC-III is planned as a final phase of support there is a need to focus on consolidation, institutionalization and sustainability.

**Recommendation 2** – UN Women should reconsider their strategy of grants and training to the micro-subsistence group and the micro-semi-commercial women, directing it differently towards the two groups, and assisting the latter group of women to acquire alternative sources of finance.

**Targeted Party:** UN Women

**Priority:** Medium

**Action Points:**

1. Identify differing needs of “micro-subsistence women” and “micro-semi-commercial women” with partners
2. For WEESC-III design different training for each group, and vary grant sizes based on business needs with subsistence women given smaller grants and semi-commercial women given larger grants
3. Develop linkages between women and organizations (government or non-government) offering micro financing to women

For the micro-subsistence groups the economic sustainability will be a longer process as they are faced with multiple vulnerabilities and the one-off grants may not be the most strategic tool to ensuring sustainability. This group will likely remain subsistence with some semi-commercial growth. Focusing on the ‘agency’ changes and qualitative benefits of social capital and connecting with the appropriate grant mechanisms may be best for them. Semi-commercial

women are those that are more commercial in nature and the project can explore potential for connecting them to commercial or semi-commercial sources of financing or agri-financing.

**Recommendation 3** – UN Women should take a systemic approach to providing support to companies implementing WEP activities, aligned with the financial and non-financial benefits to companies, and increase coordination between the public and private sector.

**Targeted Party:** UN Women

**Priority:** Low

**Action Points:**

1. UN Women to survey WEPs signatory firms to document financial and non-financial benefits and create business case for WEPs
2. UN Women to convene a meeting of, or event with, WEPs signatory firms and relevant government and NGO stakeholders to present the survey findings and allow firms to share action plans and best practices
3. UN Women to disseminate findings and business case to firms to promote WEPs and encourage linkages between private sector and women's groups

A trend was observed where the types of actions that companies are undertaking include identifying gaps and potential for change. It would be useful for the project to take a more systemic approach to identify the specific categories of support to the companies (e.g. working conditions, recruitment and retention, and supply chain) and align that with the actual financial and non-financial benefits to the company such as reduced absenteeism, reduced turnover cost, increased retention of staff, increased female client base, and supply chain considerations. Specific monitoring would help the companies align their WEP principles commitment to concrete changes and also allow for demonstrating a strong business case. WEESC project is strategically positioned as it works not just with the public sector but also the private sector. It would benefit from taking advantage of the evidence generated from the grassroots and private sector to inform the policies and also share the policies and procedures with the private sector. At the moment the outcomes sit separately and there is a growing opportunity to consolidate and align the efforts in phase three.

**Recommendation 4** – UN Women should ensure that there are adequate monitoring resources available, at all levels of implementation, to ensure complete and timely reporting.

**Targeted Party:** UN Women

**Priority:** High

**Action Points:**

1. UN Women to convene a meeting with NGO partners to understand their concerns

2. Based on the meeting UN Women to send out answers and clarifications on any questions
3. For WEESC-III UN Women to consider whether additional resources are needed in NGO contracts to cover dedicated monitoring officers

The partner NGOs stated that the reporting requirements of UN Women, particularly the resources needed to monitor the outcome and output indicators, are beyond their staffing availability. Each NGO told the Evaluation Team that they require a monitoring officer dedicated to the project on a full-time basis, and paid for from project funds.

**Recommendation 5** – When funding UN Women's projects, donors should ensure that UN Women's reporting procedures are rationalized with the requirements of the donor; this may require negotiation with UN Women HQ.

**Targeted Party:** Donors

**Priority:** Medium

**Action Points:**

1. SDC to clarify exactly what additional information they need reported, and when they need it
2. SDC to discuss with UN Women how the required information could be incorporated in reports
3. In negotiations with UN Women for WEESC-III, SDC should include these reporting requirements in their funding agreement

SDC stated that the UN Women semi-annual reports do not provide the complete data they need to effectively monitor their funding and expected project results from their side. UN Women Georgia use the global UN Women reporting template and do not have the authority to change it if requested by SDC. Should SDC or another donor wish to adjust the UN Women reporting template, as such donors as USAID and EU have done, they have to do so by negotiating the changes with UN Women headquarters.

## ANNEXES

## Annex I – WEESC-II Theory of Change

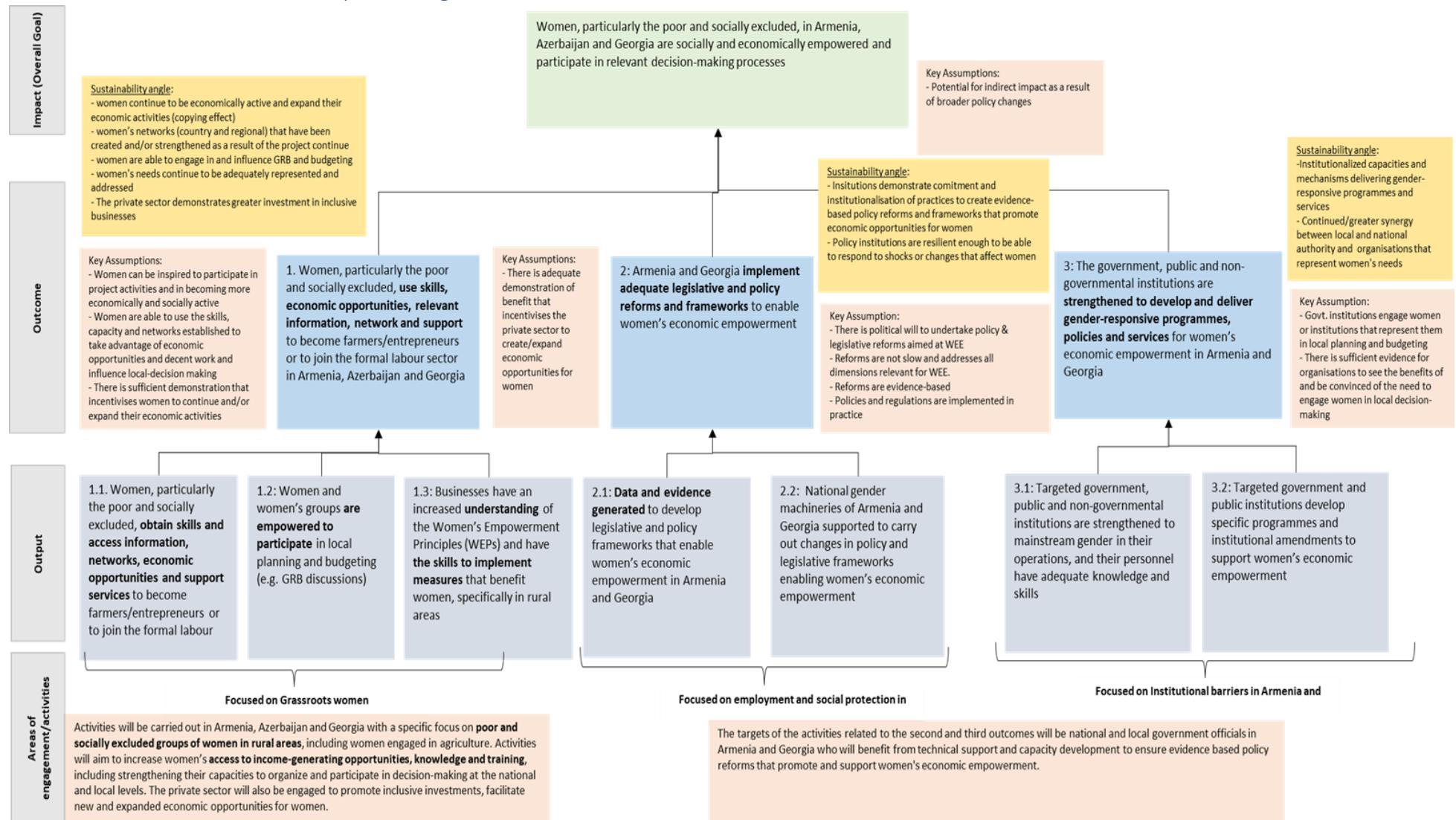


Figure 7: WEESC II Theory of Change

## Annex II – Evaluation Schedule

Dates	Activity
March 1, 2024	Contract signed between UN Women and PSI
March 5	Start up call with UN Women and Evaluation Team
March 5 to 9	Document Review and preparation of Draft Inception Report
March 10	Submission of Draft Inception Report
March 22 to April 29	Data collection in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia
April 9	Debriefing of UN Women by Evaluation Team
April 13 to 29	Data analysis and preparation of Draft Evaluation Report
April 30	Submission of “0” Draft Evaluation Report to UN Women
May 19	Submission of first Draft Evaluation Report
June 30	Submission of Final Evaluation Report
July 15	Final Presentation of the Evaluation Report
July 19	End of Contract

## Annex III – Evaluation Terms of Reference

# TERMS OF REFERENCE

for

## **External Final Evaluation of UN Women's Regional Project “Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus – Phase II”**

**Geographic Coverage:** Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan

**Type of contract:**

**Languages required:** English, Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani

**Application deadline:** 30 November 2023

**Starting date:** 20 February 2024

**Duration of the contract:** up to 5 months from 20 February 2024 to 19 July 2024

**Project:** 00127752 – Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus (WEESC) Phase II

### **Background**

Women's economic empowerment is increasingly considered to be a prerequisite for realizing gender equality, strengthening women's agency and achieving sustainable development for all. The goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to reduce inequalities and to "leave no one behind". This will require (a) identifying groups who have been left behind; (b) understanding the causes behind their exclusion; and (c) developing and implementing strategies of inclusiveness.

The economic empowerment of women (WEE) – to succeed and advance economically and to make and act on economic decisions – is a prerequisite for realizing gender equality and empowering women in all areas of life. It is also a cornerstone for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda. At the global level, there is widespread consensus that, all too often, discriminatory social norms constrain women's ability to find economic opportunities, including decent jobs on an equal footing with men. Multiple disadvantages – poverty, disability, age, geography and migratory status, to name a few – remain critical obstacles to equal rights and opportunities for hundreds of millions of women.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Report of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, *Leave No One Behind: A Call to Action for Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment* (2016), 1-2.

There has been progress in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in terms of reducing gender inequalities since gaining their independence in the 1990s. Yet, much work remains to achieve the full and equal participation of women in society and in the economy. According to the 2023 *Global Gender Gap Report*, among 146 economies, Armenia ranked 52<sup>nd</sup>, Azerbaijan 27<sup>th</sup> and Georgia 68<sup>th</sup> under the women's economic participation and opportunity sub-index.<sup>20</sup> In the 2023 *Women, Business, and the Law* analysis of barriers to women's economic participation, Armenia received 87.5, Azerbaijan 78.8, and Georgia 88.1, where a score of 100 represents the most favourable environment for women's economic empowerment.<sup>21</sup> The results of these studies suggest that women's economic opportunities in the South Caucasus region continue to be limited.

The 2018 study commissioned by UN Women to the Caucasus Research and Resources Centers in the framework of the SDC supported inception phase of this project concluded that the primary driver of women's economic inactivity in the region is traditional gender roles and the accompanying burdens associated with unpaid care work; women who are not working explicitly cite family-related reasons for not working. In Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, having children, being married, and/or having left or not sought out work for family-related reasons are strong predictors of whether or not a woman participates in the labor force. In Armenia, married women are 16 percentage points less likely to participate in the labor force. In contrast, married men are 19 percentage points more likely to participate in the labor force, controlling for other relevant factors. Children are associated with a six-percentage point lower level of labor force participation among women in Georgia. In Azerbaijan, a woman's chances of being in the labor force are 12 percentage points lower if married, all else equal. Women who have at any point in their life left a job or not sought one out for family related reasons are 11 percentage points less likely to be in the labor force. In Georgia, if a woman has ever left a job or not sought one out for reasons related to family, she is 18 percentage points less likely to be in the labor force.<sup>22</sup>

As in other contexts, **a persistent gender pay gap affects women in the region**. According to the most recent available data, the unadjusted pay gap stands at 28.4 per cent in Armenia<sup>23</sup>, 39 per cent in Azerbaijan<sup>24</sup> and 17.7 per cent in Georgia.<sup>25</sup> As in other contexts, de facto educational

<sup>20</sup> World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report*. Available from <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2023/> of the 146 countries, the overall 2023 Global Gender Gap rankings are as follows: Armenia is 52<sup>nd</sup>, Azerbaijan 27<sup>th</sup> and Georgia 68<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> The World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law* (2023), p. 4. Available from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/b60c615b-09e7-46e4-84c1-bd5f4ab88903/content>.

<sup>22</sup> UN Women, *Women's Economic Inactivity and Engagement in the Informal Sector in the South Caucasus: Causes and Consequences* (2018). Available from: <https://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/12/womens-economic-inactivity-and-engagement-in-the-informal-sector-in-georgia>

<sup>23</sup> UN Women, *Analysis of the Gender Pay Gap and Gender Inequality in the Labor Market in Armenia* (2020) Available from <https://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/analysis-of-the-gender-pay-gap-and-gender-inequality-in-the-labor-market-in-armenia>

<sup>24</sup> UNECE, *Azerbaijan Statistical Database* (2019 data) Available from <https://w3.unece.org/CountriesInFigures/en/Home/Index?countryCode=031>

segregation is likely to lead to pay gaps as well as lower rates of economic engagement. In Georgia, more men enter science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields than women. In Azerbaijan, the majority (58 per cent) of respondents thought that women should not pursue technical fields due to a lack of job opportunities.<sup>26</sup> Educational segregation, in turn, can encourage occupational segregation; there is ample evidence of a variety of sectors being gender-skewed. For instance, women are overrepresented in the education and social work sectors and men in construction, mining and manufacturing. Despite women's overrepresentation in some sectors, men in each of these sectors make more money. Notably, this pattern appears to be present in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.<sup>27</sup>

The lack of women's participation in the economy is likely hurting economic growth. Some research suggests that **enhancing women's economic empowerment by improving entrepreneurship and leadership contributes to economic growth, job creation and prosperity.**<sup>28</sup> In the region, the World Bank has estimated that women's lower levels of economic engagement depresses GDP by 12 per cent in Georgia and 14 per cent in Armenia.<sup>29</sup> Other research suggests economies and firms become more efficient as women's economic engagement increases.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, barriers to women's economic participation are likely to slow innovation since the best talent is not efficiently allocated. In Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, this issue is likely to be particularly problematic as women attain levels of education equal to that of their male peers.

## Description of the project

### 2.1 Objectives of the project

The main goal of the project "**Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus – Phase II**" (WEESC) is to ensure that **women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are economically empowered and participate in relevant decision-making.** To achieve this goal, UN Women is implementing the **second main phase** of this project with financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) through the Austrian Development Agency (ADA). The first main phase was implemented from August 2018 to July 2021.

<sup>25</sup> UN Women, *Analysis of the Gender Pay Gap and Gender Inequality in the Labor Market in Georgia* (2020) Available from <https://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/analysis-of-the-gender-pay-gap-and-gender-inequality-in-the-labor-market-in-georgia>

<sup>26</sup> UNDP, *Gender Attitudes in Azerbaijan: Trends and Challenges* (2007). Available from <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/nhdr2007gendereng.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> According to the official data of GEOSTAT (2017) and ARMSTAT (2016). See also: Melanie Hugie-Williams, Marten van Klaveren, Nuria Ramos Martin and Kea Tijdens, "An Overview of Women's Work and Employment in Azerbaijan", *Decisions for Life MDG3 Project Country Report No. 9* (University of Amsterdam/Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies, 2009), 1-13. Available from [https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Country\\_Report\\_No9-Azerbaijan\\_EN\\_short.pdf](https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Country_Report_No9-Azerbaijan_EN_short.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> OECD, *Enhancing Women's Economic Empowerment through Entrepreneurship and Business Leadership in OECD Countries* (2014). Available from [http://www.oecd.org/gender/Enhancing%20Women%20Economic%20Empowerment\\_Fin\\_1\\_Oct\\_2014.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/gender/Enhancing%20Women%20Economic%20Empowerment_Fin_1_Oct_2014.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Mercy Tembon, *Beyond celebrating—Removing barriers for women in the South Caucasus* (World Bank, 2017). Available from <http://blogs.worldbank.org/europeandcentralasia/beyond-celebrating-removing-barriers-women-south-caucasus>.

<sup>30</sup> Rachel Heath, "Women's Access to Labor Market Opportunities, Control of Household Resources, and Domestic Violence", Policy Research Working Paper, No. 6149 (World Bank, 2012). Available from <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/11987>.

This second main phase of the project builds upon the achievements of the first main phase and is implemented from August 2021 to July 2024, to be followed by a final exit phase.

In order to contribute to the set overarching goal/impact, the second main phase of the project aims to contribute to the following **three outcomes and seven outputs**:

Outcomes	Outputs
<b>1:</b> Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, use skills, economic opportunities, relevant information, network and support to become farmers/entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia ( <i>grass-roots level</i> )	<p><b>1.1:</b> Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, obtain skills and access information, networks, economic opportunities and support services to become farmers/entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector</p> <p><b>1.2:</b> Women and women's groups are empowered to participate in local planning and budgeting (e.g. GRB discussions), and greater awareness around the harmful social norms is created in the communities</p> <p><b>1.3:</b> Businesses have an increased understanding of the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) and have the skills to implement measures that benefit women, specifically in rural areas</p>
<b>2:</b> Armenia and Georgia implement adequate legislative and policy reforms and frameworks to enable women's economic empowerment ( <i>policy and legislation level</i> )	<p><b>2.1:</b> Data and evidence is generated to develop legislative and policy frameworks that enable women's economic empowerment in Armenia and Georgia</p> <p><b>2.2:</b> The national gender machineries of Armenia and Georgia are supported to carry out changes in policy and legislative frameworks enabling women's economic empowerment</p>
<b>3:</b> The government, public and non-governmental institutions are strengthened to develop and deliver gender-responsive programmes, policies and services for women's economic empowerment in Armenia and Georgia ( <i>institutional level</i> )	<p><b>3.1:</b> Targeted government, public and non-governmental institutions are strengthened to mainstream gender in their operations, and their personnel have adequate knowledge and skills</p> <p><b>3.2:</b> Targeted government and public institutions develop specific programmes and institutional amendments to support women's economic empowerment</p>

The **theory of change** of how these outcomes contribute to the overarching goal/impact of the project is as follows: if (1) women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, are provided with

skills, economic opportunities, relevant information, network and support to become farmers / entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector; and (2) adequate legislative and policy frameworks are in place and implemented to enable women's economic empowerment; and (3) government, public and non-governmental institutions develop and deliver gender-responsive programmes, public services, strategies and plans for women's economic empowerment; then (4) women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are economically and socially empowered and exercise their civil rights to participate in relevant decision-making, because (5) the key structural barriers for women's economic empowerment will be dismantled and through economic empowerment enabling environment also for their civil and social empowerment created.

The three-pronged approach described above and the implementation of the WEE agenda in the South Caucasus during Phase I (August 2018 – July 2021) served as a catalyst at all levels and supported both state and non-state partners towards the achievement of substantive gender equality in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. In line with international and national commitments, on the levels of policies and legislation, institutions and grass roots, the project has been working towards transformative results for increased gender equality and greater protection of the rights of women and girls.

Notwithstanding considerable progress, WEE is still a challenge in the South Caucasus. The low inclusion of women in formal labour, the gender wage gaps, unequal political participation and women's overinvolvement in care work translates into unequal opportunities in access to financial services. WEE is also impeded by the pervasive presence of gender-based stereotypes and discriminatory practices in all three countries.

Therefore, during Phase II (August 2021 – July 2024), the WEESC project aims to increase economic security and improve access to livelihood and development opportunities for women, particularly the poorest and most excluded in the South Caucasus countries. The project outputs are informed by relevant international commitments to women's empowerment, and they are directly linked to the existing agreements between the UN system and the Governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, thereby improving each country's international human rights commitments under CEDAW<sup>31</sup> and other legal instruments, particularly those related to equitable economic development. The project goals contribute to national priorities and various national plans that underline the importance of gender mainstreaming in development.

The design for Phase II of the WEESC project and selected priorities was informed by the results of the external final evaluation of the implementation of WEESC Phase I<sup>32</sup>, which revealed:

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<sup>31</sup> Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are all parties to the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), as well as to the Optional Protocol.

<sup>32</sup> PSI, *External Final Evaluation of Women's Economic Empowerment in South Caucasus: a regional Project of UN Women* (2021)

- Direct, positive impact was achieved by fostering women's (self)employment and increased knowledge on women's rights through advocacy in the scope of **Outcome 1**. Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, used skills, economic opportunities and relevant information to become self-employed.
- The implementation of activities under **Outcome 2** resulted in transformative regulatory and policy change in Georgia. The project did not achieve such regulatory change in Armenia because of the volatile political climate generated by the 2018 revolution, followed by the COVID-19 crisis and the military conflict in 2020.
- **Outcome 3** was implemented with success in Armenia and Georgia but with significant delays because of the temporary unavailability of governmental partners in 2020. All outcome targets – mainstreaming gender in partner institutions, implementation of participatory gender audit recommendations, and gender-based budgeting – were achieved by the end of the first phase.

Sustainability of results is intended to be achieved at all three levels, corresponding with the project outcomes and outputs. At the grass-roots level (all three countries), sustainable results are 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. On 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). 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 levels).

In addition to recommendations from international human rights bodies, such as the CEDAW Committee,<sup>33</sup> and evidence-based research and global and national evaluations of UN Women's work on women's economic empowerment,<sup>34</sup> the design and selected priorities of the WEESC Phase II project were informed by the commitments of UN agencies in all three countries. These commitments are defined within the multi-year agreements between the United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) and the Governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and thus are linked to national priorities through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCF) 2021-2025 in Armenia,<sup>35</sup> Azerbaijan,<sup>36</sup> and Georgia.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> The Concluding Observations of the CEDAW Committee to the State Party Reports of Armenia (CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/5-6), Azerbaijan (CEDAW/C/AZE/CO/5) and Georgia (CEDAW/C/GEO/CO/4-5) relevant to women's economic empowerment have all been considered in the design of this project document.

<sup>34</sup> UN Women Independent Evaluation Office, *An Empowered Future: Corporate evaluation of UN Women's contributions to women's economic empowerment* (December 2014).

<sup>35</sup> UNSDCF-Armenia 2021-2025. Available from <https://armenia.un.org/en/135999-united-nations-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework-2021-2025>.

<sup>36</sup> UNSDCF-Azerbaijan 2021-2025. Available from <https://azerbaijan.un.org/en/128784-united-nations-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework-2021-2025>.

**2.2 Beneficiaries of the project:** Activities related to the **first outcome** will be carried out in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia with a specific focus on the poor and socially excluded groups of women in rural areas, including women engaged in agriculture. Activities will aim to increase women's access to income-generating opportunities, knowledge and training, including strengthening their capacities to organize and participate in decision-making at the national and local levels. In this phase, the project will also reach out to women employed in the informal sector as domestic workers in the capitals of Armenia and Georgia, supporting their mobilization into professional networks and associations. The private sector is also provided with technical support to uphold their corporate social responsibilities and promote gender equality in the workplace, marketplace and community in Armenia and Azerbaijan; and the general population will be engaged through public awareness campaigns on issues related to gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

The **second** and **third outcomes'** activities will support the government officials and public servants in Armenia and Georgia who will benefit from technical support and capacity development. The indirect beneficiaries of the interventions within the framework of the second and third outcomes will be women who are engaged in both the formal and informal economies as this work shall result in their increased access to decent work opportunities, revised and strengthened gender-responsive policies and services, and increased access to information, skills development and decision-making spaces. Herewith, the general population, women and men will be engaged through public awareness campaigns on issues related to gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

#### **Geographic coverage of the project**

For the grass-roots level work with women (Outcome 1) in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia as well as on the institutional level with local authorities (Outcome 2) in Armenia and Georgia, the following are the target geographic areas:

- Eleven consolidated municipalities are targeted in Armenia: four in Gegharkunik (Chambarak, Geghamasar, Shoghakat, Vardenis) and seven in Shirak (Akhuryan, Amasia, Ani, Arpi, Ashotsk, Marmashen, Sarapat)
- Four regions have been identified in Azerbaijan: Baku-Khazar, Fuzuli, Gusar and Sabirabad
- Twelve municipalities are targeted across three regions in Georgia: three municipalities in Kakheti (Akhmeta, Lagodekhi, Telavi); three in Kvemo Kartli (Bolnisi, Marneuli, Tetri Tskaro); three in Mtskheta-Mtianeti (Dusheti, Kazbegi, Tianeti) and three in Samtskhe-Javakheti (Akhalkalaki, Akhalsikhe, Aspindza)

#### **Evaluation approach, purpose, objectives and use**

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<sup>37</sup> UNSDCF-Georgia 2021-2025. Available from <https://georgia.un.org/en/103990-united-nations-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework-unscdf-2021-2025>

### 3.1. Evaluation purpose and objectives

In the last year of the project implementation, as established in the Project Document, a mandatory final external evaluation is to be commissioned by UN Women. The evaluation is being commission by the UN Women Georgia CO as a primarily formative (forward-looking) evaluation to support the Country Office (CO) and national stakeholders' strategic learning and decision-making and is expected to provide actionable recommendations and to be utilized in developing the final exit phase of the project. The evaluation is expected to have a secondary summative (backwards looking) perspective, to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning from experience. The evaluation will use relevance, coherence, effectiveness, organizational efficiency and sustainability criteria.

The **overall objective** of this final evaluation is to assess the achievement of programme results and performance of the above-described intervention.

The specific evaluation objectives are as follows:

- Analyze the relevance of the implementation strategy and approaches of the "Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus Phase II" project;
- Assess organizational efficiency in progressing towards the achievement of the project's results as defined in the intervention;
- Validate the project results in terms of achievements and/or weaknesses toward the outcome and outputs;
- Assess the potential for sustainability of the results achieved by the project;
- Document lessons learned, best practices, and challenges to inform future work of UN Women on women's economic empowerment;
- Identify strategies for replication and up-scaling of the project's best practices;
- Provide actionable recommendations for the implementation of the final exit phase of the project and modalities in the countries covered by the project in order to foster sustainability of the intervention;
- To assess how the project and its results relate and contribute to commitments and achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia with a focus on SDC 5 and 8.

### 3.2. Evaluation use and users

The information generated by the evaluation will be used by different stakeholders to:

- Contribute to building of the evidence base on effective strategies for the economic empowerment of women in all three countries;
- Facilitate strategic reflection, learning and further planning for programming in the areas of women's economic empowerment at policy, institutional and grassroots levels and promotion of women's participation in decision-making.

Main evaluation users include UN Women office in Georgia as well as Governments of Switzerland and Austrian Development Agency (project donors). Furthermore, national stakeholders – UNDP in Armenia and Azerbaijan, NGO partners, Parliamentary counterparts, targeted state agencies, and local governments. All key stakeholders will be closely involved in the evaluation process to increase ownership of findings, draw lessons learned and make and greater use of the evaluation results.

The findings, lessons learned, conclusion and recommendations of the evaluation are expected to contribute to the final exit phase of the intervention and to overall effective programming on gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) in the South Caucasus. The information generated by the evaluation will moreover be used to engage policy makers and other stakeholders at local, national and regional levels in evidence-based dialogues and to advocate for gender-responsive strategies to economically empower women.

### **Scope of the evaluation**

The final evaluation of the WEESC Project is to be conducted externally by a company selected through a competitive process. It is planned to be conducted in the period of 20 February 2024 to 19 July 2024. The evaluation will cover project implementation period from August 2021 to January 2024 in all three countries covered by the project.

Evaluation data collection will be conducted in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, where the project is being implemented; including in the national capitals and the target project regions to collect data as defined by the agreed evaluation work-plan. Data collection is anticipated to take 3-4 days in each location.

The evaluation will examine all the relevant documents of the WEESC Phase II Project, including logical framework of the project, its Monitoring and Evaluation Plan, annual work plan, semi-annual and annual reports to the donor, knowledge products produced in the frameworks of the project, etc.

## **4. Evaluation Methodology, Criteria and Questions**

### **4.1 Evaluation methodology**

The evaluation methodology will deploy mixed methods, including quantitative and qualitative data collection methods and analytical approaches to account for complexity of gender relations and to ensure participatory and inclusiveness processes that are culturally appropriate, to assess how the WEESC Phase II project has contributed to promote gender equality and

women's empowerment. The project Theory of Change should be assessed to see to what extent it accurately captured both the connections between early, intermediate and long-term project outcomes and to what extent the project has contributed to bring them about. In all three countries, interviews and focus group discussions with all key stakeholders involved in the project implementation, including but not limited to WEESC project team, UN Agencies, local NGO partners beneficiaries, legislative bodies, central and local government partners, etc. shall also take place.

The evaluation will address the criteria of project relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. More specifically, the evaluation will address the following key questions:

**Relevance:**

- To what extent is the intervention aligned with international, regional and national agreements and conventions on gender equality and women's empowerment in each country including the CEDAW and the relevant SDGs?
- To what extent are the objectives of the intervention consistent with the demands and the needs of partner country (institutions respectively society) as well as the sector policies and strategies of the partner country?
- How does the project design match with the complexity of national structures, systems and decision-making processes?
- To what extent is the WEESC Phase II project contributing to the implementation of the UN Women Georgia Strategic Note (SN)?
- To what extent is the design of the intervention adequate to achieve the goal and objectives?
- Is the project design based on quality analysis, including gender and human rights-based analysis, risk assessments, socio-cultural and political analysis?
- To what extent is the objective of the intervention consistent with the demands and the needs of the target groups (incl. gender-specific requirements)?

**Coherence:**

- To what extent does the project fit within UN Women's Strategic Plan and interrelated threefold mandate and UNDP priorities in the targeted countries?
- Are there any synergies and inter-linkages between the project and other interventions of UN Women/UNDP?
- To what extent the project is in complementarity, harmonisation and coordination with the interventions of other actors' interventions in the same context?
- To what extend the implementation of the project ensures synergies and coordination with Government's and key partners relevant efforts while avoiding duplications?

- To what extent are the interventions achieving synergies with the work of the UN Country Team?
- What is UN Women's and UNDP comparative advantage in this area of work compared with other UN entities and key partners in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan?
- In all three countries, how does WEESC Phase II project assure that the interventions reflect and align to national plans on gender equality as well as the country's internationally undertaken obligations and/or best practices?
- To what extent is the WEESC Phase II project aligned with the UN Development Partnership Frameworks and nationalized SDGs in each country?

### **Effectiveness**

- To what extent the planned objectives at outcome level have been achieved taking into account their relative importance? If possible, distinguish the quality and quantity of results achieved.
- How effective have the selected programme strategies and approaches been in progressing towards achieving programme results?
- What contributions -if any- are participating UN agencies making to implement global norms and standards for GEWE in each of the countries in the framework of this project?
- Has the project achieved any unforeseen results, either positive or negative? For whom? What are the good practices and the obstacles or shortcomings encountered? How were they overcome?
- To what extent do the outcomes achieved contribute to improved governance from a systems perspective?
- To what extent have capacities of relevant duty-bearers and rights-holders been strengthened at this stage of implementation?
- Does the project have effective monitoring mechanisms in place to measure progress towards results?
- How adaptably and rapidly did WEESC Phase II project react to changing country contexts?
- What -if any- types of innovative good practices have been introduced in the programme for the achievement of GEWE results?
- Has the WEESC Project led to complementary and synergistic effects on broader UN efforts to achieve GEWE in the three countries?
- To what extent does the intervention contribute to poverty reduction, inclusion and/or reduction of vulnerabilities?<sup>38</sup>

### **Efficiency:**

- Have resources (financial, human, technical support, etc.) been allocated and split amongst the different implementing entities strategically to progress towards the achievement of the project outputs and outcomes?

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<sup>38</sup> Dimensions for consideration are: a) economic (income and assets); b) human capacities (health, education, nutrition); c) ability to take part in society (status and dignity); d) political capacities (institutions and policies); e) resilience to external shocks.

- Have the outputs been delivered in a timely manner?
- To what extend were relevant stakeholders and actors included in the project planning and implementation?
- Has there been effective leadership and management of the project including the structuring of management and administration roles to maximize results?
- To what extent are the project's individual entity and joint monitoring mechanisms in place effective for measuring and informing management of project performance and progress towards targets?
- To what extent was the monitoring data objectively used for management action and decision-making?
- To what extent are the approaches and strategies used by the intervention considered efficient (Cost-efficiency)?

#### **Sustainability:**

- How effectively has the project been able to contribute to the generation of national ownership of the project outputs in each country?
- To what extent will the positive results (outputs and outcomes) be continued beyond the end of the intervention? Considering also potential risks in the context.
- To what extent has the project identified strategic partners that could pick up on supporting continued government and non-governmental action when the project comes to an end?
- Do national/local institutions demonstrate leadership commitment and technical capacity to continue to replicate some project activities?
- To what extend has UN Women been able to promote replication of project successes?

The questions outlined above are preliminary and are expected to be revised and refined by the evaluation team during the inception phase of the evaluation. An evaluation matrix that will include revised evaluation questions will be a key element of the inception report of the evaluation.

#### **5. Evaluation Process**

The evaluation process is divided in five phases: 1) **Preparation**, mainly devoted to structuring the evaluation approach, preparing the TOR, compiling programme documentation, and hiring the evaluation company; 2) **Inception**, which will involve reconstruction of theory of change, evaluability assessment, online inception meetings with the WEESC team, inception report and finalization of evaluation methodology; 3) **Data collection** including desk research and preparation of field missions, visits to project sites; 4) **Data analysis and synthesis stage**, focusing on data analyzed, interpretation of findings and drafting of an Evaluation Report; and 5) **Dissemination and follow-up**, which will entail the development of a joint Management Response by UN Women.

The contractor will be responsible for inception, data collection and data analysis and synthesis.

- **Inception phase:** at the beginning of the consultancy, the contractor will be provided with key sources of information for an initial desk review. The online inception meetings will be conducted with the WEESC team. At the end of this phase an inception report that will include the refined evaluation methodology will be delivered. The inception report will be validated and approved by UN Women and project donors.
- **Data collection phase:** based on the inception phase, the contractor will carry out an in-depth desk review, and field mission/s will be conducted to complete data collection and triangulation of information. Interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders, as relevant, will take place in all three countries.
- **Data analysis and synthesis phase:** The collected information will be analyzed and final evaluation report will be delivered. A validation meeting will be organized where the contractor will validate the final report with UN Women and the ERG and approved by UN Women.

In addition, UN Women is a UN-SWAP reporting entity and the contractor has to take into consideration that the evaluations managed by UN Women are annually assessed against the UN-SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator and its related scorecard. The evaluation will be conducted in accordance with UN Women evaluation guidelines and UNEG [Norms](#) and [Standards](#) for evaluation and the [UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluations in the UN System](#).<sup>39</sup>

## 6. Stakeholders Participation and Evaluation Management

The evaluation will be a consultative, inclusive and participatory process and will ensure the participation of project beneficiaries. The evaluation will be Human Rights and Gender responsive.

UN Women Georgia CO will appoint an officer who will serve as the **Evaluation Task Manager** and who will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the evaluation and ensures that the evaluation is conducted in accordance with UN Women Evaluation Policies, United Nations Evaluation Group Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the United Nations system and other key relevant guidance documents. The evaluation process will be supported by the UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Evaluation Specialist.

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<sup>39</sup> UNEG Ethical Guidelines: [http://uneval.org/papersandpubs/documentdetail.jsp?doc\\_id=102](http://uneval.org/papersandpubs/documentdetail.jsp?doc_id=102); The UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluation: [http://uneval.org/papersandpubs/documentdetail.jsp?doc\\_id=100](http://uneval.org/papersandpubs/documentdetail.jsp?doc_id=100)

Moreover, an **Evaluation Management Group (EMG)** comprising of senior managers from UN Women Georgia Office and relevant technical project officers from UN Women Georgia, UNDP Armenia and UNDP Azerbaijan (as these UNDP offices are implementing Outcome 1 components of the WEESC project in these two countries) will be established to oversee and support the evaluation process, make key decisions and quality assure the different deliverables. The EMG will quality assure and approve all deliverables. EMG will be responsible for the coordination in the field including logistical support during field missions.

The establishment of an **Evaluation Reference Group (ERG)** will facilitate the participation of key stakeholders in the evaluation process and will help to ensure that the evaluation approach is robust and relevant to staff and stakeholders. Furthermore, it will make certain that factual errors or errors of omission or interpretation are identified in evaluation products. The Evaluation Reference Group will provide input and relevant information at key stages of the evaluation: terms of Reference, inception report, draft and final reports and dissemination of the results. The establishment of an ERG will enable the participation of relevant stakeholders in the design and in the validation of the evaluation, raising awareness of the different information needs, quality assurance throughout the process and in sharing the evaluation results. The Evaluation Reference Group will be engaged throughout the process and will be composed of relevant state and non-state actors. The ERG will review the draft evaluation report and provide substantive feedback to ensure quality and completeness of the report. The ERG will be composed of the designated representatives of the project donors (SDC and ADA), UN Women Georgia Country Office as well as UNDP Armenia and UNDP Azerbaijan as well as key government and civil society partners of the project from Georgia.

Within six weeks upon completion of the evaluation, UN Women has the responsibility to prepare a **management response** that addresses the findings and recommendations to ensure future learning and inform implementation of relevant projects.

### **Deliverables**

The evaluation team is expected to deliver the following products:

1. **Inception Report** where the evaluation team will present a refined scope, a detailed outline of the evaluation design and methodology, evaluation questions, and criteria for the approach for in-depth desk review and field work to be conducted in the data collection phase. The report will include an evaluation matrix and detailed work plan. A first draft report will be shared with the evaluation management group and, based upon the comments received the evaluation team will revise the draft. The evaluation team will maintain an audit trail of the comments received and provide a response on how the comments were addressed in the final

inception report. (International Evaluation Team Leader - 8 working days; International Expert on WEE - 5 working days; Local Evaluation Expert Georgia – 5 days, Local Evaluation Expert Armenia - 5 days, Local Evaluation Expert Azerbaijan - 5 days) by 6 March 2024.

2. Conduct field visits to all three countries and project sites and key informant interviews and focus group discussions, observations **to collect the data and analyze data**. The Evaluation Team Leader and International Expert on WEE are expected to travel to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia for 3-4 days per target country; it should be noted that land borders with Azerbaijan remain closed due to pandemic restrictions. No international travel requirement is foreseen for Local Evaluation Experts. In the potential scenario that onsite data collection is not possible due to travel restrictions, alternative data collection methods will be explored and agreed with UN Women. (International Evaluation Team Leader – 12 working days; Local Evaluation Expert Georgia – 5 days, Local Evaluation Expert Armenia - 5 days, Local Evaluation Expert Azerbaijan - 5 days) by 29 March 2024.
3. **Power Point Presentation of preliminary findings and recommendations** (conducted in Tbilisi or in hybrid mode) detailing the emerging findings of the evaluation will be shared with the Evaluation Management Group for feedback. The revised presentation will be delivered to the Evaluation Reference Group for comment and validation. The evaluation team will incorporate the feedback received into the draft report. (International Evaluation Team Leader - 5 working days; International Expert on WEE - 3 working days; Local Evaluation Expert Georgia – 2 days, Local Evaluation Expert Armenia - 2 days, Local Evaluation Expert Azerbaijan - 2 days) by 8 April 2024.
4. **Draft Evaluation report** which will be shared with the Evaluation Management Group for initial feedback. The second draft report will incorporate Evaluation Management Group's feedback and will be shared with the Evaluation Reference Group for identification of factual errors, errors of omission and/or misinterpretation of information. The third draft report will incorporate this feedback and then be shared with the ERG for final validation. The evaluation team will maintain an audit trail of the comments received and provide a response on how the comments were addressed in the revised drafts (International Evaluation Team Leader - 15 working days; International Expert on WEE - 10 working days; Local Evaluation Expert Georgia – 6 days, Local Evaluation Expert Armenia - 4 days, Local Evaluation Expert Azerbaijan - 4 days) by 29 April 2024.
5. **Final Evaluation report** taking into consideration comments and feedback collected from the Evaluation Reference Group. The report shall include the following chapters: Executive Summary, Introduction and Background, Evaluation approach and methodology (including limitations), Findings, Conclusions, Lessons learnt, Recommendations and relevant Annexes.

The final evaluation report should be presented online. (International Evaluation Team Leader - 10 working days; International Expert on WEE - 8 working days; Local Evaluation Expert Georgia – 4 days, Local Evaluation Expert Armenia - 2 days, Local Evaluation Expert Azerbaijan - 2 days) by 14 June 2024.

The evaluation will be conducted in the period of 20 February 2024 to 19 July 2024. All deliverables will be presented in English.

Tasks/deliverables	Expected delivery date
<b>Inception phase</b>	
Desk review of background documentation	<b>February, March 2024</b>
Inception report (including two rounds of revision)	<b>March 2024</b>
<b>Data collection phase</b>	
Additional documents review, (online) interviews	<b>March, 2024</b>
Visit to programme sites <sup>40</sup> , debriefing with ERG	<b>March, 2024</b>
<b>Analysis and reporting phase</b>	
Presentation of preliminary findings and recommendations	<b>April, 2024</b>
Draft report (including two rounds of revision) and case study summaries	<b>April, 2024</b>
Final report, final case study summaries and evaluation communication products (brief PPT, two-pager)	<b>June, 2024</b>
Final presentation of the evaluation	<b>June, 2024</b>

### **Timeframe**

The expected contract duration is up to 5 months. It is expected that the selected company shall begin work on February 20, 2024.

### **Qualifications of the Contractor**

#### **Minimum requirements for the Evaluation Company:**

- Officially registered legal for-profit entity;
- At least ten (10) years of international experience in the field of evaluations of development interventions, preferably in the area of women's rights and gender equality;

- Demonstrated experience of the company to produce high quality evaluation reports (sample reports of previous assignments will be submitted);
- Experience of working in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan or in a country with similar political, economic and social situation, preferably with particular focus on women's rights and gender equality will be considered an asset;
- At least five (5) years of experience working with multiple stakeholders: government, civil society, community-based organizations, and the UN/multilateral/bilateral institutions;
- Financial Sustainability of the Organization supported by audits or evidence of financial turnover for the last three (3) years.

The evaluation team should consist of at least five specialists: including an Evaluation team leader who will be the international evaluation expert; an international gender equality and women's empowerment expert, with experience in gender responsive policies for women's economic empowerment including gender responsive planning and budgeting (GRB); and for each country, one local/national gender expert.

Team members	Estimated number of working days <sup>41</sup>
International Evaluation Team Leader	50
International Expert on WEE	26
Local Evaluation Expert Georgia	22
Local Evaluation Expert Armenia	18
Local Evaluation Expert Azerbaijan	18

#### **Duties and responsibilities of the International Evaluation Team Leader:**

- Leading the inception phase and developing an inception report outlining design, approach and methodology of the evaluation and the workplan of the evaluation team;
- Directing and supervising the work of the national consultants in carrying out collection, research and analysis of relevant documentation and other data, and reporting;
- Overseeing and assuring quality of data collection and leading the analysis of the evaluation evidence;
- Lead and participate in all three data collection missions;
- Preparing for meetings with the reference groups and other stakeholders;
- Leading the preparation of the draft and final evaluation reports and evaluation communication products.

#### **Duties and responsibilities of the International Expert on WEE:**

<sup>41</sup> This estimation includes total amount of working days, including data collection missions

- Act as an advisor on WEE/GRB;
- Provide advice on WEE normative and legal frameworks and on the overall analysis from the WEE thematic perspective;
- Provide feedback to all deliverables.

**Duties and responsibilities of the Local Evaluation Experts from Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan (one per country) are as follows:**

- Supporting inception phase gathering documents, following up with UN Women/UNDP offices in the countries of programme's implementation and synthesizing relevant information;
- Assisting in the preparation of the missions with UN Women /UNDP offices as relevant;
- Participating in country data collection missions;
- Conduct interviews and collect additional data as needed;
- Attending and supporting the preparation of all meetings and presentations;
- Supporting the analysis of the evidence at country level.

**Minimum requirements for the International Evaluation Team Leader:**

- At least master's degree or its equivalent in one or more of the following: economics, social sciences, development studies, gender or youth studies;
- Relevant experience of conducting evaluation over at least seven years in the area of development and GEWE;
- Knowledge and experience of gender-responsive and human rights-based approaches to evaluation;
- experience having conducted complex evaluations and/or multi-stakeholder evaluations related to WEE and/or gender mainstreaming;
- Experience of designing and leading/participating in gender-responsive evaluations and/or applied research utilizing a wide range of approaches and methods;
- Ability to produce well written reports;
- Demonstrated facilitation and communications skills, experience in participatory approaches and ability to negotiate amongst a wide range of stakeholders;
- Experience in working with the UN/multilateral/bilateral institutions;
- Knowledge of UN system, practices, procedures, including UN Women and UNDP programme modalities will be an asset;
- Fluency in English.

**Minimum requirements for the Team Members:**

**International Expert on WEE:**

- Advanced (at least Master's or equivalent) university degree in social sciences, gender studies, political science, health, development studies or another related field;
- Substantive international (eastern Europe, CIS) experience (at least seven years) in the field of gender responsive policies for women's economic empowerment including gender responsive planning and budgeting;
- At least five years of international experience in evaluation of projects and programmes of development interventions;
- Experience in working with the UN/multilateral/bilateral institutions;
- Knowledge of UN system, practices, procedures, including UN Women and UNDP programme modalities will be an asset;
- Fluency in English.

**Local Evaluation Expert Georgia:**

- Advanced (at least Masters of equivalent) university degree in social sciences, gender studies, political science, development studies or another related field;
- At least five years of work experience in the field of human rights or gender equality and women's empowerment in Georgia;
- At least five years of experience in monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes;
- Experience implementing or evaluating women's economic empowerment programmes will be considered an asset;
- Fluency in English and Georgian.

**Local Evaluation Expert Armenia:**

- Advanced (at least Masters of equivalent) university degree in social sciences, gender studies, political science, development studies or another related field;
- At least five years of work experience in the field of human rights or gender equality and women's empowerment in Armenia;
- At least five years of experience in monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes;
- Experience implementing or evaluating women's economic empowerment programmes will be considered an asset;
- Fluency in English and Armenian.

**Local Evaluation Expert Azerbaijan:**

- Advanced (at least Masters of equivalent) university degree in social sciences, gender studies, political science, development studies or another related field;
- At least five years of work experience in the field of human rights or gender equality and women's empowerment in Azerbaijan;
- At least five years of experience in monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes;
- Experience implementing or evaluating women's economic empowerment programmes will be considered an asset;
- Fluency in English and Azerbaijani.

## Annex IV – Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Sub-questions	Criteria	Data Sources and Methods for Collection
<b>Evaluation Question 1: Relevance: Is the Intervention Doing the Right Things? - 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.</b>		
1.1 To what extent does the intervention reflect and align with international, regional and national agreements, conventions and/or best practices on gender equality and women's empowerment in each country including the CEDAW and the relevant SDGs? <sup>42</sup>	-Extent to which WEESC's objectives and design respond to regional and countries' policies, and agreements on gender equality and women's empowerment	-National and regional agreements and conventions on gender equality and women's empowerment, including CEDAW, UN documents -Steering Committee (UN Women Georgia Country Office, UNDP Country Offices in Armenia and Azerbaijan, donors) -Government representatives of Stakeholder Groups -Document Review, KIIs
1.2 a) To what extent are the objectives of the intervention consistent with the demands and the needs of partner country (institutions and society respectively)  1.2b) To what extent is the project contributing to the implementation of sector policies and strategies of the partner country and the overall UN Women Georgia Strategic Note (SN)? <sup>43</sup>	-Extent to which WEESC's objectives respond to the priorities (economic, environmental, equity, social) expressed in government development plans and poverty reduction strategies.  -Extent to which WEESC is aligned with the policies and strategies of the UN Women Georgia (SN)	-Country policies, strategic plans -Steering Committee -Government officials -Partners -Document Review, KIIs
1.3 How is the project design organized to take into account the complexity of national structures, systems and decision-making processes? <sup>44</sup>	-WEESC's design reflects differing local country contexts and processes specifically addressing the economic empowerment of women	-Project documents, UN Country documents -UN and Government officials -Partners -Document Review, KIIs
1.4 To what extent is the WEESC Phase II project contributing to the implementation of the UN Women Georgia SN?	- Extent of Phase II design being aligned to and contributing to Georgia SN and the insights and learnings from phase I that has been	-Project documents, UN Country documents -UN and Government officials -Partners

<sup>42</sup> This sub-question has been merged with a very similar Coherence sub-question.

<sup>43</sup> The sub-question has been structured into 2 components and includes a reference to the UN Women Georgia SN.

<sup>44</sup> This sub-question includes revised wording for clarity purposes.

Evaluation Sub-questions	Criteria	Data Sources and Methods for Collection
	used to adapt phase II design for increased effectiveness	-Document Review, KIIs
1.5. To what extent is the design of the intervention adequate to achieve the goal and objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Extent to which the WEESC theory of change can reasonably be expected to support the achievement of the program's outcomes and impact</li> <li>-Alignment of design with lessons from phase I regarding WEE and potential pathways for change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Design documents and reports, Theory of change analysis</li> <li>-Steering Committee</li> <li>-Partners</li> <li>-Document Review, particularly results reports, KIIs</li> </ul>
1.6. Is the project design based on quality analysis, including gender and human rights-based analysis, risk assessments, socio-cultural, economic and political analysis?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Extent to which the analysis conducted during the phase II design identified the right partners and implementation strategies, as well as risks.</li> <li>- Extent to which the program built on phase I lessons and reviewed partnerships for the selection of most appropriate and strategic partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Design documents and reports</li> <li>- EMG</li> <li>-Government representatives of Stakeholder Groups</li> <li>-Document Review, KIIs</li> </ul>
1.6 To what extent is the objective of the intervention consistent with the demands and the needs of the target groups (incl. gender-specific requirements) and how has it contributed to poverty reduction, inclusion and/or reduction of vulnerabilities? <sup>45</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Extent to which target beneficiaries believe WEESC is responding to their needs and priorities</li> <li>-Extent to which WEESC has reduced poverty, improved inclusion, and reduced vulnerabilities for target beneficiaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Design documents and reports</li> <li>- EMG</li> <li>-Government representatives of the Stakeholder Groups in each country</li> <li>-FGDs, KIIs</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluation Question 2: Coherence: How Well Does the Intervention Fit In? - The compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, or institution</b>		
2.1 To what extent does the project fit within the UN Women's Strategic Plan and interrelated threefold mandate and UNDP priorities in the targeted countries? <sup>46</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Extent to which WEESC's objectives respond to UN Women's and UNDP's policies and strategies in the three countries.</li> <li>-Evidence of complementarity and coordination across the partner agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-UN Women's Strategic Plan</li> <li>-UNDP Country Programme documents and other UN agency documents</li> <li>-UN officials</li> <li>-Document Review, KIIs</li> </ul>
2.2 a) Has the WEESC Project led to complementary and synergies on broader UN efforts to achieve GEWE in the three countries? 2.2 b) To what extent are the interventions achieving synergies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Evidence of complementarity and coordination across UN agencies in the 3 countries</li> <li>- WEESC supports broader UN coordination effort</li> <li>-Extent to which WEESC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Programme documents, UN Women and UNDP agency documents</li> <li>-Government and other GEWE stakeholder documents</li> <li>-UN officials</li> </ul>

<sup>45</sup> This sub-question has been merged with a similar Effectiveness sub-question.

<sup>46</sup> This sub-question has been merged with a similar Effectiveness sub-question.

Evaluation Sub-questions	Criteria	Data Sources and Methods for Collection
<p>with the work of the UN Country Team and other development partners?</p> <p>2.2 c) Are there any synergies and inter-linkages between the project and other interventions of UN Women/UNDP and other actors' interventions in the same context?<sup>47</sup></p> <p>2.2 d) To what extent the implementation of the project ensures synergies and coordination with Government's and key partners' relevant efforts while avoiding duplications?</p>	<p>complements but does not duplicate other initiatives and projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Extent to which there are synergies and interlinkages between WEESC and work carried out by UN and other development agencies in South Caucasus</li> <li>-Extent to which there are synergies and interlinkages between WEESC and other GEWE interventions carried out in SC</li> <li>- Extent to which there are synergies, complementarity and interlinkages between WEESC and other GEWE interventions carried out in South Caucasus, including government initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Government representatives of Stakeholder Groups</li> <li>-Document Review, KIIs</li> <li>-Programme documents, Government and other GEWE stakeholder documents</li> <li>-Steering Committee</li> <li>-Government representatives of Stakeholder Groups</li> <li>-Partners</li> <li>-Document Review, KIIs</li> </ul>
<p>2.3 What is UN Women's and UNDP comparative advantage in this area of work compared with other UN entities and key partners in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan?<sup>48</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Extent to which UN Women and UNDP policies and mandates support or undermine work on GEWE as compared to other UN entities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-UN Country Plans, national plans, and other documents</li> <li>-UN officials</li> <li>-Government representatives of Stakeholder Groups</li> <li>-Partners</li> <li>-Document Review, KIIs</li> </ul>
<p>2.4 a) To what extent is the WEESC Phase II assure that the interventions reflect and align to national plans on gender equality as well as the country's internationally undertaken obligations and/or best practices?</p> <p>2.4 b) To what extent is the WEESC Phase II project is aligned with the UN Development Partnership Frameworks and nationalized SDGs in each country?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Extent to which WEESC's objectives responds to country specific mandates and policy priorities and UN Partnership Frameworks and national SDG priorities and plans in the three countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Country Plans, national plans especially on the SDGs</li> <li>-UN Development and Partnership Frameworks</li> <li>-UN officials</li> <li>-Government representatives of Stakeholder Groups</li> <li>-Partners</li> <li>-Document Review, KIIs</li> </ul>
<p><b>Evaluation Question 3: Effectiveness: Is the Intervention Achieving Its Objective? The extent to which the intervention is expected to achieve its objectives and its results, including any differential results across groups</b></p>		
<p>3.1 a) To what extent the planned objectives at outcome level have been achieved taking into account</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Programme plans and reports, M&amp;E data</li> <li>-Steering Committee</li> </ul>

<sup>47</sup> This sub-question has been merged with another sub-question in this section.

<sup>48</sup> This sub-question has been linked with another sub-question.

Evaluation Sub-questions	Criteria	Data Sources and Methods for Collection
<p>their relative importance? If possible, distinguish the quality and quantity of results achieved.</p> <p>3.1b) What are the principal reasons behind the project's achievement (or not) of its outcomes?<sup>49</sup></p> <p>3.1 c) What evidence (or sign of) can be seen to show the contribution of WEESC II project initiatives at the impact level?</p>	<p>including any differential results across groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Reporting of performance against the identified outcomes</li> <li>- Extent of variances and reports explaining variances</li> <li>- Updates on risks and mitigation</li> <li>- Evidence of contribution or signs of contribution at the impact level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Stakeholder Groups, partners and beneficiaries</li> <li>-Document Review, KIIs, FGD</li> <li>- Review of trends and statistics related to impact level indicators</li> </ul>
<p>3.2 a) How effective have the selected programme strategies and approaches been in progressing towards achieving programme results?</p> <p>3.2 b) What evidence do we see of the interlinkages of outcomes 2 and 3 to outcome 1?<sup>50</sup></p> <p>3.3 c) To what extent are the assumptions underpinning the logic model, valid?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Comparative analysis of which strategies and approaches have been better able to achieve their intended results</li> <li>-Analysis of linkages and progress toward results at the grassroots level and policy/legislative and institutional levels, including intended and unintended synergies</li> <li>- Review of assumptions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Programme plans and reports, M&amp;E data</li> <li>-Steering Committee</li> <li>-Stakeholder Groups, partners and beneficiaries</li> <li>-Document Review, KIIs, FGD</li> </ul>
<p>3.3 What contributions -if any- are participating UN agencies making to implement global norms and standards for GEWE in each of the countries in the framework of this project?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Extent of mainstreaming GEWE into policy formulation and systems</li> <li>-Evidence of clear areas of change in WEE where WEESC is contributing (current and future potential pathways)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Review of norms and standards</li> <li>-Programme documents</li> <li>- UN and Government officials,</li> <li>-Stakeholder Groups, partners and beneficiaries</li> <li>-Document Review, KIIs, FGD</li> </ul>
<p>3.4 Has the project achieved any unforeseen results, either positive or negative? For whom?</p> <p>3.4 b) What are the good practices and the obstacles or shortcomings encountered?</p> <p>3.4 c) How were they overcome?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Reporting of performance against the identified outcomes, indicators and outputs compared to targets and analysis of qualitative inputs from partner organizations and stakeholders</li> <li>- Explanation of variances</li> <li>- Updates on risks and mitigation</li> <li>- Demonstration of stakeholders' resilience in responding to shocks or unforeseen situation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Programme plans and reports</li> <li>-M&amp;E data</li> <li>- UN and Government officials,</li> <li>-Stakeholder Groups, partners and beneficiaries</li> <li>-Document Review, KIIs, FGD</li> </ul>
<p>3.5 To what extent do the outcomes achieved contribute to improved governance from a systems perspective?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Extent to which WEESC results at the outcome level contribute to improved governance systems regionally and in the three countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Programme plans and report, M&amp;E data</li> <li>-UN and Government officials,</li> <li>-Stakeholder Groups, partners and</li> </ul>

<sup>49</sup> A second component was added to this sub-question.

<sup>50</sup> A second component was added to this sub-question.

Evaluation Sub-questions	Criteria	Data Sources and Methods for Collection
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evidence of institutionalisation of behaviour and perception of stakeholders in terms of designing evidence-based policy (test assumptions)</li> <li>- Evidence of demonstrate of commitment and actual implementation</li> </ul>	beneficiaries -Document Review, KIIs, FGD
3.6 To what extent have capacities of relevant duty-bearers and rights-holders been strengthened at this stage of implementation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Evidence of use of capacity and skills in action by different groups- stakeholders/change agents and beneficiaries</li> </ul>	-Programme plans and reports, M&E data -UN and Government officials, -Stakeholder Groups, partners and beneficiaries -Document Review, KIIs, FGD
3.7 a) How adaptably and rapidly did WEESC II Project react to changing country contexts?  3.8 b) How has the project responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftereffects and what have been the implications on the achievement of project results?  <sup>51</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Evidence and timeliness of programming being adapted to country contexts, including responses to regional geopolitical conflict</li> <li>-Evidence of programming being adapted to address the effects of COVID-19 (negative, positive or both) and reporting of performance against the identified outcomes, indicators and outputs compared to targets</li> </ul>	Programme plans and reports, M&E data -UN and Government officials, -Stakeholder Groups, partners and beneficiaries -Document Review, KIIs, FGD
3.9 a) What -if any- types of innovative good practices have been introduced in the programme for the achievement of GEWE results?  3.9 b) Has the WEESC Project led to complementary and synergistic effect on broader efforts to achieve GEWE across all 3 countries?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Evidence of innovation in program approaches and tools to achieve GEWE</li> </ul>	-Programme plans and report, M&E data -UN and Government officials - Stakeholder Groups, partners and beneficiaries -Document Review, KIIs, FGD,
3.10 To what extent does the intervention contribute to poverty reduction, inclusion and/or reduction of vulnerabilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evidence of program contribution to impact</li> </ul>	Review of results reports Review of macro trends on impact level indicators and validated or triangulated with KIIs to establish correlation to program support
<b>Evaluation Question 4: Efficiency: How Well Are Resources Being Used? - The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver results, in an economic and timely way</b>		
4.1 How have resources (financial,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Comparison of results targets and</li> </ul>	-Programme documents, M&E

<sup>51</sup> A Covid-19 implications component has been added into this sub-question.

Evaluation Sub-questions	Criteria	Data Sources and Methods for Collection
human, technical support, etc.) been allocated and split amongst the different implementing entities strategically to progress towards the achievement of the project outputs and outcomes?	actual targets in the results framework -Cost of implementation arrangements as share of total budget expended -Access to and timeliness of donor funding	data, monitoring and financial reports -UN and Government Officials -Stakeholder Groups, partners -Document Review, KIIs
4.2 Have the outputs been delivered in a timely manner?	-Reporting of performance against identified outputs, including consideration of COVID-19 and any geo-political implications on implementation	-Programme plans and reports including schedules, M&E data -UN and Government officials -Stakeholder Groups, partners -Document Review, KIIs
4.3 To what extent were relevant stakeholders and actors included in the project planning and implementation?	-Extent of stakeholder participation in project planning and evidence of stakeholder groups, meeting frequency and participation in decision-making	-Programme plans and reports including consultation meetings and steering committee meeting reports, M&E data -UN and Government officials -Stakeholder Groups, partners -Document Review, KIIs
4.4 Has there been effective leadership and management of the project including the structuring of management and administration roles to maximize results?	-WEESC management and governance arrangements facilitate efficient implementation -Clear commitment at the Country office level for the two UN agencies to work together	-Programme plans and reports, M&E data -Steering Committee -Stakeholder Groups, partners -Document Review, KIIs
4.5 Does the project have effective monitoring mechanisms (individual entity and joint) in place for measuring and informing management of project performance and progress towards targets? <sup>52</sup>	-Level of coordination between country and regional level M&E systems -Robustness of the performance measurement system in capturing results (both quantitative and qualitative changes)	-Programme plans and reports including consultation meetings and steering committee meeting reports, M&E data -Steering Committee -Stakeholders Groups, partners -Document Review, KIIs
4.6 To what extent was the monitoring data objectively used for management action and decision-making?	-Extent to which lessons and results performance integrated into internal decision-making	-Programme plans and reports, M&E data -UN and Government officials -Stakeholders Groups, partners -Document Review, KIIs
4.7 To what extent are the approaches and strategies used by the intervention considered efficient (Cost-efficiency)?	-Analysis of WEESC budgets across the outcomes, central and regional levels and across agencies	-Programme plans and reports including budgets and financial reports, M&E data, -UN and Government officials -Stakeholder Groups, partners -Document Review, KIIs

<sup>52</sup> This sub-question was merged with a similar Efficiency sub-question related to monitoring mechanisms.

Evaluation Sub-questions	Criteria	Data Sources and Methods for Collection
<b>Evaluation Question 5: Sustainability: Will the Benefits Last? - The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue</b> <i>Assess progress through the lens of stakeholders and beneficiaries being able to Adapt, Adopt (commitment and institutionalisation), Respond to context specific challenges and shocks and Expand behaviour changes.</i>		
5.1 How effectively has the project been able to contribute to the generation of national ownership of the project outputs in each country?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Level of understanding of the economic empowerment needs and priorities of women</li> <li>-Changes in attitudes (positive or negative) of the economic empowerment needs and priorities of women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Programme documents including M&amp;E data, monitoring and reporting documents</li> <li>-Perceptions of Stakeholder groups and partners</li> <li>-Document Review, KIIs</li> </ul>
5.2 How does the project monitor sustainability across the different outcomes and to what extent will the positive results (outputs and outcomes) be continued beyond the end of the intervention? Considering also potential risks in the context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Performance measurement reporting system against identified outcomes and outputs</li> <li>-Demonstration of increased capacity of partner organisations and direct beneficiaries</li> <li>- Evidence of behaviour change commitment and institutionalisation of practices to across 3 levels (a) evidence-based policy reforms and frameworks by public agencies locally, nationally and regionally, (b) private sector investing in inclusive models and (c) women continuing to expand and/or engage in economic activities and 'copying' at the grassroots level, beyond the life of the project</li> <li>- Resilience through demonstration of institutions' ability to respond to context specific challenges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Programme documents including M&amp;E data, monitoring and reporting documents</li> <li>-Perceptions of Stakeholder groups and partners</li> <li>-Document Review, KIIs</li> </ul>
5.3 To what extent has the project identified strategic partners that could pick up on supporting continued government and non-governmental action when the project comes to an end?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Number and type of strategic partners who have demonstrated institutionalisation of changes that promote WEE or expressed commitment and interest to continue and actual implementation of policy reforms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Programme documents including M&amp;E data, monitoring and reporting documents</li> <li>-Perceptions of stakeholders, partners and beneficiaries</li> <li>-Document Review, KIIs, FGD</li> </ul>
5.4 Do national/local institutions demonstrate leadership commitment and technical capacity to continue to replicate some	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Level of ownership by national/local institutions</li> <li>-Changes in capacity of national/local institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Programme plans and reports including consultation meetings and <b>steering committee</b> meeting reports, M&amp;E data</li> </ul>

Evaluation Sub-questions	Criteria	Data Sources and Methods for Collection
project activities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Institutionalisation of use of WEESC tools and approaches into action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-UN and Government officials</li> <li>-Stakeholder Groups, partners and beneficiaries</li> <li>-Document Review, KIIs, FGD</li> </ul>
5.5 To what extent has UN Women been able to promote replication of project successes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The extent to which the project's model and successes have been adopted by other partners and stakeholders and evidence of replication amongst the three countries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Programme plans and reports including consultation meetings and steering committee meeting reports, M&amp;E data,</li> <li>-UN and Government officials</li> <li>-Stakeholders Groups, partners and beneficiaries</li> <li>-Document Review, KIIs, FGD</li> </ul>

## Annex V – Data Collection Guides

### **Key Informant Interview Guiding Questions Donors and Project Officers**

#### **INTRODUCTION TO THE KII:**

We are pleased to have this chance to follow up with you directly as we understand that you have been involved in the implementation of the WEESC project as one of the key partners. The evaluation team is interested in learning more about your role in the project and would also like to obtain your perspectives on some key topics that will help us shape our overall evaluation.

With your permission, we would like to do an audio recording of this interview that will be treated with confidentiality and used by the evaluation team for evaluation purposes only. Your anonymity will be protected so as to ensure candid responses to our questions.

#### **Relevance:**

In your view how does the program align with the Donor and National Priorities in achieving positive gendered outcomes?

- How has the program pivoted in phase 2, if at all, to ensure relevance to national and regional priorities?
- To what extent does the interventions reflect and align with international, regional and national agreements and action plans, conventions and/or best practices on gender equality and women's empowerment, including the CEDAW and the relevant SDGs in [(....name of the country)?]
- How does the program continue to ensure relevance to the needs of the national government and donor priorities?
- How does the program ensure a balance between regional and national priorities? Do you feel anything in particular has been compromised at the local context level in an effort to align it with the global program level objectives?

#### **Coherence:**

- Does the regional nature of the project create positive synergies? If so, how?
- Are there other programs and initiatives (both by national and development partners) working towards women's economic empowerment and gender-responsive budgeting where you are operating? What are some of the other complementary programs?
- To what extent is the WEESC project ensuring synergies and coordination with other programs and other key partners' relevant efforts while avoiding duplications?
- How are best practices shared?

- In your opinion what is WEESC's key strength compared to other programs? (understand additionality)

**Effectiveness:**

- In your view, to what extent has the WEESC project achieved its planned outcomes? And what are the reasons behind the project's achievements or shortcomings?
- Has the project achieved any unforeseen results that are positive or negative?
- What have been the main challenges and obstacles? how were they overcome?
- Comparing the different pillars of the program – grassroots, institutional level and policy level, where do you think the program has made **most progress**? Are there areas that have been **less successful**? Why/why not?
- The progress reports indicate that:
  - o Although, majority of the beneficiaries are smallholder women farmers (45% of the total project beneficiaries), Georgia has a higher proportion of employment beneficiaries (38% of total benefited) compared to the other two countries. What explains this?
  - o Of the total trained across the 3 countries, only 38% reported income increase. Georgia has the highest number of women reporting benefit as of Dec 2023 (871 women) from income increase but the ratio of trained to benefit is highest for Armenia (42%), followed by Georgia (38%) and then Azerbaijan (35%). Does this mean that more people are joining the training but not necessarily getting grants or joining the SHGs?
  - o There is greater emphasis of working with the private sector in phase 2. What drove this shift and how do you think it is working?
- To what extent do you think the achievements or the lack of progress on policy/legislation and institutional levels has had influence at the grassroots level?
- In your view what are the top value additions or contribution of the program to the local community or grassroots level?
- Do you think the WEESC project played a role in strengthening the relationship between women and the local municipality level? How?
- Do you think the WEESC project played a role in strengthening the relationship between different stakeholders at the national level?
- Are there external factors, such as COVID-19 and the geopolitical situation in the region, that have impacted the project?
- If so, how has the project been able to respond and adapt to these challenges?

**Efficiency:**

- How has the WEESC project ensured that the resources (financial, human, technical support) are allocated among different implementing entities in a strategic manner?
- To what extent have the partnering agencies, been involved in project planning, implementation and monitoring?
- Does the project have effective monitoring mechanisms in place?
- How does the project management team use monitoring data in the decision-making process? Share examples.
- How efficiently has the project been able to manage resources on the ground (time and resource efficiency)?
- How has the project utilised its regional structure to ensure greater efficiency and regional synergy and learnings? Please share some examples.
- How successful has WEESC project been in sharing learnings with others?

**Sustainability:**

- What progress or achievements at the grassroots, local and national level, to date do you think will be sustained beyond the project interventions and how? If not, why?
- Which interventions or approaches do you think will not be sustained after the project ends? Why not?
- How does WEESC ensure ownership of activities promoted by the target group and stakeholders?
- Since this is the end of the second phase, are there certain approaches where the program has a phase out plan to ensure greater ownership?
- What changes do you envision for the next phase of the project?

**Closing Questions:**

- From your perspective, what are the main lessons learned from phase 2 of the WEESC project that has influenced phase 3 design?

## Key Informant Interview Guiding Questions

### National and Local Government

#### INTRODUCTION TO THE KII:

We are pleased to have this chance to follow up with you directly as we understand that you have been involved in the implementation of the WEESC project as one of the key partners. The evaluation team is interested in learning more about your role in the project and would also like to obtain your perspectives on some key topics that will help us shape our overall evaluation.

With your permission, we would like to do an audio recording of this interview that will be treated with confidentiality and used by the evaluation team for evaluation purposes only. Your anonymity will be protected so as to ensure candid responses to our questions.

#### Relevance:

- 2 How long have you been engaging with WEESC and what activities were you involved with?
- 3 How does the WEESC program activities align with your priorities or contribute to your organisation's objectives?
- 4 What need does gender responsive budgeting or gender responsive action plans address within your local context?
- 5 Do you think the project understands the country context, national structures and systems and is able to respond to the country needs/demands?

#### Coherence:

- 6 Are there are programs working towards women's economic development and gender-responsive budgeting? What are some of the other complementary programs?
- 7 To what extent is the project ensuring synergies and coordination with other programs and other key partners' relevant efforts while avoiding duplications?
- 8 In your opinion what is WEESC's key strength compared to other programs? (understand additionality)

#### Effectiveness:

- 9 Has the program helped you meet any local or national objectives? How?
- 10 Are there any specific areas where you think **good progress** has been made to date in the project? Are there areas that have been **less successful**?
- 11 In your views what are the top value additions or contribution of the program for your organisation? (let them answer and you can tick as applicable but you can also probe)
  - 11.1 Support in making legislative and regulatory reforms
  - 11.2 Evidence generation and data analysis

- 11.3 Support in institutional processes- e.g. capacity building of staff, having tools and processes in place to make regulatory amendments.
- 11.4 Coordination with other donors and private sector stakeholders
- 11.5 Help understand the need of women at the grassroots level.
- 11.6 Help conduct internal gap analysis.
- 11.7 Support in understanding and improving gender-responsive budgeting.
- 11.8 Create economic opportunities for women in the local level.
- 12 How are you doing things any differently as a result of WEESC engagement?
- 13 What has been the key change(s) in how you prioritise budgeting or allocation of resources to be more gender responsive? Share examples. (ask this question if not answered above)
- 14 What have been some of the key challenges (e.g. resistance from team members, etc.) and benefits of applying those changes and why?
- 15 What could be done to improve or make them more effective?
- 16 Were there any negative or unintended consequences as a result of the program?
- 17 In your view which departments and regions are doing better in terms of gender-responsive budgeting and women's economic empowerment and gender rights? Why or what factors make them different than others?
- 18 How has the project responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and other external issues?

**Efficiency:**

- 19 To what extent have you, as a partnering agency, been involved in project planning, implementation and monitoring?

**Sustainability:**

- 20 In your view, do you think the changes (e.g. process, budget, policy reforms, personnel/HR, priorities, etc.) you made as a result of the WEESC partnership can be continued in the long run? If not, why?
- 21 Which interventions or approaches do you think will not be sustained after the project ends? Why not?
- 22 Are there certain changes or practices that you tested in some regions or departments, you want to expand or replicate in others? How?

**Closing Questions:**

- 23 What has been the biggest challenge in engaging with the program from your perspective and why? (e.g. COVID-related? geo-political conflicts? identifying the poor women and most marginalized, ethnic groups, disabled, aged? lack of data disaggregated by diversity? What changes do you recommend for the next phase of the project to address challenges you have identified above?

## Key Informant Interview Guiding Questions NGOs and other Community Organisations

### INTRODUCTION TO THE KII:

We are pleased to have this chance to follow up with you directly as we understand that you have been involved in the implementation of the WEESC project as one of the key partners. The evaluation team is interested in learning more about your role in the project and would also like to obtain your perspectives on some key topics that will help us shape our overall evaluation.

With your permission, we would like to do an audio recording of this interview that will be treated with confidentiality and used by the evaluation team for evaluation purposes only. Your anonymity will be protected so as to ensure candid responses to our questions.

#### Relevance:

- How long have you been engaging with WEESC and what activities were you involved with?
- How does the WEESC program activities align with your organisation's priorities?
- Do you think the project understands the country context, national structures and systems and is able to respond to the country needs/demands, particularly in relation to gender outcomes?

#### Coherence:

- Are there other programs working towards women's economic development and gender-responsive budgeting where you are operating? What are some of the other complementary programs?
- To what extent is the WEESC project ensuring synergies and coordination with other programs and other key partners' relevant efforts while avoiding duplications?
- In your opinion what is WEESC's key strength compared to other programs? (understand additionality)

#### Effectiveness:

- In your view has the program helped meet or contribute to the local or national objectives, particularly towards achieving gender outcomes? How?
- Are there any specific areas where you think **good progress** has been made to date in the project? Are there areas that have been **less successful**? Please answer in relation to:
  - Grassroots level
  - Local municipality level
  - National level

- In your view what are the top value additions or contribution of the program to the local community or grassroots level? (let them answer and you can tick as applicable but you can also probe)
  - o Support in making legislative and regulatory reforms
  - o Evidence generation and data analysis
  - o Support in institutional processes- e.g. capacity building of staff, having tools and processes in place to make regulatory amendments to be more gender responsive
  - o Coordination with other donors and private sector stakeholders
  - o Help understand the need of women at the grassroots level.
  - o Help conduct internal gap analysis.
  - o Support in understanding and improving gender-responsive budgeting.
  - o Create economic opportunities for women in the local level.
- Do you think the WEESC project played a role in strengthening the relationship between women and the local municipality level? How?
- Were there any negative or unintended consequences as a result of the program?
- How has the project responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and other external issues?

**Efficiency:**

- To what extent have you, as a partnering agency, been involved in project planning, implementation and monitoring? Please share examples.
- How responsive has the WEESC project been in responding to any critical issues in the field? Could you share some examples?
- How efficiently has the project been able to manage resources on the ground (time and resource efficiency)?
- What is your opinion of their monitoring system?
- How successful has WEESC project been in sharing learnings with others?

**Sustainability:**

- In your view, do you think the changes that WEESC project helped introduce or facilitated at the grassroots and local municipality level will sustain in the long run without project support? If not, why?
- Which interventions or approaches do you think will not be sustained after the project ends? Why not?

**Closing Questions:**

- What has been the biggest **challenge** in engaging with the program from your perspective and why? (e.g. COVID-related? geo-political conflicts? identifying the poor women and most marginalized, ethnic groups, disabled, aged? lack of data disaggregated by diversity? etc.)
- What changes do you recommend for the next phase of the project to address challenges you have identified above?

### **Key Informant Interview Guiding Questions**

#### **Private Sector**

We are pleased to have this chance to follow up with you directly as we understand that you have been involved in the implementation of the WEESC project as one of the key partners. The evaluation team is interested in learning more about your role in the project and would also like to obtain your perspectives on some key topics that will help us shape our overall evaluation.

With your permission, we would like to do an audio recording of this interview that will be treated with confidentiality and used by the evaluation team for evaluation purposes only. Your anonymity will be protected so as to ensure candid responses to our questions.

#### **Relevance:**

3. How long have you been engaging with WEESC and what activities were you involved with?
4. What motivated you to be involved with the WEESC project? How does the program activities align with your organisational objectives or values?
5. Do you think the project understands the country context particularly in relation to the private sector and the policy environment?

#### **Coherence:**

6. Are there are programs working with you or the private sector on women's economic empowerment?
7. To what extent is the project ensuring synergies and coordination with other programs and other key partners' relevant efforts while avoiding duplications?
8. In your opinion what is WEESC's key strength compared to other programs? (understand additionality)

#### **Effectiveness:**

9. What are some of the benefits and challenges of employing and retaining women in your organisation? (*Note: skip this question if already responded in the previous one*)
10. Has the WEESC program been able to support you in addressing those challenges? How?

11. In your views what are the top value additions or contribution of the program for your organisation? (let them answer and you can tick as applicable but you can also probe)

11.1. Advocacy and building relationship with the government.

11.2. Understand WEE and the best practices to apply women's empowerment principles.

11.3. Support in institutional processes- e.g. capacity building of staff, having tools and processes in place to meet compliance.

11.4. Help understand the need of female employees.

11.5. Build a brand value

11.6. Introduce practices that help address female turnover and recruitment challenges.

12. In your view what are the key advantages and disadvantages of being a WEP signatory?

13. Are there any specific areas where you think **good progress** has been made to date as a result of the project engagement? Are there areas that have been **less successful**? How?

**If they applied WEP practices:**

14. What changes or WEP principles or learnings have you been able to apply or are intending to apply in your organisation as a result of your engagement with the project? Please share examples.

15. Why and how are they useful for the organisation (*Note: this is to understand the economic and social benefits to the organisation as a result of improved work-place practices*)

16. What have been some of the key challenges (e.g. resistance from team members, etc.) and benefits of applying those changes and why?

17. Were there any negative or unintended consequences as a result of the program?

**If they haven't applied WEP practices:**

18. Are there any specific WEP principles that you are planning to apply?

19. Are there any specific challenges that are limiting you from applying some of these practices (note: try and understand what the constraints to application are- resources, willingness, etc.)

**Sustainability:**

20. In your view, do you think the changes you made in your organisation as a result of the WEESC partnership can be maintained or continued in the long run? If not, why?

21. Which approaches do you think will not be sustained? Why not?

22. How practical or realistic is it for these changes to be adopted by other organisations or businesses in your sector? Why? (*Note: Understand the challenges that could limit the scale up or replication of these activities to other organisations/businesses*).

23. Have you had the opportunity to share these best practices with others? Do you know of other businesses who have implemented similar changes?
24. Since this is a regional program, have you had the opportunity to take advantage of its regional network? How?
25. What else can be done to improve workplace practices to empower women and enhance their opportunities for decision-making?

**Closing Questions:**

26. What has been the biggest **challenge** in engaging with the program from your perspective and why? (e.g. COVID-related? geo-political conflicts? identifying the poor women and most marginalized, ethnic groups, disabled, aged? lack of data disaggregated by diversity? etc.)
27. What changes do you recommend for the next phase of the project to address challenges you have identified above?

## Focus Group Discussion Guide

### INTRODUCTION FOR ALL FGDs:

We are pleased to have this chance to speak with you as we understand that you have been directly involved in the project activities (i.e trainings, networking, grant recipients and job opportunities). The evaluation team is interested in learning more about your experiences during and after the WEESC project activities. Your insights will be used to help us evaluate Phase 2 of the project and influence design and decisions related to a Phase 3.

**If FGD is conducted in-person:** We will plan to conduct this discussion over a 1.5-hour time slot and as you can see from our (...Zoom/Google Hangouts/Skype...) call, there are (X..) number of participants in this group and we would like to thank ..Name of Relevant Implementing Partner...) for helping us organize this session.

**If FGD is conducted on Zoom:** We will plan to conduct this discussion over a 1.5-hour time slot and as you can see from our (...Zoom/Google Hangouts/Skype...) call, there are (X..) number of participants in this group and we would like to thank ..Name of Relevant Implementing Partner...) for helping us organize this session.

### Notes

1. Explain Zoom housekeeping rules. Not to open mic without raising hand. Speaking one at a time, ensure that everyone has an opportunity to give their views; respecting the opinions of others – everyone's views are valid although you might not agree with them; there are no right or wrong answers – we just want to know what you think and notes will be taken but everything that is said will be kept **confidential** – no names will be put against comments.
2. With your permission, we would like to do an audio recording of this confidential discussion that will be used for the evaluation team for evaluation purposes only. Your anonymity will be protected so as to ensure candid responses to our questions. Are you comfortable with that?

To start off, it might be useful to ask the participants:

1. Do you have any questions before we begin?
2. Do I have your consent to make reference to your country and region if any quotes are used in the report, bearing in mind our commitment to anonymity?

**TOOL A1: FGD Questions for SELF-EMPLOYED WOMEN** who have received training and invested or improved their business and/or agricultural farms

**Objective for this group:** here we intend to understand how they have used the training skills and knowledge and how their involvement with the SHG and WRC have helped them obtain grants for a business/farm.

### **GENERAL QUESTIONS:**

- 1.1 Where and from whom did you first hear about the WEESC project? (Note: in some cases they may not be aware of WEESC but more familiar with the partner NGOs. In that case focus on the activities)
- 1.2 What project activities were you involved with (that is, your engagement with the project or training)?
- 1.3 How did you decide which activities to take part in? (Key motivation)
- 1.4 How long have you been involved with the Self-Help Groups (SGH) and/or Women's Resource Center (in case of Azerbaijan)?

### **ENGAGEMENT WITH SGH AND/OR WRC**

- a. In your view, what has been the biggest advantage of joining the SGH and/or WRC? (first ask as an open ended question and then ask which of the following have been most valuable to them- in order of preference)
  1. Capacity building training and information
  2. Access to finance
  3. Access to jobs
  4. Access to networks
  5. Knowledge of gender-based budgeting and/or women's economic empowerment
- 1.5 What barriers were you able to overcome as a result of your engagement with the SGH and/or WRC (e.g. training, networks, skills, market, finance, etc.)? (ignore this question if covered under 1.5)
- 1.6 What are some of the challenges of being involved with the SGH and/or WRC?

### **ACCESS TO TRAINING, INFORMATION AND UTILIZATION OF NEW SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE:**

- 1.7 What key skills and knowledge have you gained from the WEESC project training(s) or other events attended, that you have found most useful to you and why? Please share in order of topmost importance/usefulness to least useful. E.g. Business management, business plan development, financial planning and budgeting, tax management, marketing, Food safety, etc.
- 1.8 Which of those skills/knowledge have you been able to use in practice in order to: (a) secure a self-employment opportunity (business or farm); and (b) continue to improve your skills in your existing business (self-employment- business or farm), and why?
- 1.9 If you have not been able to use/apply, then what do you think limits you from using these skills/information?
- 1.10 Are you doing things any differently after the training? If so, how? (Note: ask general reasons, then also WEESC activities.
- 1.11 Are you aware of the climate change risks on your business and/or farm? If yes, how did you learn about this topic?
- 1.12 What kind of skills and/or knowledge do you think the project has NOT been able to address, and why?

### **ACCESS TO SERVICES:**

- 1.13 What other services are you able to access since your engagement with the WRC or after attending the training, that was not available to you before? (this is to probe and understand their

access to local financial services, funding, information services, information on loan facility, networks etc.)

1.14 Has your access to economic opportunities changed as a result of the project? If yes, how? If not, why not?

1.15 What are you doing differently in terms of finding and securing self-employment opportunities?

**ALTERNATIVES AVAILABLE (COUNTERFACTUAL):**

1.16 What alternative activities would you be involved with in the absence of the skills or self-employment activity (agri or non-ag) that you have gained through the support of the program?

1.17 What are the alternative sources of finance for setting up and expanding your business or farm?

1.18 What are other alternative sources of accessing training or building skills for improving your chances of setting up and or improving your business (in the absence of such a project)? (Note: optional question)

**INCOME GAINS, PERCEPTIONS AND DECISION-MAKING AND CONTROL:**

1.19 What are the general perceptions about women's engagement in economic activities (farm/non-farm), earn and manage money and make economic decisions in the household and community?

1.20 Have these perceptions changed? Why or why not? (*probe to see if the WEESC program has any influence on it*).

1.21 Did you experience an income gain as a result of your engagement with the activity through WEESC? If not, why?

1.22 If yes, for what key purposes are you able to use the income earned from your self-employment activity? Can you use it as you think is appropriate or it requires discussion with other household members?

1.23 Have there been any perceived and/or actual changes in your sense of self-confidence and self-esteem since being involved in the project? In what way(s) and why?

1.24 Do you experience any change in perception of your household members and community members as a result of your engagement in economic activities? How?

***If the FGD includes women who participated in gender-responsive budgeting training:***

1.25 Have you received any training on women's economic empowerment (WEE) and your ability to influence the local government to improve services for women in the community (note: this is related to gender-based budgeting)?

1.26 Do you think it has helped in anyway or you have been able to apply those WEE and GRB skills/awareness at home or within the community? Please share examples of how it has helped.

**SUSTAINABILITY AND KEY CHANGE**

1.27 Now that you have received the grant and used it for your businesses/farm purposes, do you plan to continue the business or expand? How?

1.28 What will be your source of finance to continue in investing in your business/farm?

1.29 Has the project helped you gain skills, networks and services that you think will be beneficial to you or enable you in the long term to continue your business/farm? Please share examples.

1.30 What do you see as the most significant changes/benefits of the project to your community? (*note: ignore if already answered*)

1.31 Have there been any negative consequences as a result of the project, and if so, what are they?

1.32 How should UN Women/UNDP/donors involve your community in planning these activities? (optional question)

**RISKS AND RECOVERY:**

- 1.33 In your opinion, how effective was the project in reaching out to you during the COVID-19 pandemic? Which method/activity did you find especially effective for you during this period? Were there any new economic opportunities arising out of the pandemic?
- 1.34 Has your community seen an increase in domestic violence since the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 1.35 What supports are there for women and their children in your community to protect against those risks? (optional question)

**CLOSING QUESTIONS:**

- 1.1. Finally, thinking about the WEESC project and your involvement, are there specific ways that you feel like the project could be more useful to you (or assist you in wage employment, self-employment, or accessing decision-making positions within your community)?
- 1.2. Are there any specific recommendations or relevant issues we haven't raised here that you think we should know about?

**FINAL REMARKS:**

Many thanks for your time and feedback!

Explain how participants can contact us if they have any more questions or feedback.

**(OPTIONAL) RESPONDENT DATA:** (for disaggregated data /GBA+ analysis): **gender** (female/male/non-binary), **age** group (20 to 39; 40 to 59; 60 or over), **ethnicity/race/national origin** (majority/minority), **(dis)ability** group (able-bodied/physical handicap), **spirituality/religious affiliation** (majority/minority)?

## Annex VI – List of Documents Reviewed

### Key documents WEESC-II

- a. WEESC-II External Final Evaluation Terms of Reference
- b. UN Evaluation Group's Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation
- c. First Progress Report WEESC-II – V2
- d. Second Progress Report WEESC-II
- e. Third Progress Report WEESC-II
- f. Fourth Progress Report WEESC-II 26.07.23
- g. WEE Beneficiary Data – Georgia
- h. Stakeholder Analysis WEESC-II
- i. WE Women Have Power
- j. WEESC Inception Report Final Version January 2020
- k. WEESC Final Evaluation Report 2021

### UN Treaty Documents

Country Reports for CEDAW, CERD, CESCR, CCPR, CRPD, CMW, Special Rapporteurs on Violence Against Women for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia

### Strategic Frameworks and Work Plans

- a. *UN Women Strategic Note 2021-2025*, UN Women Georgia Country Office
- b. *United Nations-Azerbaijan Partnership Framework, 2021-2025*
- c. *Armenia-United Nations Development Assistance Framework, 2021-2025*
- d. *United Nations Partnership for Sustainable Development (Framework Document), Georgia, 2021-2025*
- Swiss Cooperation Strategy: South Caucasus

### National Policies, Laws and Regulations

- a. Armenia Country Strategic Plan (2019–2024),
- b. Decent Work Country Program (2019-2023)
- c. Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Armenia 2021-2025
- d. Azerbaijan's National Gender Policy,
- e. State Program on the Development of Official Statistics,
- f. Azerbaijan 2020: Vision for the Future and Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-economic Development Strategy,
- g. State Programme for the Socioeconomic Development of the Regions of Azerbaijan (2019)
- h. Order No. 602 (2018) on the employment strategy for 2019–2030
- i. Azerbaijan's commitments to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 5, and 8.
- j. Georgia's Human Rights Strategy 2021-2030
- k. National Human Rights Action Plan 2018-2020
- l. National Strategy 2019-2023 for Labour and Employment Policy of Georgia

- m. Action Plan 2019-2021 of the National Strategy for Labour and Employment Policy
- n. National Strategy for the Development of Official Statistics of Georgia 2020-2023
- o. National Strategy for the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises in Georgia 2021-2025

## Annex VII – List of Stakeholders Interviewed

Total across 3 countries			# of organisations
Total # of KIIs Planned			65
Total # of FGDs Planned			22
<b>Total KIIs completed</b>			<b>60</b>
<b>Total FGDs completed</b>			<b>22</b>

Armenia			# of organisations
Total # of KIIs			23
<i>Total KIIs completed</i>			23
Total # of FGDs			4
<i>Total FGDs completed</i>			4
			# of organisations
<b>Donors, Program officers</b>	Designation		<b>4</b>
UNDP	UNDP program officers managing WEESC	Completed	1
SDC	Program Manager	Completed	1
Armenia General Benevolent Union	1. Women Entrepreneurs (WE) Program Manager 2. Business Development Advisor	Completed	1
UNWomen	UNWomen representative in Armenia	Completed	1
<b>National Government</b>			<b>6</b>
Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure of Armenia	Head of LSG Department of MTAI	Completed	1
National Statistics Office Armenia (ARMSTAT)	Head of Labour Statistics Division and other representatives	Completed	1
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Armenia (MLSA)	Head of Department of human trafficking and women's issues	Completed	1

Health and Labour Inspection Body	Head of Department of Information, Consultation and Public Relations	Completed	1
Caucasus Regional Research Center (CRRC-Armenia)	Representative from HRRC	Completed	1
Human Rights Research Center (HRRC)	Representative from HRRC	Completed	1
<b>Local Government</b>			<b>2</b>
Martuni Community (Gegharkunik municipality)	Head of Development projects Department	Completed	1
Ani Community	Head of Development projects Department	Completed	1
Akhuriya Community (Akhuryan Municipality of the Shirak Province)		Not available	0
Artik Community in Shirak Province		Not available	0
Governor's Office in Gegharkunik municipality		Not available/Not responsive	0
<b>Private sector partners</b>			<b>6</b>
Armenia Marriott Hotel	Director of Human Resources	Completed	1
Green Rock	Director of People and Culture	Completed	1
ACBA Bank	1. Head of Customer Experience Analysing Division 2. Human Resources Manager	Completed	1
ContourGlobal Hydro Cascade	Human Resources Manager	Completed	1
Holiday Inn	Human Resources Director	Completed	1
Armenia Securities Exchange (AMX)	Head of HR and organizational development department	Completed	1
McCan, PwC Armenia, Fast Bank, Vansevan, Aregak UCO		Reached out but not available	0
<b>Non Government Organisations</b>			<b>3</b>
World Vision Armenia	Sub-Grant Manager	Completed	1
Armenia General Benevolent Union	Project manager and coordinator	Completed	1

Green Lane	President of Green Lane NGO	Completed	1
Communities Association of Armenia (CAA)		Not available	0
<b>Think Tanks/Research Centers</b>			<b>2</b>
Human Rights Research Centre	President of HRRC	Completed	1
Caucasus Regional Research Centre	1. Research Director 2. Program Manager for Qualitative Research	Completed	1
<b>Focused Group Discussions</b>			<b>4</b>
<i>Shirak Region</i>			
1 combined FGD covering: (a) Those who have been trained, received grants and are economically active in agri and/or non-ag entrepreneurial activities or have secured employment or placements. (b) Those who have been trained but have not received grants	6 participants	Completed	1
(c) Those who have been trained but have not received grants	5 participants	Completed	1
<i>Geghakunik region</i>			
1 combined FGD covering: (a) Those who have been trained, received grants and are economically active in agri and/or non-ag entrepreneurial activities or have secured employment or placements. (b) Those who have been trained but have not received grants	6 participants	Completed	1
(c) Those who have been trained but have not received grants	3 participants	Completed	1

Azerbaijan			# of organisations
Total # of KIIs			<b>20</b>
<i>Total KIIs completed</i>			<b>17</b>
Total # of FGDs			<b>12</b>
<i>Total FGDs completed</i>			<b>12</b>

<b>Donors, Program officers</b>			<b>4</b>
UNDP- all officers involved with WEESC	UNDP program officers managing WEESC	Completed	1
SDC	Deputy of ambassador	Completed	1
UN Resident Coordinators and UNCTs	UN Resident Representative	Completed	1
GIZ	Advisors	Completed	1
<b>National Government</b>			<b>0</b>
State Committee for Family, Women, and Children Affairs (SCFWCA)		Denied	0
<b>Local Government</b>			<b>4</b>
Executive Committee of Fuzuli	Deputy of chair	Completed	1
Executive Committee of Gusar	Deputy of chair	Completed	1
Executive Committee of Khazar	Deputy of chair	Completed	1
Executive Committee of Sabirabad	Deputy of chair	Completed	1
<b>Women Resource Centre</b>			<b>4</b>
WRC Fuzuli: staff and coordinator	Coordinator	Completed	1
WRC Gusar: staff and coordinator	Coordinator	Completed	1
WRC Khazar: staff and coordinator	Coordinator	Completed	1
WRC Sabirabad: staff and coordinator	Coordinator	Completed	1
<b>Private sector partners</b>			<b>7</b>
Access Bank	Human Resources Manager	Completed	1
Holcim Azerbaijan	Communication & Sustainable Development manager (also the Chair of the Sustainable Development Committee, for American Chamber of Commerce)	Completed	1
Azerconnect	Head of Employee Transformation and Programs	Completed	1
Tufandag Qis-yay istirahet kompleksi MMC (mountain resort) Gabala Atcilig MMC (shooting club) Qafqaz Qabala MMC (hotels network) Gabaland MMC (amusement park)	Group Marketing Director	Completed	4

Baku Stock Exchange on the 'Ring the Bell for Gender Equality' event		No response	0
Veyseloglu		No response	0
PMD Group		No response	0
<b>Non Government Organisations</b>			<b>1</b>
Azerbaijan Mirco-finance Association (AMFA)	Executive Director	Completed	1
<b>Think Tanks/Research Centers</b>			<b>NA</b>
<b>Focused Group Discussions</b>			<b>12</b>
<i>Sabirabad</i>			
(a) Those who have been trained, received grants and are economically active in agri and/or non-ag entrepreneurial activities	6 participants	Completed	1
(b) Those who have been trained and have secured employment or placements	8 participants	Completed	1
(c) Those who have been trained but have not received grants	7 participants	Completed	1
<i>Fuzuli</i>			
(a) Those who have been trained, received grants and are economically active in agri and/or non-ag entrepreneurial activities	5 participants	Completed	1
(b) Those who have been trained and have secured employment or placements	8 participants	Completed	1
(c) Those who have been trained but have not received grants	5 participants	Completed	1
<i>Khazar</i>			
(a) Those who have been trained, received grants and are economically active in agri and/or non-ag entrepreneurial activities	7 participants	Completed	1
(b) Those who have been trained and have secured employment or placements	7 participants	Completed	1
(c) Those who have been trained but have not received grants	3 participants	Completed	1
<i>Gusar</i>			
(a) Those who have been trained, received grants and are economically active in agri and/or non-ag entrepreneurial activities	10 participants	Completed	1

(b) Those who have been trained and have secured employment or placements	9 participants	Completed	1
(c) Those who have been trained but have not received grants	9 participants	Completed	1

Georgia		# of organisations
Total # of KIIs		22
<i>Total KIIs completed</i>		20
Total # of FGDs		6
<i>Total FGDs completed</i>		6
# of organisations		
Donors, Program Officers		3
UNWomen	1. UNWomen Country Representative 2. UNWomen Deputy Country Representative 3. WEESC Program Analyst 4. WEESC Program Monitoring Analyst	Completed 1
Swiss Development Corporation (SDC)	1. Head of Program, Georgia 2. National Program Officer	Completed 1
Austrian Development Agency (ADA)	1. Head of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) Georgia 2. Program Manager	Completed 1
National Government		9
Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia (GEC)	Member of the Parliament, Georgia (Chair of Gender Council)	Completed 1
National Statistics Office of Georgia (GEOSTAT)	Deputy Executive Director	Completed 1
Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development (MoESD)	Head of Economic Policy Department	Completed 1

Rural Development Agency (RDA)	1. Deputy Executive Director 2. Chief Specialist Project Support and Donor Relations Division, Project Development Department 3. Member of the unit	Completed	1
Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health, and Social Affairs of Georgia (MoIDPOTLHSA)	Head of Department of Social Protection	Completed	1
Labour Conditions Inspecting Department (LCID) – Labour Inspectorate - under MoIDPOTLHSA	International Affairs Specialist	Completed	1
Employment Support Agency - under MoIDPOTLHSA	1. Head of the Agency 2. Head of International Relations & Donor Coordination Division 3. Member of the unit	Completed	1
The State Laboratory of Agriculture	1. Deputy Director 2. Human Resources Manager	Completed	1
Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA)	1. Deputy Minister	Completed	1
<b>Local Government</b>			<b>2</b>
Akhmeta Municipality, Kakheti	1. Deputy Mayor 2. Head of Women's Room 3. Head of Finance Department 4. 3 other representatives of the office	Completed	1
One municipality from Kvemo Kartli	1. Deputy Mayor and representative of the finance department, GFP	Completed	1
One Municipality from Samtskhe Javakheti	1. Deputy Mayor and representative of the finance department, GFP	Denied	0
<b>Private sector partners</b>			<b>4</b>

UNWomen team on the Norwegian Dev agency partnership supporting the private sector initiative on WEP	Project Analyst, Women's Economic Empowerment Team	Completed	1
Georgian Chamber of Commerce (GCCI)	Director of Business Development Department	Completed	1
TBC (Tibisi Bank)	1. Environmental, Social and Governance Coordinator 2. Head of Customer Experience	Completed	1
MBC Bank	Corporate Responsibility and Communications Manager	Completed	1
<b>Non Government Organisations</b>			<b>2</b>
Kakheti Regional Development Foundation (KRDF)	1. Project Manager 2. Deputy Director 3. Finance Director	Completed	1
TASO Foundation	1. Program Manager 2. GRB Expert	Completed	1
<b>Focused Group Discussions</b>			<b>6</b>
<i>Akhmeta Municipality, Kakheti region</i>			
(a) Those who have been trained, received grants and are economically active in agri and/or non-ag entrepreneurial activities or have secured employment or placements.	8 participants	Completed	1
<i>Telavi Municipality, Kakheti region</i>			
(b) Those who have been trained but have not received grants	5 participants	Completed	1
<i>Akhalkalaki Municipality, Samtskhe Javakheti region</i>			
(a) Those who have been trained, received grants and are economically active in agri and/or non-ag entrepreneurial activities or have secured employment or placements.	5 participants	Completed	1
<i>Akhalkalaki Municipality, Samtskhe Javakheti region</i>			
(b) Those who have been trained but have not received grants	11 participants	Completed	1

<i>Kazbegi Municipality, Mtskheta Mtianeti region</i>			
(a) Those who have been trained, received grants and are economically active in agri and/or non-ag entrepreneurial activities or have secured employment or placements.	6 participants	Completed	1
<i>Dusheti Municipality, Mtskheta Mtianeti region</i>			
(a) Those who have been trained, received grants and are economically active in agri and/or non-ag entrepreneurial activities or have secured employment or placements.	3 participants	Completed	1

## Annex VIII – Technical

This annex provides additional data to address the comments and questions from stakeholders to Version one of the Draft Evaluation Report. The information is placed in the annex as it is too voluminous to place in the body of the report and still meet the GERAAS size requirements. It is structured to follow the evaluation criteria and the Finding within each.

### Relevance

**Finding 1** - WEESC-II's interventions align closely with international, regional, and national agreements and conventions on gender equality and women's empowerment, including CEDAW and the relevant (SDGs).

During Phase I (August 2018 – July 2021), the three-part strategy and the execution of the WEE agenda in the South Caucasus acted as a driving force across various levels, aiding both governmental and non-governmental partners in advancing significant gender equality goals in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. In line with international and national commitments, on the levels of policies and legislation, institutions, and grass roots, the project has been working towards transformative results for increased gender equality and greater protection of the rights of women and girls.

In Phase II (August 2021- July 2024) the program continued to pursue the same goal but with an aim to further increase economic security and improve access to livelihood and development opportunities for women, particularly the poorest and vulnerable population. The project is guided by relevant international commitments to women's empowerment and is directly linked to the existing agreements between the UN system and the Governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, thereby improving each country's international human rights commitments under CEDAW and other legal instruments, particularly those related to equitable economic development. The project contributes to national priorities and various national plans that underline the importance of gender mainstreaming in development.

**Finding 2:** The objectives of the WEESC-II interventions in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are highly consistent with the national gender equality policies, strategic priorities, and sector strategies of each partner country.

The WEESC-II intervention in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia is closely aligned with each country's national gender equality policies and strategic priorities. In Armenia, it supports initiatives like the Armenia Country Strategic Plan and Decent Work Country Program, reflecting international human rights recommendations and focusing on enhancing women's employment opportunities. Azerbaijan's WEESC-II aligns with national gender policies and socio-economic development strategies, emphasizing grassroots engagement and inclusive employment measures. In Georgia, the project contributes to key national strategies for human rights, labour policy, and SME development, supporting the country's European integration goals and sustainable development agenda. Overall, WEESC-II effectively supports gender equality and

women's empowerment priorities through strategic partnerships and targeted interventions across the region

Triangulated evidence from the document review and KII<sup>s</sup> indicate that WEESC-II is well aligned with national gender equality policies of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Although this is a regional program, it is well contextualised and aligned with the needs of the individual countries.

In Armenia the project is in accordance with recommendations from international human rights mechanisms, particularly the Universal Periodic Review, which provides the most recent and pertinent recommendations. It also aligns with the latest initiatives of the Government of Armenia aimed at enhancing employment opportunities for women and vulnerable groups, such as the Armenia Country Strategic Plan (2019–2024) and the "Work, Armenia!" initiative. These efforts involve collaborative endeavors across ministries, government bodies, educational institutions, and employers to bolster employment promotion. Additionally, the project is in line with the Republic of Armenia's new Decent Work Country Program (2019–2023). Furthermore, the recent report from the CEDAW Committee highlighted specific areas of action for the Government of Armenia related to women's employment, economic empowerment, and participation in political and public spheres—key objectives of WEESC-II. Moreover, the project's framework is informed by the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Armenia 2021-2025, which prioritizes gender equality and women's empowerment to strengthen governance, civil society, and the social contract within Armenia.

In Azerbaijan, WEESC-II's objective and structure are closely aligned with the priorities and primary areas of focus of both local government bodies and the national government, specifically the State Committee for Family, Women, and Children Affairs. The project places significant emphasis on grassroots-level engagement, reflecting the Committee's belief that community-based work with families is essential for driving social change towards gender equality. Moreover, the project aligns well with Azerbaijan's National Gender Policy, the State Program on the Development of Official Statistics, the strategic documents "Azerbaijan 2020: Vision for the Future" and "Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-economic Development Strategy", which emphasize gender equality through capacity-building, promoting self-employment among rural women, and improvement in women's access to economic opportunities. A key aspect of Azerbaijan's national development strategy is maximizing the potential of women in the workforce to fuel private sector growth.

WEESC-II's framework is also influenced by the UN-Azerbaijan Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2021-2025, which outlines key steps for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 5, and 8 and is consistent with Phase II activities of the project. Additionally, recent concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Azerbaijan<sup>53</sup> by the

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<sup>53</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Azerbaijan. UN, July 2022

CEDAW Committee highlight positive areas of development in Azerbaijan in relation to addressing WEE, employment, political and public participation, and gender equality in rural regions which are well aligned with the work areas of the project. This includes but not limited to, remarks in relation to Decree No. 500 on the State Programme for the Socioeconomic Development of the Regions of Azerbaijan, containing specific measures to improve the development of women-owned small businesses and the enhancement of vocational training, in 2019 and Order No. 602 on the employment strategy for 2019–2030 to promote inclusive employment and reduce unemployment among women, in 2018.

In Georgia, the project not only aligns with but also contributes to the effective implementation of several strategic documents that support GEWE. These include the Human Rights Strategy 2022-2030 (which was approved by the Parliament of Georgia), the National Human Rights Action Plan 2018-2020, the National Strategy 2019-2023 for Labour and Employment Policy of Georgia, the Action Plan 2019-2021 of the National Strategy for Labour and Employment Policy, the National Strategy for the Development of Official Statistics of Georgia 2020-2023, and the National Strategy for the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises in Georgia 2021-2025. Additionally, the WEESC project aligns with Georgia's European integration agenda and the Association Agreement. The project's framework is influenced by the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2021-2025), which is guided by principles such as Leaving No One Behind, a human rights-based approach, and a focus on GEWE. Moreover, in Georgia's context, upcoming priorities include environmental protection, innovation, and decentralization efforts.

During the KIIs, the national government stakeholders, including the Chair of the Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia and Member of Parliament, emphasised the strategic relevance of the WEESC-II programme with the national priorities. The Georgian government has prioritized WEE within its economic policies, implementing new tools and strategies to enhance women's participation in the economy. This focus is integrated into various state strategies, including the SME Development Strategy 2021-2025 and is strongly aligned with the work that the WEESC project has contributed to over phases one and two. Stakeholders confirmed that the collaboration with UN Women has been extensive, covering areas such as gender impact assessment, training, and other capacity building. The Chair highlighted although there are limitations on mandate and strategic goals, the government remains aligned with UN Women's general principles and operates effectively, in part, due to UN Women's expertise and support. Overall, the collaboration has been instrumental in addressing gender equality issues and driving reforms in areas like labour codes and sexual harassment policies.

In addition, the KIIs and the ProDoc indicated strong alignment of the project design with interests and priorities of the Swiss Development Corporation (SDC) and Austrian Development Agency (ADA). The project documentation aligns with the strategic goals outlined in Switzerland's International Cooperation Strategy (2021-2024), focusing on sustainable economic growth, market development, and job creation (economic development). Additionally, it reflects Switzerland's Cooperation Strategy for the South Caucasus (2017-2021), emphasizing the

enhancement of gender equality, women's and girls' rights, and inclusive economic growth through improved job quality and quantity, and favorable economic conditions. Specifically, the project outcomes directly contribute to achieving the first sub-objective of the International Cooperation Strategy, which involves enhancing market access conditions and economic opportunities by empowering women and enabling their influence in economic decision-making processes. Furthermore, the project supports the second sub-objective by collaborating with private enterprises on initiatives such as the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) to promote innovative approaches in creating decent job opportunities. The project's relevance to SDC's priorities was further echoed during the KII where SDC confirmed that the programme sits well within the Governance, Climate Change and Environment Unit.

The Project Documentation also aligns with the strategic objectives of ADA and its primary aim of enhancing the livelihoods of rural communities, particularly women, youth, and vulnerable groups, in the South Caucasus region with a focus on Georgia and Armenia. This involves promoting agricultural practices in collaboration with Armenia and supporting Georgia's national economic development and democratization endeavors. Within ADA's Strategic Goal 1, the project contributes to various outcomes, including enhancing local value addition by ensuring equal access to resources, knowledge, innovations, and markets for farms, agribusinesses, and SMEs in Armenia (Outcome 1.1). In Georgia, it focuses on increasing employment opportunities, improving knowledge, skills, and competencies, especially for women, youth, skilled workers, and inclusive market systems in rural areas (Outcome 1.3). Additionally, the project supports Outcome 2.2 by empowering civil society to participate in transparent and gender-responsive budgeting and decision-making processes, thereby ensuring accountability among local institutions in Georgia.

The Three-Year Programme on Austrian Development Policy (2019–2021) underscores the importance of building inclusive societies and advancing women's empowerment as key priorities in improving living standards and creating new opportunities for people in developing nations. During the Evaluation Team's meeting with ADA, they shared their appreciation of the comprehensive and cross-cutting nature of the programme where they work with different key stakeholders at the policy and institutional level, grassroots level and with the private sector and that the focus on empowering vulnerable groups is strongly relevant to the priorities of ADA.

**Finding 3:** WEESC-II's design matches very well with the complexity of national structures, systems and decision-making processes?

At the national and local government level, WEESC-II capitalized on UN Women's expertise in engaging with government entities at various levels and considered local and national structures in its project design. The project also demonstrated a keen awareness of the geopolitical complexities in the South Caucasus region and adjusted as necessary to address both project requirements and immediate challenges. Activities related to addressing the Gender Pay Gap, revising the Labour code, and conducting Gender Audits and Assessments were particularly pertinent given the significant wage disparities and low female participation in the workforce

across the three countries. The work with local municipalities and grassroots on GRB was highly appreciated as it helped generate field evidence of how policy directions can have influence at the local level.

At the private sector level, engaging with the private sector was deemed essential for the project's objective of connecting women with economic growth prospects. Private enterprises were regarded as key advocates and agents of transformation to enhance the integration and retention of women in the workforce, and WEESC-II collaborated with several other donor projects and similar programmes at this level. The objective was to showcase to other companies how engagement with the private sector could lead to positive changes in workplace policies and practices. To foster this demonstration effect from the outset, the project encouraged exchanges and collaborations among companies across the three countries. Project initiatives in this area focused on developing more inclusive organizational policies within the private sector, particularly those benefiting women. The private sector expressed deep appreciation and willingness to continue working with UN Women.

**Finding 6:** WEESC-II's objective is consistent with the demands and the needs of the target groups, however better economic analysis would have strengthened the objective.

The project design was very relevant to the needs and vulnerabilities of the women at the grassroots level. All beneficiaries from FGDs confirmed the relevancy of the trainings and further commented that the trainings adequately reflected their needs. For example, in particular regions of Georgia where the Georgian language is not fully understood by certain ethnic groups, the beneficiaries have been offered language trainings. Most of the Phase I beneficiaries who could not engage directly (without interpretation) during FGDs were fluently expressing themselves during the Phase II evaluation, in Georgian. However, the success of implementation has varied across different countries. More is detailed in the effectiveness section. Some women mentioned that it would be useful to have refresher courses; some highlighted the need to have more in-depth courses while others mentioned that a shorter course is more useful given their responsibilities, but with frequent follow-up sessions. Therefore, it is important to take into account women's preference and relevant gaps of women in relation to the nature of the economic activity when designing the training programs.

The project uses several criteria at the onboarding or inception stage to assess vulnerability of women in relation to their economic and social conditions, location and ethnicity, disability and exposure to domestic violence. From the FGDs the participants had at least one form of vulnerability, however, the outcome or success of their ability to use the financial and/or business development support is dependent on the types of vulnerabilities they are exposed to. For example, in regions where women are exposed to a greater number of vulnerabilities or women from certain ethnicities who are subject to more than one type of vulnerability are not as successful in continuing or expanding their economic activities compared to others who are relatively less vulnerable.

Therefore, it would be useful for the program to closely look at the vulnerability data when determining success and also use the information to inform interventions in relevance to the incidence and nature of vulnerability in the local municipalities. (See below in Effectiveness section for a longer discussion of vulnerabilities identified in the FGDs). In some cases, there might be a need to work with other development partners to ensure that different sets of vulnerabilities are addressed based on the strength of the organisation or programmes. For example, if the vulnerability criteria of GBV is high for a certain group of beneficiaries in a certain region, then WEESC can work with other programmes or organisations that focus on GBV to ensure that alongside economic empowerment, there are interventions to address GBV issues as the success of economic empowerment is reliant on the reduction of a range of different vulnerabilities.

The trainings and economic opportunities need to better align with the demand from buyers to ensure continuity of sales.

The choice of locations was also seen as relevant to address the most vulnerable communities. In Georgia, project beneficiaries interviewed confirmed that the interventions enhanced and supported their livelihoods, and all of the women confirmed increased capacities or attested to the resilience of their communities, including but not limited to increased understanding of women's rights and economic empowerment possibilities. In addition to economic empowerment, the project recognised the psycho-social element affecting women due to their high degree of vulnerability (e.g. issues related to gender-based violence) however, there is a need to further respond to these challenges in a more strategic manner.

The GRB component was seen very valuable and relevant to the local context of grassroots women as it enabled them to voice their opinions and needs and supported women in building their capacity to engage with the local authorities. However, success has been varied between countries, where Georgia had much greater success and Armenia with some degree of variability. Nevertheless, this component was seen as extremely valuable and relevant for all stakeholders.

**Finding 7:** WEESC-II 's design was based on quality analysis.

During the planning stage, UN Women conducted various assessments, such as the "Gender Analysis of Labour Market Regulations" and the "Women's Economic Inactivity and Engagement Study," spanning all three countries. The outcomes of these studies guided the project's design, and additional assessments were carried out as part of program activities under Outcomes 2 and 3 to shape policies and project initiatives. UN Women also leveraged insights gained from its own experiences and those of other UN agencies operating in the target countries. The phase 1 evaluation results and recommendations were also taken into account to further develop the strategies and activities of phase 2. This is particularly reflected in how the program pivoted to pushing towards greater independence of the Women's Resource Centres (WRC); expansion into regions with greater vulnerability and the increased scale of work with the private sector which has seen significant response.

The project has conducted a Gender Assessment of Agriculture and Local Development Systems study, and assessments have been conducted at the inception stage but it is not clear how the information on market demand or growth opportunities at the municipal level were used to design the training on product/services so that financial assistance and micro-business opportunities for women are aligned with sectors or economic activities that have growth opportunities. In some of the FGDs women mentioned that they are not being able to sell their products in the absence of buyers or there is some level of saturation with multiple suppliers such as tailoring business whereby they are not being able to sell enough. It will be useful to carefully consider or prioritise 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 lack of markets and poor economic opportunities will affect the sustainability of the initiatives.

It is important to note that during the intervention design/implementation stage, the program conducted an assessment of the socio-economic status of the beneficiaries to understand the extent of their social vulnerability. At the inception stage of the intervention activities, questions were asked across eight areas: poverty, nature of employment, ethnicity, disability, IDP status or displacement experience, location, experience of domestic violence and whether they are from conflict affected region or not. These were useful to understand the profile of beneficiaries and address any concerns as required.

### Coherence

**Finding 10:** WEESC-II has demonstrated complementarity, harmonization and coordination with interventions of other actors' interventions in the same context.

In Azerbaijan, stakeholders highlighted the important and unique role of the WRCs which is a holistic approach tailored to the needs of women at the grassroots level developed by UNDP. There are no other activities similar to WRC in the country. There are other programmes supported by the Government and the development agencies that facilitate training programmes for women such as the AFAG - project on agricultural support, the DOST Agency, and the State Social Protection Fund (DSMF) under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection – an employment program of the state fund for social protection which mainly supports war veterans and their families. There are also other SDC initiative that primarily focus on technical work related to the financial market and climate change, rather than women's economic empowerment, highlighting the uniqueness of the WEESC program in its objectives and budget allocation. There was mention of GIZ's EPIC project, focusing on the economic and social participation of Internally Displaced People (IDP), aligns with the objectives of women's economic empowerment and the project's components emphasize employment and self-employment, cooperative establishment, and community building, reflecting coherence with broader objectives of WEE and social inclusion. However, this project differed from WEESC and was primarily implemented in other regions of Azerbaijan, which do not overlap with the WEESC project locations.

In Georgia, the project drew from the successful experience of UN Women Georgia's Good Governance for Gender Equality Programme, supported by the Government of Norway, which focused on WEPs in collaboration with private enterprises. This was successfully replicated in Armenia and Azerbaijan and continues to be an important pillar of engagement with the private sector. The European Union (EU) is also a major development partner and it, alongside the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), are actively pursuing women's economic empowerment. At the policy level, it is mostly UN and EU that are closely working with the government agencies. In addition, the International Labour Organization (ILO) is also actively working on labour code and employment conditions. At the municipality level there is a strong presence of national and international NGOs such as Care Caucasus, USAID supported projects, Mercy Corps, etc. that are actively working on women's economic empowerment

**Finding 11:** WEESC-II implementation has ensured synergies and coordination with Governments and key partners efforts including the avoidance of duplications.

In Azerbaijan, the stakeholders during the KIIs highlighted that the WEESC project operates across various regions in Azerbaijan, ensuring there are no duplications with existing initiatives but rather complementing them. The project also fills in gaps in the local municipalities through a holistic approach to women's economic empowerment. Despite limited resources, there is significant demand for similar support among local women, underscoring the project's relevance and effectiveness. Stakeholders highlighted the important and unique role of the WRCs which is a holistic approach tailored to the needs of women at the grassroots level developed by UNDP. There are no other activities similar to WRC in the country. There are other programmes supported by the Government and the development agencies that facilitate training programmes for women such as the AFAG - project on agricultural support, the DOST Agency, and the State Social Protection Fund (DSMF) under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection – an employment program of the state fund for social protection which mainly supports war veterans and their families. There are also other SDC initiative that primarily focus on technical work related to the financial market and climate change, rather than women's economic empowerment, highlighting the uniqueness of the WEESC program in its objectives and budget allocation.

Coordination efforts extend to collaboration with projects like a USAID-funded initiative, addressing gender-based violence in the regions simultaneously, further enhancing effectiveness. By integrating gender-based violence support services, the WEESC project showcases effective coordination to meet diverse needs, maximizing impact and resource efficiency. There was mention of GIZ's EPIC project, focusing on the economic and social participation of Internally Displaced People (IDP), aligns with the objectives of women's economic empowerment and the project's components emphasize employment and self-employment, cooperative establishment, and community building, reflecting coherence with broader objectives of WEE and social inclusion. However, this project differed from WEESC and was primarily implemented in other regions of Azerbaijan, which do not overlap with the WEESC project locations. Interviews across FGDs and KIIs highlighted that WRCs are uniquely

positioned given the reliability of support, the institutional presence at the local level, and the tailored approach to women's needs, which makes them different from other programs. Stakeholders also mentioned that UNDP's portfolio includes other similar projects aimed at WEE, demonstrating coherence in objectives across various initiatives and the pooling of resources for complementary activities.

In Armenia, UN Women, in partnership with the Caucasus Regional Research Center Armenia and the Human Rights Research Center, has been coordinating with partners and stakeholders to raise awareness of the issues faced by domestic workers, as inputs to their research and advocacy activities. In addition, the WEESC program in Armenia is actively engaged in the working group to coordinate with different stakeholders and develop the Armenia Gender Strategy 2024-2026.

In Georgia, UN Women has forged a longstanding partnership with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) like the TASO Foundation and Kakheti Regional Development Foundation (KRDF), leveraging its proven social mobilization methodology to effectively reach and address the needs of the most vulnerable communities. Additionally, the project drew from the successful experience of UN Women Georgia's Good Governance for Gender Equality Programme, supported by the Government of Norway, which focused on WEPs in collaboration with private enterprises. This was successfully replicated in Armenia and Azerbaijan and continues to be an important pillar of engagement with the private sector.

There's a collaborative approach to achieving each programmatic goal, involving UN Women and the statistics agency of Georgia, National Statistics Office of Georgia (GEOSTAT), along with government agencies, LEPLs, and other public bodies that express interest and investment in specific data collection efforts. This collaboration is aimed at contributing to policy-making processes. For instance, UN Women supported GEOSTAT to align their methodology with EUROSTAT and the project also supported the labor inspection office to develop the methodology of inception and assessment of equal pay for equal work and gender discrimination based on pay, which is currently being considered for adoption. SLA's participation in the EU Horizon programme necessitated a gender perspective to align with their recommendations. In relation to the private sector, the project policy-level endeavors are in alignment with WEP guidelines, yet these are recommendations, and the private sector is not obligated to adhere to them. These represent best practices, and WEESC consistently strives to demonstrate the importance of practices like enhanced maternity leave and minimized gender pay disparities. While certain policies can be enforced under the labour code, to be complied with by the public sector, others are more recommendations for best practices. For instance, the private sector uses their own internal company procedures and policies and some of the broader policy directives serve more as recommendations or good practices than an enforcement.

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government agencies. In addition, the International Labour Organization (ILO) is also actively working on labour code and employment conditions. At the municipality level there is a strong presence of national and international NGOs such as Care Caucasus, USAID supported projects, Mercy Corps, etc. that are actively working on women's economic empowerment. Alongside development agencies, the government of Georgia has multiple programmes such as Produce in Georgia and Georgia's Innovation and Technology Agency (GITA), who work in coordination with local NGOs and other development partners. In terms of the private sector there is strong presence of support from the Norwegian government in partnership with UN Women and USAID also works closely with the private sector.

KII also revealed that to avoid duplication of efforts at the municipality level, different NGOs focus on different beneficiary groups for similar project outcomes. While this has been useful to avoid duplication, it has also led to risks of discrepancy of services or activities. For example, women at the grassroots level mentioned that they appreciate the CARE Caucasus model of considering both the social and economic needs of women when designing programs. For example, in one of the FGDs, women shared an example from CARE Caucasus where they brought in one of the popular Georgian writers to meet with beneficiaries upon their request. This is to highlight that women consider social aspects as an important element of the economic empowerment pre-programmes, as such they are seen as highly valuable. Similarly, they also appreciate CARE's program to engage men in the training programs to mitigate the risk of exclusion. Women mentioned that they would like to engage in such activities but as that program works with a different set of beneficiaries, women working with WEESC are not able to participate. Therefore they have suggested that WEESC program take into consideration some of these aspirations or social aspects when designing intervention activities.

The evaluation team observed that UN Women Georgia has actively supported the Government and various line ministries in integrating gender considerations into policies, programs, and national action plans. Furthermore, its collaboration with local governments on gender-responsive budgeting has been notable. Strong partnerships with entities like the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Ending Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, and the thematic group of the Task Force on Women's Economic Empowerment have facilitated synergies in project efforts. There is a strong need to continue and deepen the coordination efforts even further especially in the final phase of WEESC where consolidation is key. Phase 3 will also be an important phase for sharing lessons from the project with other partners and key stakeholders, including government, private sector, civil society, and development agencies. It will be critical to ensure that the good work of WEESC is taken up by others or replicated or scaled up by others to ensure continuity.

**Finding 13:** UN Women and UNDP have distinct comparative advantages in women's economic empowerment (WEE) in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

In Armenia, the project was able to successfully work with Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Armenia (MLSA) towards WEE outcomes. Similarly, their collaboration with inspection bodies related to health and labor and representatives from the ILO on gender issues, has been key to

implement evidence-based policies and procedures in relation to WEE and better employment practices. At the municipal level, stakeholders appreciated UNDP's role in mainstreaming gender analysis in local planning. Given UNDP's longstanding work on economic development, they were also able to build capacity of their NGO partners in women's economic empowerment. WEESC-II stakeholders noted the project's expansive nature and scalability has created new opportunities. According to the project team members, working with a large group allowed them to address the needs of a diverse audience, enabling them to deepen their work. This has opened up avenues for new collaborations with individuals and groups, enhancing inclusivity in other programs. Additionally, UNDP's experiences in working with women producer networks have complemented the needs of this program. Strength of UNDP in Armenia also lies in the organisation's ability to support very vulnerable women including refugees to integrate them to economic activities by providing agricultural and non-agricultural inputs.

In Georgia, implementing partners and stakeholders acknowledge several strengths of UN Women, including its expertise in WEE and its provision of technical support that goes beyond mere project funding. This support includes enhancing organizations' expertise, management, project preparation, and implementation skills, particularly benefiting grassroots organizations. UN Women's adaptability during implementation to address unexpected circumstances, especially changes in the political context, and its willingness to collaborate with partners to adjust activities for more effective results were highly appreciated. Partners appreciated UN Women's approach as a 'partner' rather than a donor and echoed the importance of the organisation's focused agenda on gender equality and WEE. The focus on this specific agenda makes them very driven.

UN Women Georgia reportedly engaged highly skilled professionals to guide the WEESC Project, keeping abreast of global trends and adapting to the evolving implementation environment. Government partners expressed satisfaction with their involvement in various interventions. With over a decade of experience, UN Women in Georgia is well-positioned to understand and address the needs of marginalized populations, including ethnic minority women and victims of gender-based violence. They also possess insights into opportunities for marginalized women to participate in local decision-making.

In Azerbaijan, stakeholders mentioned that the project's primary strength lies in its ability to offer women employment opportunities while harbouring hopes and aspirations. Local municipality stakeholders also mentioned that there is significant demand on the ground, indicating the necessity to increase both the resources and the scope of the project. Regrettably, the current capacity of the project falls short of fully meeting this demand. On the other hand, the project's key strength is its focus on providing additional support and opportunities specifically tailored to women in rural areas, addressing their unique needs and challenges. Unlike other programmes that may focus solely on economic development or environmental issues, WEESC stands out for its targeted approach to women's economic empowerment. It offers a range of services including skills development, employment opportunities, and psycho-social support.

Interviewees during the KIIs emphasised that the establishment of WRCs serves as a distinctive feature of the project, providing a centralized platform for women to access resources, training, and networking opportunities. Through partnerships with the private sector, the project emphasizes the importance of women's inclusion in economic activities and promotes the adoption of gender-sensitive practices in workplaces. This highlights its commitment to gender equality and empowerment, making it a notable initiative in the realm of women's economic empowerment.

Overall, WEESC is uniquely placed with a lens to gather field level evidence at multiple levels including grassroots, local institution, and national policy levels, there is significant opportunity for the project to foster knowledge exchange and learning opportunities among different programs and stakeholders to promote best practices in WEE. At the moment it is happening in small pockets and there is opportunity for the program to deepen its efforts to exchange learnings and promote coordinated efforts.

#### **Effectiveness**

**Finding 14:** WEESC-II has achieved its outcomes, albeit with some challenges.

**OUTCOME 1:** Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, use skills, economic opportunities, relevant information, network and support to become farmers/entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia

Progress in relation to Targets			
(Source: drawn from WEESC II Progress Report, as of December 2023)			
Country	Number of women beneficiaries with increased information, strengthened capacities and skills to participate in the economy, including as farmers and entrepreneurs (Indicator 1.4)		
	Target	Achieved as of Dec 2023	% of target achieved
Armenia	300	521	174%
Azerbaijan	300	388	129%
Georgia	300	496	165%
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>1405</b>	<b>156%</b>

At the Grassroots Level the aim was to increase women's access to income-generating opportunities, knowledge and training, including strengthening their capacities to organize and participate in decision-making at the national and local levels. The project targeted 3 groups:

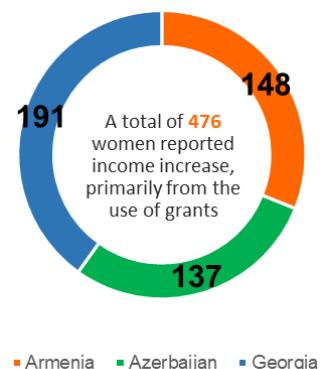
- Small-holder female farmers
- Self-employed women engaged in entrepreneurial activities (non-agriculture)

Wage employed women who secured new employment and/or have received job placement/internship through WEP signatories (as relevant)

Activities were carried out in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia with a specific focus on the poor and socially excluded groups of women in rural areas, including women engaged in agriculture and non-agriculture activities. In addition, in this phase, the project also made efforts to reach women employed in the informal sector as domestic workers in the capitals of Armenia and Georgia, supporting their mobilization into professional networks and associations. (WEESC Pro Doc).

### Women's Access to Training, Information and Financial Resources:

Number of women benefiting from increased income as a result of using grants



### Benefit experienced by women as a result of project support and signs of influence towards Impact Level:

#### **Financial Benefits:**

As per the WEESC donor report (as of December 2023), of the 1,405 women who were reached, 476 (34%) reported an increase in income, primarily as a result of investing the grant in existing income generating activities. Across the three countries, Georgia had the highest number

of women reporting income increase (39% of total income beneficiaries), followed by Azerbaijan (35%) and Armenia (28%) respectively.

The table below gives the breakdown of income beneficiaries per category of beneficiaries per country as of December 31, 2023 (Source: WEESCII Progress report).

Breakdown of beneficiaries	A. Smallholder women farmers with increased incomes from agricultural production		B. Women with increased incomes from entrepreneurial (non-agricultural) activities		C. Women having new or better employment		D. Total # of income beneficiaries
	#	% of total beneficiaries per country (A/D)	#	% of total beneficiaries per country (B/D)	#	% of total beneficiaries per country (C/D)	
Armenia	70	47%	45	30%	33	22%	148
Azerbaijan	34	25%	34	25%	69	50%	137
Georgia	80	42%	68	36%	43	23%	191
<b>Total</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>476</b>

It is interesting to note that, smallholder female farmers comprise the highest proportion of beneficiaries in Georgia and Armenia, whereas, in Azerbaijan highest proportion of beneficiaries

fall under the 'employment' category which means that in Azerbaijan a higher proportion of women used their skills to secure wage-employment.

The table below shows that in terms of targets achieved as of December 31, 2023, in relation to 'Income Benefit', Georgia has overachieved its benefit target across all categories of beneficiaries. Azerbaijan was able to achieve its targets in relation to smallholder female farmers and women having new or better employment but fell short of meeting the income benefit target for female entrepreneurs (non-agriculture). Azerbaijan overachieved its targets in relation to women having new or better employment but fell short of achieving its income benefit targets for women in agriculture and non-agricultural entrepreneurial activities. This indicates that starting up a new non-agricultural business and sustaining it takes time. It is also important to note that these results are as of December 2023 indicating an opportunity for the program to show more progress in the reporting periods.

Total # of women reporting benefit from increased income (Indicators 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3) as of December 31, 2023												
	Target				Achieved as of Dec. 2023				Percentage of Target Achieved			
				Total				Total				Total
1.1. Smallholder women farmers with increased incomes from agricultural production	70	70	70	210	70	34	80	184	100 %	49%	114 %	88%
1.2. Women with increased incomes from entrepreneurial (non-agricultural) activities	60	60	60	180	45	34	68	147	75%	57%	113 %	82%
1.3. Number of beneficiary women having new or better employment	30	30	30	90	33	69	43	145	110 %	230 %	143 %	161 %
Total number of women reporting benefit from increased income	160	160	160	480	148	137	191	476	93%	86%	119 %	99%

Women's perception of the financial benefits as a result of the grants: As per the FGDs conducted across the three countries, most women mentioned that although the grants are quite small in size to start a business that could self-sustain; they have been more appropriate to supplement existing economic activity. Women mentioned that the grant provided the additionality for these businesses to speed up their economic activity which would otherwise take longer (some mentioned as much as 3 years or so). Most women interviewed during the FGDs mentioned that they have been able to use the grants to buy assets (e.g. equipment) to boost or expand their existing business or use to improve their efficiency in existing economic activity and for some it has been to supplement their capital to start a new business. Women in Azerbaijan in particular highlighted the importance of the financial assistance to purchase assets such as machinery and tools as it created a tangible positive impact on their livelihoods.

It is important to note that there is limited to no credit available for start-ups that belong to the target group of this program as they are quite subsistence and semi-commercial in nature. Therefore, there is greater indication of continuity for existing businesses but for those that are start-ups, unless there is profit to reinvest or a follow-up additional finance to continue reinvesting, the scale and sustainability of the economic activity is poor.

Overall, across the three countries, benefit reported by the program only focuses on those who had income gain as a result of using grants. Therefore, we see a high attrition between access (those who were reached) and benefit (those who received grants). 39% of those reached in Georgia reported some form of income benefit as a result of grants, followed by Azerbaijan and Armenia respectively. This also indicates that Georgia did better in terms of access to income benefit ratio, indicating that a higher proportion of women who got trained, received grants for economic activities and therefore are able to secure some form of income gain. However, it is important to note, that there are significant non-financial benefits that women reported on during FGDs, particularly around improved social capital, awareness of their rights, ability to participate in gender-based budgeting discussions and confidence as a result of the trainings. These are not accounted for in the benefit calculation, which means the total benefit would be higher than reported. In addition, some women were also able to use the skills gained from the trainings to apply for other grant sources, particularly from government and/or other development projects.

#### **Non-financial Benefits reported by women:**

All women interviewed as part of the FGDs across the three countries highlighted the importance of non-financial benefits experienced by them as a result of the program activities, which are critical elements of Women's Economic Empowerment principles. The non-financial benefits include a combination of the following:

- **Access to a reliable source of information and network:** In Georgia and Azerbaijan, the self-help groups and WRCs are seen as very important sources of information, services, networks and economic opportunity for women as there are little or no alternatives available. Women in Azerbaijan highly appreciated the WRC's role as a one-stop service for women. In addition to economic opportunities and skills development, some of the NGO partners and WRCs have been an important source for women to seek psychosocial support or get references in cases of gender-based violence (GBV) and other issues.
- **Improved financial and business management skills:** Women are better aware of how to do financial planning and management and have expressed and improved understanding of taxation policies as well. During the FGD in Shirak region of Armenia, women expressed an improved knowledge of the taxation and licenses for business. Similarly, women in Azerbaijan specifically emphasised on the importance of learning how to do financial planning, income and expenditure management and taxation. Financial and business management and grant writing skills were strongly highlighted by women interviewed in Georgia as they were

“-”Taxation used to seem daunting to me, but now it's easy. Many people warned me that buying equipment would lead to heavy taxation. However, I've realized it's not as burdensome as they said.” – FGD with women

not only able to use it for their business but also for securing other grants and also managing household expenses.

- **Improved outlook of possibilities and business viability:** women feel they are better able to understand the market and investable opportunities in their locations and through the discussions with the NGO partners and WRCs they are able to gather more insights on the market demands that could make their business more viable. Women, particularly in Azerbaijan, highlighted the importance of the NGO partners and WRCs in guiding them to choose the most appropriate equipment/machineries for their businesses which led to more cost-effective investments. In Armenia, women highlighted that the program provided them with an opportunity for diversify their income sources by exploring other opportunities in non-agriculture. In addition, as a result of the organized courses, women were able to expand their horizons, participate in different programs and ultimately change the attitude of the community towards them.
- **Improved social capital:** across all three countries, women mentioned the important role of the project activities in bringing them together. Women highlighted the importance of the project activities in facilitating networking, sharing ideas, and developing friendships which is otherwise very difficult in the target locations. Most women mentioned that it gave them a reason to go out of the house. In addition to making new friends, women were also able to get access to networks of economic opportunities through other NGOs. In Armenia, women mentioned that as they have not been socially and economically active for a long time, the social skills and connections they made during the program significantly improved their self-image.
- **Increased self-confidence and understanding of women's rights:** across all three countries women reported having improved self-confidence in their ability to engage in economic activities, understand and advocate for their rights and needs. More is detailed under the GRB component. **In Armenia**, for example, women from Ani and Maralik reported to have participated in events and courses on women's rights and addressing issues of violence which is increasingly empowering them to voice their experiences and perspectives on these topics. In addition, through the implementation of a gender-sensitive budgeting program, women mentioned that they have developed greater trust with local authorities and there is a higher likelihood that women's opinions will be more considered within the communities. They also mentioned that many members of the community are considering participating in the decision-making process of women and engaging in discussions regarding the community's annual budget plans. Women in Georgia, particularly in Kazbegi mentioned that understanding their rights positioned them better at the workplace. One participant mentioned that after attending the training she understands that she is able to take sick leave and better

“It's a plus for a housewife. We never used to go out. I came here happily; the women talked and laughed here. It was a good thing for me.” – FGD with women

defend her rights at the workplace. Another mentioned that now she reads her employment contracts. Others mentioned that the trainings were lifechanging as they are now communicating with larger groups of women, have larger networks. All women mentioned that going through training processes helped them with the mental health and stability.

- **Reduced workload:** There are signs of improved efficiency and reduced workload for e.g. women have reported purchasing milking machinery that has helped reducing manual labour time or bakery equipment to make more units within the same amount of time.
- **Shift in men's perception and trust within the community:** women mentioned that the project has helped improve perception of men and other household members of women's role in economic activity, creating a sense of trust on women's engagement in such social network as seen as valuable. Although patriarchal norms continue to exist, women added they are seeing signs of improvement – they feel their role is better understood and valued within their community. This was particularly highlighted in Armenia and Azerbaijan where they mentioned the continued social norms that limit women's engagement but as a result of the program they are starting to see a difference. Women interviewed in the Shirak region of Armenia mentioned that in the past, their husbands often viewed them solely as caregivers and homemakers. However, over time, they have become accustomed to seeing them empowered, working, and actively engaged in economic activities.
- **Unintended effects:** In Georgia, ethnic Azerbaijani and Armenian women have been collaborating, meeting and exchanging practices throughout the project, despite ongoing conflict in Karabakh, indicating an indirect effect on women, peace and security through women empowerment and exchange. In Azerbaijan some women reported on positive outcomes related to GBV (reduced GBV as a result of economic activity) and WRCs are seen as a reliable place for support. In Armenia women appreciated the ability to be provided with an opportunity for individuals to attend training in a setting traditionally considered unconventional within the community.

“After purchasing a milking machine through the project grant, it has become much more convenient and less laborious for me and frees up time for other tasks.”

“The project has helped encourage a shift in men's perceptions, away from the belief that a woman's primary responsibility is solely childcare and homemaking.”

### Progress on Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) at the Grassroots Level:

Work on GRB was undertaken only in Armenia and Georgia. According to WEESC reports, across Armenia and Georgia, the program has been able to facilitate a total of 122 advocacy initiatives

(as of Dec 2023), and a total of 296 women beneficiaries reported to have contributed to local planning and budgeting / GRB discussions aimed at addressing their socio-economic concerns.



In Armenia, 100 women beneficiaries (against a target of 100 women) reported contributing to local planning and budgeting / GRB discussions aimed at addressing their socio-economic concerns but only 45 successful advocacy initiatives were facilitated by women beneficiaries to overcome their socio-economic challenges (WEESC-II Results Report). Monitoring report shows that as of December 2023, 7 municipalities conducted one or more elements of GRB. The GRB activities helped improve women's understanding of their rights and ways to advocate. During the FGDs conducted in the Shirak region it was discovered that some of the women participated in the commissions during elections and have also started participating in decision-making. For example, women have started participating in discussions about subsidy programs in Artik. FGDs with women also revealed that their experience has not always been very positive. In some places women have been able to directly approach the municipality and the gender-sensitive budgeting training helped build trust between women and the local authority; but in general decisions are made by the heads of the community during the meetings of Council Heads where women are not allowed. Only in some instances were women able to share their demands with the elders.



In Georgia, 203 women beneficiaries (against a target of 100 women) reported contributing to local planning and budgeting / GRB discussions aimed at addressing their socio-economic concerns and 107 successful advocacy initiatives (against a target of 45 initiatives) were facilitated by women beneficiaries to overcome their socio-economic challenges (WEESC-II Results Report). This is further supported by FGDs in Georgia where women indicated most progress in terms of their ability to engage and voice opinion with the local authorities and municipality's response to women's needs. Women are increasingly attending roundtables, village meetings and women's rooms to share their opinions and advocate for their needs.

Project monitoring report shows that 12 out of 64 municipalities (19%) in Georgia have reported conducting one or more elements of GRB. According to the donor report, the advocacy cycle in 2023 resulted in a total expenditure of 25 million GEL on women's initiatives, sourced from the budgets of 12 municipalities and village support programs. KII as part of the evaluation indicate that not all the municipalities have the same level of effectiveness in terms of applying GRB practices, however, some such as Akhmeta and Akhaltsikhe in Georgia are already showing increased commitment. In Akhmeta municipality in the Kakheti region of Georgia the KII with municipality authority revealed that they are piloting the allocation of GEL 10,000 specifically for women's services. Similarly, Akhaltsikhe municipality was initially relying on the local NGO partners to organise meetings with women but now have their own initiatives (KII Georgia). During some of the roundtable meetings the local municipality offices have committed to taking

into consideration as high as 60% of women's demands and being successfully able to implement roughly one-third of the requests (KII in Georgia).

Although the project did not focus on GRB in Azerbaijan an unintended benefit was that women during the FGDs mentioned having their ability to understand their rights which also boosted their self-confidence.

### **Challenges affecting project's achievements at the Grassroots Level:**

Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia
<b>Inadequate grant amount and absence of alternative sources of finance:</b> Women feel that the grant size is not sufficient for starting a business, but it has been critical to upgrade or expand existing economic activity or add to the capital stock for testing out a new business idea. In addition, these grants are one-off which means unless they have sufficient profit, they struggle to continue or expand since there are limited to no alternative finances available.		
In Armenia, particularly in the Shirak region, women shared concerns on the lack of finance to actualize their ideas and skills gathered from the entrepreneurship training. They mentioned that although there are international grants made occasionally available, they do not provide long-term stability.		Some women in Georgia have reported applying for government funding but in most cases, women are struggling to secure alternative finance. The project has only been monitoring the grantees, which makes it difficult to conclude more broadly on the nature of continuity by grantees from phase 1.
<b>Limited application of skills in the absence of economic opportunities:</b> some of the project locations have more economic opportunities than others, which meant that the effectiveness of skills and trainings varied. In places where there are more opportunities, women have been able to use their skills but in other places it has been very difficult as there are no markets or buyers for the entrepreneurial skills they acquired.		
During the FGD women in Gegharkhunik expressed greater satisfaction in their ability to apply the economic skills gained than those in selective areas of Shirak. In Maralik and Ani districts of Shirak region of Armenia, women expressed frustration related to limited opportunities available in their communities. Only one woman from the FGD participants mentioned being able to manage to generate income using her acquired hairdressing skills, but even this	In Fuzili in Azerbaijan women expressed their concerns on the lack of economic opportunities. For example, they were not able to use their skills gained on computer lessons as there are not enough opportunities. Similarly, women in Khazar were gained knowledge in sewing and tailoring but were not able to secure finance for their fabric which meant they were not able to use the skills.	women participating in FGDs in Akhmeta and Telavi Municipalities of Kakheti region in Georgia,

Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia
<p>opportunity stemmed from a previous round of the program. Similarly, at the FGD conducted with women from Jil and Vaghashen in Gegarkhunik region, women mentioned that there is a lack of economic opportunities in the villages and even if they find a job in the nearest city, the cost of transportation makes it difficult for women to consider it.</p>		
<p><b>Mobility challenges and unpaid care responsibilities:</b> Although women have expressed preference for in-person trainings and reported that face-to-face interactions are highly valuable for women to develop social capital, mobility challenges and care responsibilities of the dependents (particularly children and the elderly) preclude women from joining trainings organized in distant locations or engaging in economic activities that are not in close proximity to their home.</p>		
<p>Women in Shirak region of Armenia mentioned that the cost of transport to get to the venue and household responsibilities often hinder their ability to participate program activities. They recommended considering organising training sessions on non-working days to improve their likelihood of participation.</p>	<p>Women in Sabirabad and Gusar mentioned that distance to the training locations can make it difficult and costly. This makes it even more difficult for them to get permission from their family members.</p>	<p>Lack of mobility and distance to training venue was highlighted major concern for participants. Particularly women from Akhmeta and Dusheti mentioned that absence of public transport and local terrains make it difficult and costly to get to the training venues. This becomes even more difficult during winter. Online lessons are also difficult as internet is not always available.</p> <p>In addition, care responsibilities also limit women's participation. Some of the women in the FGD expressed the need to allocate someone from the community that they trust to manage the children during the training programs so that women are able to participate.</p>
<p><b>Challenges related to the training sessions and content:</b></p>		
<p>In Armenia women mentioned that traveling to the venue can often get very costly and limit their participation. Women in</p>	<p>Women in Sabirabad mentioned that the one-off training is not sufficient, and refreshers would be useful. Similar to Armenia, women</p>	<p>For Azzeri women in Telavi language barrier was highlighted as an issue to understanding training content. Because of the language</p>

Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia
<p>Gegharkhunik mentioned that the course was very rich but also very densely packed in two days and the complexity of the topics in such a short time made it difficult for them to absorb so much information. They were recommended either refresher courses or spreading it over a certain period. In their opinion, refresher courses would also allow them to share their experiences of applying the skills into practice. Additionally, they also mentioned that practical exercises would improve their learning.</p> <p>In Gegharkhunik, the FGD participants mentioned that the training participant group were too diverse in terms of age and experiences with economic activity. This made it more difficult for younger individuals.</p>	<p>in Azerbaijan also mentioned that classes over the weekend would help improve attendance and they took emphasised that the duration of the course is too short and dense.</p> <p>During one of the FGDs in Gusar, some women mentioned that the delivery of the training was in the local language for the Lezgi participants which made it difficult for the Azerbaijani minority who were attending.</p>	<p>barrier they also need a lot of support to fill out the grant application. However, they appreciate that this has pushed them to learn Georgian which has been beneficial for them to engage with others.</p>
<p><b>Vulnerability criteria is often not clearly understood which makes some women feel excluded:</b> In Georgia for example, some of the women from Akhaltsikhe mentioned that the project did not give grants to applicants from the same house but often there are multiple, separate families living in the same house or sharing the house. Although there is a strong reason for the project to avoid giving grants to families sharing a house, poor communication negatively affects women's perception. Similarly, in Armenia women from highly vulnerable groups are keen to apply but are precluded from doing so as they are part of the Family Benefit Program (FBP) although it does not primarily focus on the economic aspect.</p>		
<p><b>Poor communication with unsuccessful grantees caused disappointment</b> as they were not informed of why they failed to secure the grant, reducing their ability to improve.</p>		
<p><b>Risk of digital exclusion:</b> To address the difficulties around mobility, the project has included online training but there is risk of digital exclusion as women in some locations have reported to have poor digital literacy and limited access to phone/network.</p>		
This was not raised in Armenia.	This was not raised in Azerbaijan.	This was more relevant in Georgia where women in some of the FGDs expressed that in women from the Azerbaijani communities in Georgia are not allowed to travel to attend

Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia
		trainings and in order for them to be able to participate in the trainings they either need additional help to have access to internet or seek support from the trainers to go to their village and conduct in person trainings. In addition to poor digital literacy skills, accessibility of network is another issue and lack of internet access limits them from attending the online sessions.
<p><b>Continued gender stereotypes and patriarchal social norms</b> in some regions affect women's ability to participate in training programs and economic activities. This was more highlighted in Azerbaijan and somewhat in Armenia. Women expressed that continued social awareness program will reduce this over time and in some FGDs women highlighted the potential to engage men in the socialization and training programs so that they do not feel excluded and also see the importance of such activities for women.</p>		
In Armenia, women mentioned that gender stereotypes are quite prevalent which affects women's ability to engage in training activities or even economic opportunities. However, this too is gradually changing and the project has been playing an important role to demonstrate that.	At the FGDs conducted in Azerbaijan women mentioned that prevalent societal norms impose significant constraints on their ability to attending the training sessions (either partially or completely) which in turn hampers their commitment to follow up on business activities, thereby hurting their social and economic confidence. These patriarchal norms extend beyond male family members and includes mothers-in-law and mothers, who exert control over women's economic and social autonomy. Women in Sabirabad highlighted that they faced much more difficulties when attending the first few sessions but over time as the household members saw the usefulness of it, they became more supportive.	This was not as strongly highlighted as in Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, women from the Azzeri community in Telavi shared the strong gender stereotypes that they have to counter to be able to engage in project activities.
<p><b>Risk of conflict and/or gender-based violence:</b></p>		

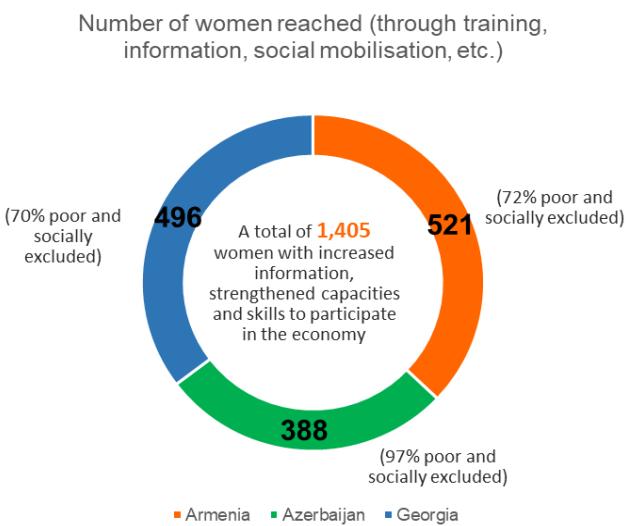
Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia
There has been no mention of incidence of violence as a result of project engagements, however, women did mention that there is a women's center in Martuni which can be used to seek support if needed. In contrary, some women in Gegarkhunik mentioned that as a result of the project activities women have gathered strength and the fact that they can earn money and support their children makes them more confident and helps prevent violence and negative behaviors from their family members.	In Azerbaijan women indicated the risks of exposure to GBV which often affects their ability to engage socially or economically. For example, to expand their business activity, women are willing to open their businesses' social media pages (Instagram etc.), nevertheless, they often face restrictions from their male partners in doing so. Currently, only a few WRCs have specific programs and training on GBV, and they only target women. Women feel that such issues could be raised as awareness campaigns targeting both women and men or together as household.	Women from the Telavi municipality who are ethnically Azerbaijani highlighted that they have to overcome several household restrictions to convince them to approve of their attendance in trainings. However, very few to none have secure grants or any form of finance from that region making them more vulnerable and frustrated.
<b>External risks</b> particularly conflict and political risks in Azerbaijan and Armenia have affected women at the grassroots level.		

### Finding 19:

#### Application of the training and information acquired as a result of improved access to new tools, techniques, skills and information:

Women interviewed as part of the FGDs across all three countries mentioned that the trainings gave them access to a range of different skill sets which can be subdivided into (a) generic transferable skills and (b) targeted skills specific to economic activity.

**Generic transferable skills** such as business and financial planning and management, accounting and income and expenditure management, CV writing, grant/proposal writing,



computer skills, use of social media, etc., for marketing their products/services (e.g. Instagram, facebook, whatsapp), etc.

- **In Armenia**, women particularly highlighted the importance of building soft skills such as communication, networking and project design and management abilities. They also mentioned about their improved knowledge in developing CVs, handling financial documents and communicating with potential employers.
- **In Azerbaijan**, women during FGDs mentioned their improved understanding and capacity in business management, skills to use computer, writing CVs and being able to speak more professionally, conduct business feasibility, improved entrepreneurship, business and financial management skills.
- **In Georgia**, there was specific mention of financial and business management, grant writing skills (that helped to secure not only WEESC but other projects' grants); improved employment rights; marketing skills and language skills.

**Targeted skills specific to economic activity** such as related to specific cultivation practices in agriculture and livestock management, use of equipment for specific businesses e.g. sewing, beauty care, etc.

- **In Armenia**, women appreciated the project's support in improving their technical skills such as sewing and also promoting or marketing their products.
- **In Azerbaijan**, women highlighted improved technical skills related to their business such as beekeeping, nail techniques to better offer services at their salon, use of specific assets related to their business/economic activity.
- **In Georgia**, specific technical skills were highlighted such as improved food safety processes, culinary skills and agricultural techniques.

**Effectiveness of these skills varied** between groups who are (a) micro-subsistence and (b) semi-commercial, have an existing business or have secured grants. From the FGDs conducted, it appears that the following factors influenced effectiveness of the trainings:

- (a) **Nature of the training:** the generic skills gained such as business plan writing, taxation, CV writing, computer skills, etc. are more transferable in nature as they are not tied to a particular business trait and therefore were relatively more applicable by beneficiaries regardless of their ability to secure a grant from the WEESC project or not.
  - Women in the Shirak region of **Armenia** mentioned that now they better understand taxation policies relevant for their business which was very daunting for them before, for example. They have also been able to use the financial planning and management for their household income and expenditure.
  - For wage-employed women in **Azerbaijan**, computer skills and writing a proper CV have been very important to improve their employability for future jobs.
  - Women from an ethnic minority community in **Georgia** appreciated the program's activities to improve their language skills which has helped them interact better.

Women in selective regions of Georgia also mentioned that they were able to use the grant writing skills for other NGOs or government projects even if they were not able to secure the WEESC grant.

**(b) Level of existing economic engagement and availability of opportunities in the region:** FGDs across the three countries indicate that success in application of training has been higher for women with existing businesses/economic activity (be it agriculture or not) or in locations where there are opportunities or market linkages already existing.

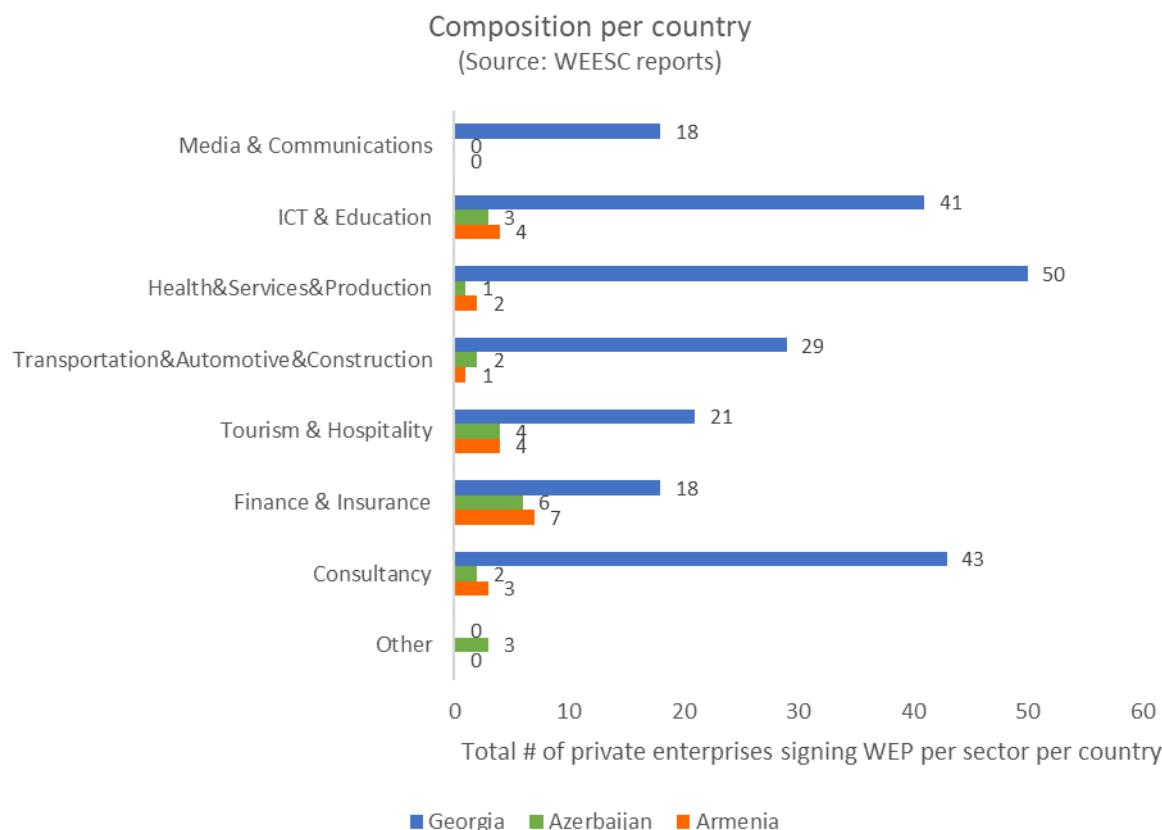
- For example, women in the Gegharkunik region of **Armenia** expressed frustrations that they had not been able to apply much of the skills gathered as there is limited to no economic activity.
- Women in Sabirabad, Guzar and Khazar in **Azerbaijan**, expressed higher effectiveness of the trainings compared to Fuzuli given poor economic opportunities and limited availability of finance in the locations. This also indicates why the success in agriculture is higher than entrepreneurship in some of the regions across the three countries because women are improving already existing economic activity rather than starting something completely new. This highlights the need to focus on trainings that are aligned to the availability of economic opportunities and market potential; one of the areas where value chain analysis can be useful.

"Training is great but unless sales are possible then it is very difficult to apply the skills." - FGD in Gegharkunik region of Armenia

"My client base has grown since I now have a salon with proper equipment. Previously, I operated from home, and clients were less satisfied. But now, with a well-equipped salon, they appreciate it more, leading to increased praise and clientele." - FGD in Sabirabad, Azerbaijan

**(c) Availability of alternative finance:** absence of availability of alternative sources of finance or inability to secure WEESC grants have caused frustrations amongst women as the lack of finance meant that they were not able to invest in the economic activity and therefore not apply their new technical skills. This is particularly applicable for those who are intending to start a new business. For example, women interviewed in the Telavi Municipality of Kakheti region and Akhaltsikhe Municipality in Samtskhe Javakheti region of Georgia mentioned they have not been able to use their skills much at all due to the absence of finances to set up their economic activities.

### Private sector engagement



**Type of companies and motivation to sign WEP:** KIs indicate that most of these companies are either international; have international investments or are local leading companies who want to establish themselves as a leading brand/employer with positive values. For example, International Finance Institutions (IFIs) have a requirement that banks integrate gender to be able to access financial capital for which many large financial institutions are eager to introduce gender-responsive practices. Similarly, international brands generally have to comply with international best practices and values which often require equitable recruitment practices. Given the nature of the companies, most of them were already motivated or had some form of internal commitment to promote gender equality and/or better human resource (HR) practices for their staff but struggled to identify ways to do so. Companies shared that the key motivations for them to become a WEP signatory and apply gender responsive practices include:

- Identify practical approaches in actioning their commitment to gender outcomes within the company.
- Network with other companies that share similar values and learn from each other.
- Becoming a reputable employer.
- Meet compliance requirements of their international investors, company policies and procedures.

**Areas of application:** Across the three countries the application of WEP principles have varied. Georgia has seen the most application of practices given its maturity of activities but there has been great progress even in Armenia and Azerbaijan and companies across these two countries have expressed their interest to work with WEESC to deepen the activities. Both in Azerbaijan and Armenia, one-third of the companies that have signed WEP principles have applied or are in the process of applying some changes to their practices as result of their engagement with WEESC. In Azerbaijan majority of these companies are from the Finance and IT sector and a few from the hospitality and construction sector and Armenia majority of these companies applying practices are from the Banking and Financial Services sectors followed by marketing research and management consulting.

According to the KIIs with WEP signatories across all 3 countries, the following are the key areas where the WEP signatories are applying changes or expressed intention to apply changes with the support of UN Women:

- **Training and awareness raising of management and staff:** Improving awareness of staff and management have been critical for most companies. Training was directed to staff on improving their understanding and awareness of men and women's rights, understanding of gender issues and maintaining a respectful workplace. Training for management was directed to improving their awareness on the benefits of having gender-responsive policies and procedures at workplace, identify ways on how to empower employees and introduce policies that improve flexibility and safety at work; introduce gender sensitive recruitment and promotion practices, etc. For instance, some of the largest financial institutions interviewed in Armenia as part of the evaluation mentioned that they have now introduced periodic training components on understanding and addressing discrimination at work, understanding employee rights, etc. Similarly, in **Azerbaijan** some of the companies interviewed highlighted that following their initial engagement with WEESC, they are now making a conscious effort to include gender awareness as part of the training components. For example, one of the hospitality group of companies mentioned that the company now recognizes the importance of training and is taking steps to strengthen its internal training policy by hiring a dedicated training manager. The trainings have also helped them develop an internal action plan. KII with Georgia Chamber of Commerce indicated that many companies have taken initiatives to promote training of employees on sexual harassment; trained their management and other HR on the WEP principles and developed training materials supported by UN Women, for further developing their company's internal training modules focused on specific topics such as sexual harassment, termination and stereotypes, diversity and equality, types of violence.

“WEP helped us to concentrate more and understand the importance of gender issues. Even when I passed the training, I thought I knew about all this but listening to it over and over again periodically has changed how I think and make it more purposeful and also help us think how we can do things differently.” -

Management representative of one of the largest banks in Armenia.

- Introduction of targeted gender response company policies and procedures: engagement with UN Women has helped the companies become more intentional in their policies and procedures. For example, some of the WEP signatories in Armenia ensure increased visibility of job postings to women. Similarly, while keeping meritocracy an important criterion, some of the ICT WEP signatories in Azerbaijan mentioned that they consciously reach out to university students to promote the career prospects for women in their sectors as part of the recruitment drive. One of the ICT companies interviewed mentioned that following the WEP engagement, they boosted their effort to show their commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and have embedded comprehensive performance management and learning development initiatives within their HR practices.
- Consciously gathering gender data – some of the WEP signatories mentioned that they were already training women and had policies in place but now they are consciously disaggregating data, e.g., to see what proportion of their workforce women are, how many are joining the trainings, how many are receiving scholarships, etc. These are helping them make more informed decisions, rather than generic ones.
- Networking and coordination: Companies highly appreciated the opportunity to meet other companies within and outside their sectors to share good practices and also learn from others within the same country and also regionally. Companies mentioned engaging in events in coordination with UN Women to participate in panel discussions as speakers or representatives sharing knowledge and experiences of how to engage women. Ring the Bell is another key event participated by companies to promote the benefits of WEP and share success. Some of the companies in Armenia and Azerbaijan expressed the need to have more sector specific discussions as the employment issues can be quite sector specific.

Perception of additionality by WEP signatories: KIIs indicated that most of the companies engaging as part of the WEP process already had a motivation to have positive gender outcomes; some already had existing practices while others struggled to understand the priorities and action a plan to do so. The following were highlighted as key additionality of the WEESC project to the private sector partners:

- Self-audit and endorsement: Becoming a WEP signatory is seen as a brand endorsement that shows that the company is committed to good practice. In addition, to become a WEP signatory, the companies are required to conduct a gap analysis to understand their current practices and identify the gaps in

“The only very good source about gender equality and gender topics in Georgia is the UN Women report”. – One of the WEP Signatories in Georgia

“The gap analysis as a part of the WEP process has been very important in showing where we are at the moment and also help us put together a structured plan in place on how to better integrate gender in the workplace.” – WEP signatory, Armenia

complying with the WEP principles. This has been highlighted as the most valuable exercise for all companies. For those that already had good practices in place, this was an opportunity to highlight and share them with others and have WEP as an endorsement; while for others this was used as an opportunity to identify areas of improvement.

- **A trusted and reliable source of information and advisory:** private companies across all three countries echoed that UN Women is seen as a trusted and valuable partner to help them build training materials, provide advice on better gender-sensitive corporate practices which are more structured in nature and help improve awareness of management. UN Women's reputation has been critical in gender-sensitizing senior management of companies.
- **Targeted involvement:** Unlike other programs or development partners, UN Women is considered to be a very involved partner in the gender-sensitisation journey of the WEPs signatories. This includes discussing issues, course correcting together, and reviewing results together. While other development partners have multiple development objectives, UN Women's targeted agenda towards gender-equality makes them a highly valued partner whereby they can deepen the work focused on gendered outcomes.
- **Networking:** WEP signatories interviewed mentioned that UN Women helped foster network and exchanges between countries and also within the region.
- **Demonstrate benefit through establishing business case:** Companies interviewed mentioned that it is not always the case that senior management of big companies are ready to invest in gender issues. There is a need to demonstrate benefit for their buy-in and UN Women is considered a valuable partner in playing an important role as they help share that initial investment to demonstrate the business case.

#### **Challenges/Barriers in relation to the Private Sector:**

- **Variability in commitment to action:** It is clear that there is increased commitment and willingness to introduce gender-response policies and practices by the private sector across the three countries. However, signing the WEP principles is only one step towards the commitment. The actioning of the WEP principles is still varied across different companies and for those companies that have internal pressure from investors and senior management such as international hotel chains or banks, the commitment to action is higher compared to the others. For some the signing of WEP was seen as an important indicator of brand value but they are not clear on the financial and gender benefits that the actioning will accrue.
- **Level of engagement and support:** While the companies in Georgia highly valued the support and engagement of UN Women, companies in Armenia and Azerbaijan

appreciated the support they received but mentioned there is scope to do more such as more support on how to implement the gender action plan; increased frequency of meetings between WEP signatories in the country either sector specific or more broadly. It is understood that Georgia has been working with the private sector for much longer and therefore a comparison is misleading. But WEESC has the opportunity to learn from its success in Georgia and apply the learnings in Armenia and Azerbaijan. There is strong willingness and intent to action the plans but there is still lack of clarity and therefore follow-ups would be required to action the changes.

- The link between WEPs principles and business benefits are not always clearly understood: While all companies understand the need to have better gender practices, most companies interviewed, particularly in Armenia and Azerbaijan struggled to explain how the gender practices will affect their retention of staff or improve productivity or reduce turnover issues, while those were also challenges, they had mentioned. In several meetings companies in the finance sector and in agribusiness mentioned the potential and issues in engaging more women as part of their supply chain and client base but could not clearly show the link between using the WEP principles to guide them to address these challenges or potential.
- Sectoral versus generic approach: while all companies highlighted the importance of have broader exchanges and learning; in a number of meetings particularly in Armenia and Azerbaijan, companies mentioned the need to have specific sectoral meetings to address gender issues. For example, companies operating the construction and renewable energy sector have very different issues related to gender that are not necessarily understood by others and require targeted sectoral approach. The same was mentioned by companies from the tourism and hospitality sector.

### Progress in Outcome 2:

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

Change in legal and/or regulatory frameworks aligned with international standards creating decent work for women



No change has been made in the **legal and/or regulatory frameworks** aligned with international standards creating decent work for women. (Activities in progress; target yet to be achieved)

Change in gender-responsive policies or programmes enabling WEE

**1 new and/or improved gender-responsive policy/programme** enabling WEE developed and/or implemented. (50% target achieved)

This involved the HILB advocacy campaign / program on women's labor rights (maternity, care leave, equal pay).



**3 legal and/or regulatory frameworks** aligned with international standards creating decent work for women developed and/or implemented. (Target achieved by 100%)

1. The maximum ceiling of GEL 1000 for state provided **maternity benefit** was removed from the Labour Code
2. The **state-provided maternity benefit** was doubled through Ministerial Decree and teachers' maternity leave was equated to the public servant standard (100% of salary for 6 months)
3. The **occupational minimum wage** was introduced for certain roles in state-funded healthcare facilities

**9 (against a target of 2)** new and/or improved gender-responsive policies or programmes enabling WEE developed and/or implemented. (Target overachieved)

1. Georgia has formally joined EPIC.
2. Project contributed to the Parliamentary Thematic inquiry.
3. Project contributed to MoESD Action Plan on SME Development.
4. RDA developed a stand-alone programme for women in Georgia.
5. RDA's gender equality strategy and action plan approved and adopted.
6. RDA's stand-alone program for women has been extended for 2024 with the state resources and has been institutionalized.
7. The state provided maternity benefit was doubled through the Ministerial Decree and the teachers maternity leave was equated to public servant's standard (100% of the salary for 6 months).
8. The occupational minimum wage was introduced for certain roles in the state-funded healthcare facilities.
9. UN Women contributed to the Parliamentary Thematic Inquiry on State Agricultural Policy and the project is supporting the Employment Strategy and Action Plan of the MoDPOTLHSA.

Compliance of labour legislation of Armenia and Georgia with ILO Conventions Nos. 100, 156, 183 and 189 and corresponding EU Directives

In Armenia MLSA is developing a new employment strategy and umbrella Social Strategy with the support of the project

Tripartite commission has issued the non-objection for ratification of ILO C 183 (Maternity Protection) and negotiations are ongoing to improve coverage.

## Field Observations gathered from the KIs:

In both Armenia and Georgia, the project was able to influence legislative and regulatory reforms, however, relatively more progress has been made in Georgia compared to Armenia. Georgia has been able to meet and, in some cases, surpass their planned targets. KIs indicate the following:

- **Perceived key additionality by partners:** Partner agencies at the national government level mentioned that UN Women brings some key value additions which includes:
  - Supporting regulatory reforms, generating evidence and analyzing data and informing strategies and programs of the government.
  - Building institutional processes, particularly in relation to capacity building of staff, having tools and processes in place to make regulatory amendments.
- Partners expressed strong appreciation for its alignment and contribution to Government Partners Agencies: in Armenia, the Statistical Committee of Armenia (ARMSTAT) highly values their engagement with UN Women which has helped them recognize the significance of gender analysis and the importance of data-driven policies. They confirmed that it helped

them shift their perceptions and understanding of gathering gender disaggregated data for policy use.

- Indication of policies informed by research and evidence: In Georgia, the partner agencies highlighted the importance of removing the maximum ceiling of GEL 1000 for state provided maternity benefit from the Labour Code and commended project support in influencing the increase in the state-provided maternity benefit through the Ministerial Decree. Additionally, the partner agencies highlighted the usefulness of the exploratory research titled, “Don’t rob your sister: a gender-sensitive policy reform in the area of inheritance and property rights” in Georgia. In addition, the work with GEOSTAT has been seen as highly effective in gathering data and information. The partner agency mentioned that with the help of WEESC programmatic goals and methodologies created together with the UN Women helped GEOSTAT to be 5th in the ranking of Open Data Watch – Unlocking the Data Revolution, which is a huge achievement.

In Armenia for the first time, the regulatory Impact Assessment was conducted of the ratification of ILO Convention No. 189 (Domestic Workers) and the research into the situation of Domestic Workers in Armenia is being used to contribute to the efforts towards ratification of ILO Conventions No. 189, No.183, and No.156. The partner agencies also highlighted the importance of the Amendments to the Labour Code that include new prohibitions of violence and harassment in the workplace as a first step towards ratification of ILO Convention No. 190 in Armenia. Statistical data is also being collected in the communities regarding the number of women, children, housewives, and agricultural workers, enabling program modifications tailored to community needs. A notable example is in the Shirak region, where statistical insights prompted adjustments to planned kindergarten construction.

- Contribution to Ministerial Strategies: In Armenia, the MLSA highlighted the value addition of WEESC to their agency to support Armenia’s Gender Strategy Analysis which was used as a basis for updating the Armenia Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2028. Other examples include inputs to the Draft Employment Strategy (2023-2030) by the Armenian MLSA.

In Georgia, the national government partners highlighted the importance of the project in contributing to Parliamentary Thematic inquiry in Georgia and the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development (MoESD) Action Plan on SME Development. Additionally, there was strong appreciation for UN Women’s contribution to the Parliamentary Thematic Inquiry on State Agricultural Policy and Employment Strategy and Action Plan of the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health, and Social Affairs of Georgia (MoIDPOTLHSA).

- Demonstration of successfully targeted gender-responsive programs: In Armenia, the Labour and Health Inspection Body highlighted the important role that the engagement with UN Women had in improving their legal awareness to protect women's rights, particularly in

relation to maternity and paternity leaves and gender pay gap. They worked with the project to develop content such as posters for awareness raising and discussions, addressing legal issues while highlighting instances of violations of employees' rights. This initiative significantly increased public engagement and inquiries, particularly on their inspection body's social media page. Additionally, they maintain a hotline for inquiries, registering and categorizing calls for monitoring purposes. The hotline receives an average of 400-500 calls per month, addressing labor legislation inquiries and providing preventive measures for employers. Given the success and requests from citizens, the Labour Inspectorate Office intends to continue the relationship with UN Women to further boost their awareness campaign and they aim to cover a wide range of legal topics beyond women's issues.

In Georgia, the highest success was with RDA on the targeted program. Success of RDA's greenhouse pilot project has now resulted in interest from other municipalities and it is being scaled to three additional municipalities through RDA's own budget.

- Improved understanding and awareness of gender-issues as a result of project engagement: Along a range of different activities, the agencies that WEESC partnered with shared their appreciation of UN Women in improving their perception, awareness and understanding of gender-issues and the ways in which to promote gender-sensitive policies. Although the application and continuity may be variable.
- Systems and tools in place for certain Government agencies: Partner agencies mentioned that the support of UN Women has contributed to strengthening internal processes and capacities and in some partner agencies they have the processes in place. For example, in Georgia, GEOSTAT mentioned that they now have new methodologies and systems that can be used for generating new data in the country. The World Statistical Forum will be held in Georgia in 2025, which is the result of UN Women's work. Similarly, Produce in Georgia increased women's participation from 30 to 50 percent points with the cooperation with UN Women. The Labour Conditions Inspecting Department (LCID) – Labour Inspectorate - under MoIDPOTLHSA of Georgia mentioned that with help of UN Women, they now have new regulatory mechanisms (e.g. regulatory mechanism on sexual harassment) that will be the basis for their work. In addition, the recommendation for state agencies to conduct Gender Impact Assessment of all programs and policies is also an important step towards promoting good practices. In Armenia, ARMSTAT has applauded the role of UN Women in training their staff and supplementing their efforts to collect gender disaggregated data. Although continuity has its challenges particularly due to resources and the ability to find appropriate staff and reliable data analysis, the support has led to improvements.
- Greater accountability through assessments and audits: Participatory gender audits (PGAs) and Gender Impact Assessments (GIA) are considered important mechanisms for supporting gender mainstreaming at the institutional level which can lead to concrete recommendations and gender action plans. However, the recommendations are yet to be fully actioned.

- **Risk of external factors reversing policy outcomes:** The progress in regard to the legal and policy reforms is very fragile and is highly dependent on the country's political course. For example, the recent developments in Georgia of April 2024 (e.g. abolishing gender quotas in Parliament and local municipalities) show that policy changes can be withdrawn at any time. Similarly, in Armenia there is a resistance to explicitly share errors or issues in statistical data collection generating mistrust and therefore non-use of certain data which were collected using a lot of resources.
- **Insufficient resources and coordination challenges:** The project underestimated the extent of UN Women human resources required for partnering with government agencies that do not have existing institutional mechanisms and knowledge of gender equality, to prioritise gender issues and focus on policy-making. In addition, KII's indicated coordination challenges with other programs and institutions.

Figure 8: Progress in Achieving Outcome 3 – Institutional Level



### Progress in Outcome 3:

#### **Field Observations gathered from the KII's in relation to Outcome 3:**

Similar to Outcome 2, significant progress has been made in Georgia compared to Armenia. KII's revealed the following additional information:

#### Greater appreciation for training and continued appetite for capacity building:

- Partner government and public institutions are all well aware and ready to implement different gender mainstreaming mechanisms that support women's economic empowerment, however, the initiatives to conduct such measures is mostly supported by the project and it is not clear how much of it will be continued after the project ends.
- The partner institutions are positive about adapting the gender mainstreaming (GM) tools to their needs and requirements and to be flexible in implementing and practicing those tools.
- Varied understanding of the importance of GIA: Agencies have undergone training and have included gender impact assessments and gender audits but some agencies are doing it as requested by line ministries with limited understanding of the benefits. This risks the processes becoming a one-off pilot.

Partners reported improved awareness and sensitisation: the attitude towards gender equality and women's economic empowerment has been changed and there are more entities that are willing to design and implement GM and WEE measures in their respective organizations.

Weak Institutionalisation: Resourcing is weak or insufficient to support continuity although they are included as part of the strategies and plans. For example, there is very little mention or indication of including a gender focal point or targeted resource to continue checking the implementation of action plans or to develop or improve the action plan in the future. It is also not clear how the trainings and gender action plan will be actioned in the future without additional external support. There is high reliance on UN Women's budget and expertise to continue some of the key changes. For example, GEOSTAT mentioned that they are hoping for more resources from UN Women to support the regular data collection and research for the Time Use Survey. The same was mentioned in Armenia where the ARMSTAT highlighted that they have the knowledge but not the resources to continue.

Increased turnover affects continuity and decision-makers continue to be male with poor gender awareness: in some of the KIIs, they mentioned that at the institution level, particularly at the local government bodies, the decisions are made by men who are not always gender aware. It would be useful to target the decision-makers as despite improved training of other staff, the institutionalisation remains poor. Similarly, high turnover within the government means the institutional memory is lost and despite being included in the reports and strategies these are not actioned. Therefore, some form of institutionalization of training and continued awareness needs to happen.

Poor coordination and information exchange between ministries and with the private sector: During the KIIs it was indicative that the agencies were asking for training materials and guidance which have already been tested out with other agencies. This indicates the gap of coordination between ministries. In addition, there is little information exchange and transparency of policies and procedures between ministries and agencies.

**Finding 24:** WEESC-II has contributed to the reduction in poverty of the beneficiaries and the reduction of vulnerabilities.

It is to be noted that all the locations selected included vulnerable populations and in phase 2, based on the poverty and exclusion criteria, the project extended its reach to locations where there are pockets of exclusion such as selective locations in the region of Mtskheta-Mtianeti in Georgia; (semi-)urban areas in Gegharkunik and Shirak regions of Armenia capital city where there is high concentration of domestic workers and Fuzuli, which was brought under Azerbaijan's governance after the renewed Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 2020. The project has done an assessment of vulnerability across multiple criteria including location, ethnicity, age, disability, exposure to GBV and socio-economic conditions. This has helped the project identify the extent and composition of vulnerable population in their target group. Across all the three countries, women mentioned the important role of WEESC to not only improve their ability to engage in economic activities but also improve their self-confidence, network with others in their community and advocate for their rights.

In Armenia, particularly Gegharkhunik, women mentioned that as a result of project activities many of them are becoming increasingly empowered to voice their experiences and perspectives. They emphasised that not only does the program offer women significant advantages in material terms, but it also fosters opportunities to start their own businesses and they feel valued as contributors. They also mentioned that the program has particularly empowered rural women, providing them with newfound strength.

In Azerbaijan, FGDs confirm that women in Fuzuli are most affected and vulnerable, and the project activities have significantly influenced their lives in multiple ways-including new income earning opportunities (e.g. beekeeping), access to machineries and equipment to increase efficiency (e.g. milking machine), improved sewing techniques, ability to network with others which is not common at all and also influence local norms and gender stereotypes. Both women and men have been adversely affected in that region from conflict and the women during

<sup>WRC</sup> There are no other alternatives.  
h“During the conflict, the wall of our house cracked, and the roof collapsed. I sought help from the executive authority, but none of us are employed, and our application was not considered. There is no assistance available, except from this place (WRC)...”  
FGD, Fuzuli

FGDs mentioned that the WRC is the only place of support for them. Initially there was some resistance by household members to allow women to join the training sessions but over time they have realised the benefits. One FGD participants mentioned that given the increased interest and value from the WRC activities, she alone was approached by 10 women in the community to help them get involved with the project activities.

In Georgia, all women attending the FGDs mentioned of increased self-confidence and improved mental health as a result of the trainings. The women participating in the FGDs from Kazbegi, Akhaltsikhe, Akhmeta and Dusheti, also commented that one of the biggest achievement of the project was changing stereotypes around women's ability to engage in economic activities and their ability to engage in decision-making. Some women mentioned that those who have been involved in project activities in phase 1 were criticized that "they are lazy housewives who had no other job but to attend the trainings" but now they are regarded positively as they are seen valuable members. However, women from Telavi and Akhalkalaki experienced some positive shifts but not as much as the others.

The FGDs also indicated that the degree of vulnerability affected women's ability to use/apply the skills and the success of their economic engagement. Women who have had the most difficulty in securing economic opportunity including grants faced a combination of vulnerabilities such as mobility constraints, number of dependents in the household and significantly higher unpaid care responsibilities; some were living in remote locations, representing ethnic minority population, had language barriers, had little or no ownership of land or are from the regions where the economic opportunities are very poor or have little or no access to markets and very poor access to alternative finance. Women who had one or more of these vulnerabilities and were from locations where they had less economic activities faced even more difficulties as they were stuck in a cycle of subsistence.

These issues became evident during the FGDs where we saw that in locations where there is a higher combination of these characteristics, women reported to have a lower ability to secure jobs or economic opportunities despite training. For example, in Georgia a some of the women who participated in FGDs in Telavi and Akhalkalaki had difficulty securing economic activities. During the FGDs in Armenia women expressed frustration that they are excluded from the state FBP support if they obtain any grant support or assets as a result of the project engagement as they appear to look less vulnerable and does not satisfy the state vulnerability criteria. According to them this might seem misleading because although their asset value or grant value is included in the vulnerability assessment of the government, this may be short term and if they cannot secure finance or continue to profitably run their economic activity then they remain vulnerable.

## Efficiency

**Finding 30:** Leadership and management of WEESC-II has been adequate to ensure the achievement of most results.

Reporting is quarterly for internal UN Women management and semi-annually to donors. Report templates are standard UN and include, Results-based Management (RBM) report for

numerical summaries, narrative reports for descriptive analysis, and Indicator Tracking Table (ITT) reports for indicator tracking.

SDC stated that WEESC II reporting is at the output level not on progress towards the achievement of project outcomes. They went on to say the reports are more general, lacking specifics. UN Women responded that they actually provide more specific data precisely because they report mainly on outputs. SDC did concede that reporting on outcomes is harder as UN Women need to show how WEESC II has achieved the targets and if not, why. They also said reporting using the UN template does not provide what is required by donors. Additional difficulty has been with financial reporting. UN Women use a different structure compared to other programs supported by SDC, which causes them difficulty as they are not aligned with the SDC financial templates. UN Women states that financial donor reports are prepared by UN Women HQ on a central level. These reports are prepared in accordance with the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) on the accrual accounting basis. UN Women's standard format is harmonized with UNDP and UNFPA and is agreed with the Member States at the HQ level. Special formats exist for the EU, USAID, IFAD and UN agencies. Currently, according to the Donor Agreement templates, UN Women provides SDC and ADA financial reports in accordance with UN Women standard procedures and formats. UN Women Georgia Country Office is not able to change the financial report template as it is beyond their authority. As with the EU and USAID, should SDC require a different format, they must request it at the HQ level.

Some NGOs complained that the reporting templates UN Women provide and require completing are mainly quantitative reports with little room for qualitative results reporting. They don't tell the whole story. UN Women stated that they trained NGOs several times on the reporting templates. Any extra qualitative information, anything the NGOs have to say, can be attached as an annex. However, they most often do not use this opportunity and usually, UN Women requests the additional annexes. It may be beneficial to follow-up with the NGOs to determine where the weaknesses exist. Individuals in NGOs may not grasp the importance of stories, or they may lack proficient storytelling skills, making it difficult to capture human narratives. Examples could be provided, and perhaps it would be possible to create a specific template format for that annex so that NGOs can benefit.

The implementing NGOs noted that the turnover of officers at both UN Women and UNDP has been a problem for them. The NGOs have had to spend time justifying and explaining their operations, what they are doing and why they are doing it, even though it was agreed to by the previous officers. Both the NGOs and UNDP stated that the reporting requirements are a challenge. They are stressful for the staff to complete, as they see the reporting requirements as overly complicated and feel they need to be simplified.

UNDP stated that they do not receive UN Women's semi-annual regional donor reports. They would like to as they feel the reports would provide them with insights into their

accomplishments and would be valuable for understanding the context behind reported figures and success stories.

It was observed by the Evaluation Team, that WEESC II lacks a UN Women brand in Component One, i.e., UN Women has a low profile related to Component One. For example, beneficiaries in Armenia thought WEESC II was a World Vision project, and similarly, beneficiaries in Azerbaijan thought the project was UNDP's.

**Finding 33:** To a large extent the approaches and strategies used by WEESC-II were considered efficient.

UN Women's financial management system for programme implementation follows the UN2UN system where funds flow from UN Women to UNDP for Component One. UN Women and UNDP have transitioned to the Quantum system for financial management. The new system enhances transparency and accountability, facilitating smoother financial transactions and procurement processes. SDC did say that overall, the quality of reporting by UN Women to donors has improved overtime. SDC noted that the Lessons Learnt section of the donor reports were particularly useful to them.

Payments are made via bank transfers to implementing NGOs. Cash transactions are limited to specific circumstances where alternative payment methods are necessary.

The Evaluation Team reviewed the *Interim financial statement for the period ended 31 December 2023* and the *WEESC II Phase Annual Work-Plan for 2024*. As stated in the semi-annual reports to the donors, the project has a \$4,700,000 USD budget of which SDC provides \$4,000,000 and ADA provides \$700,000 USD. The expenditures for 2023 were \$2,080,882, according to the Interim Financial Statement. The breakdown of expected expenditures by country for 2024, the last year of WEESC II, can be seen in the Annual Work Plan.

#### Breakdown of Expected Expenditures by Country for 2024

Country	Amount	Percentage
Georgia	\$286,448	28.6%
Armenia	\$384,131	38.4%
Azerbaijan	\$330,707	33.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,001,286</b>	<b>100%</b>

Adding the expenditure for 2023 of \$2,080,882 to the expected expenditure of \$1,001,286, the total is \$3,082,168. The remaining \$1,617,832 is assumed, by the Evaluation Team, to have been spent in previous years of WEESC II implementation, however, this could not be confirmed without the previous years' financial reports or a column for cumulative expenditures in the

2023 financial statement reviewed by the Team. The difficulty in following the financial reporting has been pointed out by the donors. The Evaluators found the same difficulty with UN Women's financial reporting. For example, it is not possible to determine the total expenditures by country from the interim reports. According to SDC and ADA, UN Women use their own financial reporting template that does not provide the specifics required for the two donors to adequately monitor WEESC II expenditures. In similar projects being funded by the donors in the South Caucasus, the recipients utilize templates provided by the donors.

UN Women have subsequently added additional information:

- Please correct the figures, ADA contribution was EUR 700,000 to the total budget not USD 700,000. Also, there was additional USD 580,421.09 advanced to RPs as per December 2023 interim financial report, please mention this as well - as this adds not to delivery but to utilization of funds information.
- I have revised the ADA tranche number in line with the total tranches received with different exchange rates - totaling to EUR 700,000
- Will the 2024 forecast change since the ADA amount changed from USD 700,000 to USD 814,270.76? The wording and numbers should be changed in the text accordingly

As evidenced in the above chapters of this evaluation report, the donors and beneficiaries are satisfied with outcomes of the project and feel it has been implemented in a cost-effective manner, given the size of the budget and the expected outcomes to be achieved. The Evaluators found no reason to refute the general impressions provided by the project's stakeholders, however the following points are raised in an effort to improve project efficiency going forward.

Several of the implementing NGOs interviewed in the three counties stated they did not have a sufficient budget to carry out all the activities they had wished to under WEESC-II. For example, the Armenia General Benevolent Union stated it was not possible for them to cover all project indicators due to lack of funding. Yet, UN Women informed the Evaluation Team that both UNDP Armenia and UNDP Azerbaijan had funds left unspent as WEESC-II is nearing its completion (mid 2024) in the two countries. This contradiction does suggest a cost-efficiency issue. See more on this in the sub-section below.

AGBU also stated that UNDP wanted money to be spent within three months for certain activities, but proper process, involving training, the provision of technical assistance, follow-up, and reinforcement requires about 12 months to be effective in ensuring the beneficiaries will succeed in their business.

Based on information obtained from WRC coordinators, the situation regarding some grants was such that decisions were made about who would receive the resources, but due to lack of finances, distribution was delayed. In other words, they would allocate the resources to the grant recipients once the funding became available. The names of these grant recipients were

added to the ITT. Unfortunately, no note was included to distinguish between the actual recipients and the expected recipients.

On another cost-effective note: in Azerbaijan, WEESC-II benefits from the use of a UN volunteer who assists UNDP in organizing events, preparing articles and stories, and handling public relations. The volunteer contributes to the project's efficiency by assisting in administrative and communication-related activities, enhancing the overall effectiveness of programme operations.

WEESC-II is operating in a very fragile political environment with the new laws being put in place which negatively affect WEE initiatives. Examples of these can be seen in Georgia where the government has recently passed the "Foreign Agents' bill", which hampers the operation of NGOs/CBOs and they have also introduced a bill to rescind the quota for women parliament members. Donors, interviewed by the Evaluation Team, stated their headquarters will require convincing arguments as to why they should continue to fund WEE projects in this environment in the South Caucasus.

## Sustainability

**Finding 35:** Over the life of WEESC-II there has been an increasing effectiveness in generating national ownership of the project outputs in each country, however institutionalization has been moderate and variable across the three countries.

and

**Finding 36:** The prospect of WEESC-II's results being continued beyond the end of the intervention is varied across women beneficiaries, the public sector organizations, and the private sector companies.

Factors influencing economic continuity and growth among women entrepreneurs at the grassroots level: continuity of economic activities is dependent on the nature of the economic activity, size and maturity of the entrepreneur, access to markets and opportunities in the region and availability of alternative finance. In most cases the size of the grants were small and one-off in nature which meant they were good for supplementing existing economic activities but for start-ups it has been difficult to continue unless they made profit to reinvest or if they could secure alternative sources of finance. In agriculture continuity seemed easier as women already were engaged in such activities. Across all FGDs conducted in Azerbaijan women expressed intent to continue or expand their economic activities. In Georgia women in Kazbegi and Akhmeta expressed an intention to expand unlike women in Dusheti and Akhaltsikhe. Greenhouses were also seen as a growing success and women expressed their intent to continue working on them as there is a clear market for it. Women in FGDs highlighted the difficulties in accessing finances especially start-ups who are not usually able to secure commercial funding due to lack of a commercial history or record of transactions.

Strong women's networks ensure continuity of advocacy: WEESC has been able to foster networking amongst women through the self-help groups in Armenia and Georgia, Women's Rooms in Georgia and Women's Resource Centers in Azerbaijan. 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 opinion and communicate their needs and rights with different stakeholders. Even in the absence of the NGO activities, in some locations, the women continued to advocate for their needs through these networks.

Business development services and training is highly reliant on NGOs which are further dependent on the project: the training component of the project is seen as extremely useful by women to help them better understand and manage their economic activities. There is a need to support and monitor the businesses for some time to ensure that they are able to continue. Such skills are currently being supported through the NGOs who are highly reliant on the project.

WRCs are seen as a very important source of information, economic activities and social capital for women. They serve as a one-stop shop for women in Azerbaijan and there is little or no alternatives available to such centers. The sustainability of WRCs has been extremely critical for the project. Alongside training the WRC Coordinators and Staff to manage such services, registering the WRCs as local NGOs was the first step towards ensuring financial sustainability so that they could become eligible for funding opportunities. KIIs as part of the evaluation confirmed that all WRC coordinators had undergone Training of Trainers (ToT) on business operations and one of them participated in English courses, as well as a seminar on the CEDAW convention. This has not only supported them in delivering services to women but also improved their own capacity to run the WRCs as NGOs.

Achieving financial sustainability of WRCs is important: the WRCs continue to be highly reliant on the WEESC project funding with some support from the State Committee for Family, Women, and Children's Affairs. The WRCs did mention securing other grants but the size of those grants to run the activities have not been adequate. Currently all coordinators work closely with local government deputies on social, political, and humanitarian issues under the Chair of the Local Executive Committee and the WRCs are provided with office spaces to carry out the training and social mobilization activities for women. However, the absence of adequate finance may affect their ability to support such expenses in the long run. WRCs also explored the possibility of charging a membership fee but that has raised concerns amongst members and generated a feeling of mistrust whereby WRCs decided not to pursue that route. WRCs continue to explore alternative options to improve their sustainability. For example, the WRC in Khazar has set itself up as a limited liability company so that they can engage in business activities to generate profit that could be reinvested to run the WRC.

Strong commitment to integrate gender-responsive policies and procedures by government agencies but institutionalisation and actioning of plans in general has been moderate risking continuity: A number of gender strategies and policies have been initiated with the support of UN Women, however, evidence of continued enforcement of action is not clear, with some exceptions such as RDA in Georgia where resource has been allocated to scale up the gender targeted greenhouse project. KIIs reveal that despite having clear actions in the strategic plans, sufficient resources (HR and finance) have not been put in place to action them. For example, there is no evidence of gender focal points or of dedicated personnel to move the agenda forward in the absence of UN Women. Some of the strategic plans are coming to an end in 2024/2025 and there was no clear evidence of how the agencies will review the plans to integrate change for the next strategic plans. Similarly, both ARMSTAT and GEOSTAT indicated high degree of resource and expertise reliance on UN Women to continue and see the risk that the new systems and methodologies will not be used once UN Women withdraws its resources (human, IT and material resources) as all the data collection requires money and there are no financial resources for making this kind of specific, gender-focused data collection without external support. Overall, it is clear that there is significant increase in appetite and willingness to continue working with UN Women to develop gender responsive strategies, policies and procedures but there is not enough evidence of continuing such action independently. Therefore, there is a need to monitor and reinforce how certain strategic partners are 'continuing' to action the strategic plans/programs without project support.

**Use of local structures:** The project is building on local structures to strengthen women's ability to become self-sustaining. For example, in Georgia, as of December 2023, 157 women are part of 13 village savings and loan associations (VSLAs). In June 2023, informational meetings introduced the VSLA model in the municipalities of Akhalkalaki, Akhmeta, Bolnisi and Dusheti. This was followed by establishing savings groups by an additional 21 women across the communities of Buzaveti, Khulgumo and Matani. In Azerbaijan, the WRCs are an important source for sustaining the network for social and economic activities for women and the continued operation of such structures with gradual reduction in support from external sources will be critical for their sustenance in the future.

**Staff turnover affecting institutional memory and continuity:** Some of the partner agencies mentioned that high turnover of staff affects the momentum of work and the one-time gender awareness and knowledge is lost. Therefore, there is a need to ensure that the training components are embedded as part of the staff training modules across the government agencies so that they are not lost with the loss of personnel.

**Lack of demonstration of the benefits of GIA affects its importance to be continued:** There is variable understanding of the importance of Gender Impact Assessments and Participatory Gender Audits. Not all agencies understand the importance of it and treat it more as required to comply with the Ministry's request which may affect continuity in the long run.

Private sector WEP signatory partners are seeing value in integrating better gendered practices at workplace and the process of doing the gap analysis has been seen as a valuable exercise.

Some of the companies interviewed as part of the KIs are already including gender action plans as part of their organisational strategy while others are in the process of applying the recommendations. It is important to further demonstrate the link between gender-integration and business benefits to strengthen the potential for continuity.

**Finding 37:** To a large extent WEESC-II has been able to identify strategic public and NGO partners across the three countries that could pick up the work of the project as it comes to an end, however, the strategic importance of partnering with the private sector is not strongly demonstrated.

Although WEESC-II has been able to identify strategic public and private sector partners and NGO partners across the three countries, there are instances when the project took up engagements with agencies that was not highly strategic but more as a response to request. WEESC-II could have done better to consolidate and deepen the project strategic partnerships to strengthen institutionalisation and sustainability of impact.

During some of the KIs with certain public agencies in Georgia, it was evident that they were struggling to find a link with gender audits and impact assessments to how they will action their recommendations and the subsequent benefits to their agency. For example, the State Laboratory Agency underwent training and gender assessment to develop a gender strategy with support from WEESC primarily to comply with the requirements of the EU horizon programme. Although the knowledge and capacity of their staff has improved the management was struggling to link the concrete benefits of a gender strategy to their function as an organisation. Similarly, the Ministry of Economy in Armenia is an important partner for WEESC but not much strategic results were achieved. In Azerbaijan, WRC continue to be an important source of continued impact for women but WEESC needs to explore partnerships with additional system actors such as the private sector and financial institutions to expand market opportunities for women. Additionally, some form of engagement with local government agencies in Azerbaijan will further sustain the results of the project.

Across all three countries the strategic importance of partnering with the private sector is not strongly demonstrated and they are critical agents of change to boost market and economic opportunities for women.

**Finding 38:** National and local institutions demonstrate leadership commitment and technical capacity to continue to replicate some project activities, however, there is a weakness to institutionalise of some project activities at a broader level.

Signs of 'adapt' or autonomous change by selective agencies: There are signs of institutionalisation in selective public agencies across Georgia and Armenia and in some private sector actors across all three countries. Based on secondary documents and primary interviews, it appears that Georgia has a relatively higher degree of institutionalisation compared to the other two countries. For example, in Georgia, the pay-gap methodology review is expected to

continue; RDA has successfully scaled up the greenhouse project in three additional municipalities (Chkhorotsku, Vani and Chokhatauri) with their internal funding allocating GEL 1 million to this expansion. RDA is also working with local financial institutions to extend agri-insurance and commercial credit to farmers at the municipality level. The MOIDPOTLHSA has appointed a staff member responsible for gender equality in the newly established Research and Analysis Unit and MOESD has integrated Gender Impact Audits (GIA) aspects into the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) methodology. ISET-PI has institutionalized the Course on Gender and Economics in the BA programme of the International School of Economics at Tbilisi State University. In Armenia, the Deputy Prime Minister's Office created a position of Adviser, for gender mainstreaming in all of the Government's policies. In addition, the Health and Labour Inspection Body of Armenia is expanding their outreach on promoting citizen's rights as a result of initial success with UN Women support

Growing evidence of successful GRB at the municipality level but continued monitoring is required: Across Armenia and Georgia the inclusion of gender relevant changes in the local budgetary process is a sign of progress towards institutionalization. There is greater evidence of integration and roll-out of the budget to meet women's needs in phase 2, compared to phase 1. However, this needs to continue. The success in GRB has been higher in Georgia than Armenia. In 2023, 147 initiatives were presented and 61 were included in 2024 budget which comprise of 5% of the 2024 budget of the 12 municipalities and 2.7% of allocations for village support programmes of the same municipalities were brokered via women's initiatives amounting to a total of approximately 25 million GEL. Based on a review of nine municipal budgets the WEESC monitoring report suggests that 28% of the budget allocations meet GRB principles. According to WEESC-II donor reports, 28% of the 2023 annual work plans in seven municipalities in Armenia are gender mainstreamed and included in the budget. Note that FGDs with women and KIIs with local NGOs in Georgia indicate that although women prefer some form of support to negotiate with the local government, there is strong evidence that they are continuing to engage in some level of advocacy and negotiation with the local government without close supervision. However, the program needs to closely monitor if such engagements continue without project support as there is still room for improving gender awareness of the decision-makers at the municipality offices (e.g. the Mayors and Deputy Mayors who are mostly men).

Advancing gender-sensitive workplace practices- progress and challenges by the private sector: There is significant willingness and commitment from the private sector to introduce gender-sensitive workplace practices. While much progress has been made in Georgia given that the sister program has been working with the private sector much longer; majority of the work in Armenia and Azerbaijan has been at an initial stage in conducting the gap analysis for companies and developing plans to improve workplace practices in relation to recruitment and retention, workplace conditions, gender awareness of staff and career development. While some companies have already initiated changes, others are still at the initial gap analysis phase and require support to implement the changes. Some of the large companies in Azerbaijan are already moving further ahead beyond project support to initiate outreach events at universities to reach out to potential female employees. As part of the Armenian Chamber of Commerce programs, some of the companies in Armenia are getting together to propose policies on

maternity to the government. While for some of the companies they are actively trying to implement change, for others becoming a WEP Signatory is more of a brand endorsement. This is why it is important for WEESC to follow-up and closely monitor application of practices to close the gaps identified when signing the WEP.

If we consider an analytical framework for systemic change across four key quadrants presented in Figure 11 below<sup>54</sup>, it can be seen that much of the WEESC sustainability progress is still at the 'Adopt' and 'Adapt' stage where partners have adopted new practices in cooperation and with support from the program; some have advanced to implementing independent changes at a wider systemic level but this is yet to happen broadly across more partners and beneficiaries.

**Adopt:** This is defined as the state when "Partners take up new practice, it works well, plan to continue". So far that the WEESC project partners are adopting/testing out new practices as a result of the project support, however there is room to monitor continuity. This is considered 'green'.

**Adapt:** This is defined as the state when "Partner invests in change independently without further support". In terms of WEESC, partners are somewhat investing in change independently without further support. For example, private sector partners in all three countries are gradually investing in activities to promote better gender-equality practices in the workplace. There is strong willingness and commitment from partners but institutionalisation has been varied across different types of partners and beneficiary level and needs to be monitored to check for continuity without program support. This is depicted by 'amber'.

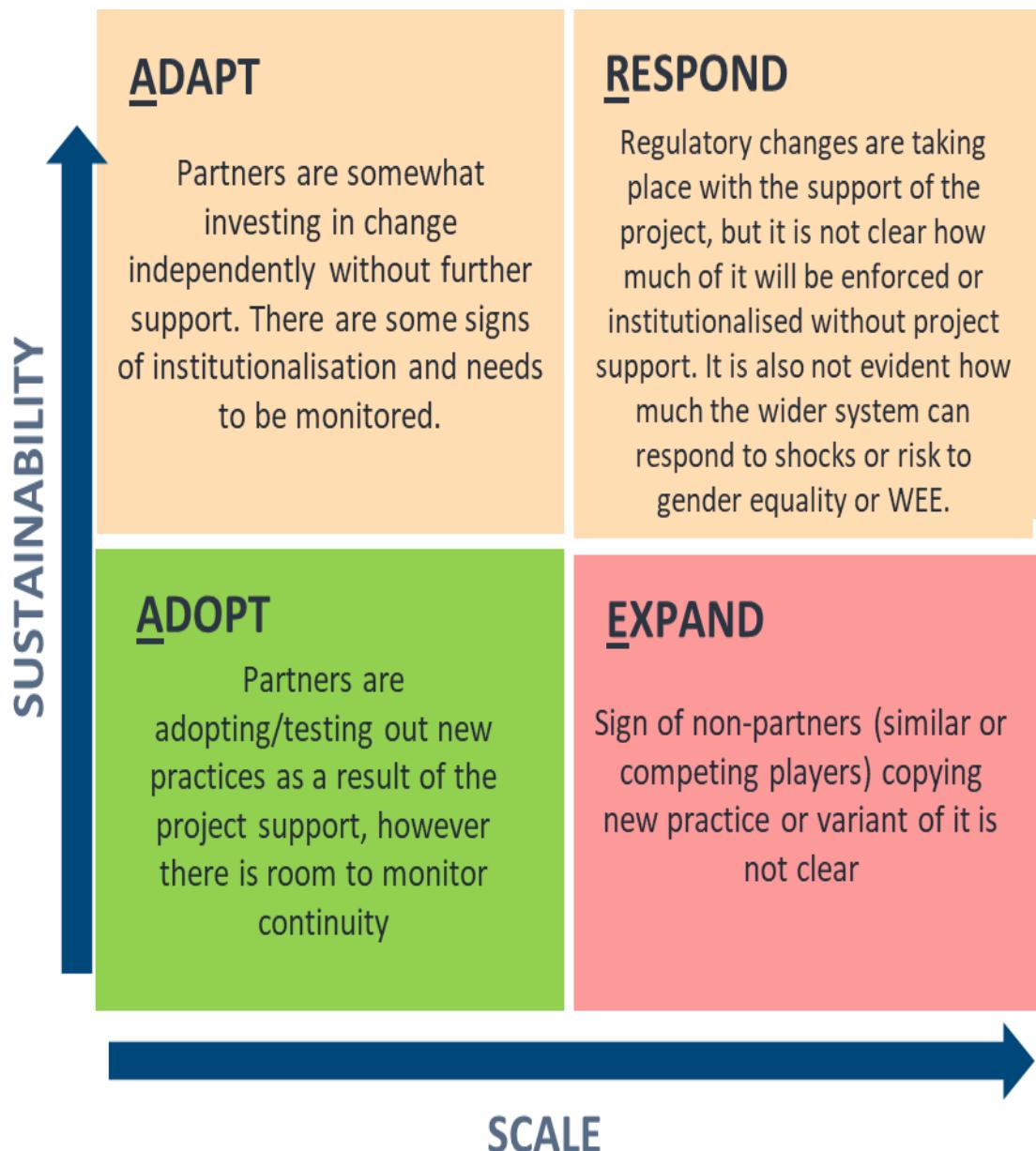
**Respond:** This is defined as the state where there is "Wider response in market system (by non-competing players)". It questions, that if you left now, would the system be supportive of the changes introduced. It appears that regulatory changes are taking place with the support of the project, but it is not clear how much of it will be enforced or institutionalised without project support. It is also not evident how much the wider system can respond to shocks or risk to gender equality or WEE. This is depicted as "red".

**Expand:** This state is defined as "non-partners (similar or competing players) copy new practices or variant of it". At this point much of the change has happened across the WEESC-II partners and it is not clear if the changes have gone beyond the partners.

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<sup>54</sup> The Systemic Change Framework by the Springfield Center

Figure 9: The Systemic Change Framework



## Annex IX – Case Studies

### Armenia

## Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus Phase II

### CASE STUDY - ARMENIA



June 2024

## CASE STUDY – ARMENIA

Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus – Phase II (WEESC-II) is a three year (August 2021 to July 2024), US\$4.7 million regional project, supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Austrian Development Agency. It builds on WEESC – I (2018- 2021) and operates in three countries in South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.) The project aims to ensure that women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, are economically empowered and participate in relevant decision-making.

In Armenia, the project is managed by UN Women Georgia and UNDP Armenia, and implemented at the grassroots level through Green Lane NGO, World Vision Armenia and Armenia General Benevolent Union (AGBU) in 11 consolidated municipalities: four in Gegharkunik (Chambarak, Geghamasar, Shoghakat, Vardenis) and seven in Shirak (Akhuryan, Amasia, Ani, Arpi, Ashotsk, Marmashen, Sarapat).

This case study is based on the evaluation of the WEESC - II project which included a careful study of Project documents, gender-related policy documents, 22 Key Informant Interviews (KII) with 29 people (20 F, 9 M) including 4 project staff, 1 donor, 6 implementing partners, 8 National and local government representatives, 7 private sector partners and 3 research centers and 4 focus group discussions (FGD) with 20 women beneficiaries.

### Background

Women in Armenia face many challenges and stereotypes that affect them deeply, one of them being the issue of gender inequality. Although Armenia's legislative frameworks in support of ensuring gender equality and advancing women's empowerment is relatively strong, pervasive gender norms and stereotypes confine women to home and the care of families. The National Constitution prohibits discrimination of any kind and Armenia adopted the Law on Guaranteeing Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men (2013), the Law on prevention of violence within the family, protection of victims of violence within the family and restoration of peace in the family (2017) and a Prime Ministerial Decree on the Council Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2019). However, budgets are small, legislative enforcement is weak and challenges remain for women's economic empowerment, women's political participation, and women's unpaid, unsupported care work in the home. The World Bank's Gender Data Portal in 2024 reports:

- Female labor force participation rate in 2023 was 56% compared to 68.3% for men. Since 1990, female labor force participation has decreased.
- More women are in vulnerable employment (informal work arrangements without social protection or safety nets to guard against economic shocks) than men: vulnerable employment among women is 66.7% and among men is 55.8% in Armenia for 2022. The

proportion of women in vulnerable employment has remained virtually unchanged since independence in 1991.

- Financial inclusion is relatively low: 52.2% of women report having an account (by themselves or together with someone else) at a bank or another type of financial institution or report personally using a mobile money service in 2021 compared to 59.4% of men.
- The adjusted gender wage gap in Armenia is 28.4%.<sup>55</sup>

In this context, the UN and the Government of Armenia agreed to implement the WEESC project based on the theory of change that postulates that if women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, are provided with skills, economic opportunities, relevant information, network and support to become farmers / entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector; and adequate legislative and policy frameworks are in place and implemented to enable women's economic empowerment government, and public and non-governmental institutions develop and deliver gender-responsive programmes, public services, strategies and plans for women's economic empowerment, then women will be economically and socially empowered.

WEESC-II aligns with the initiatives of the Government of Armenia aimed at enhancing employment opportunities for women and vulnerable groups, such as the *Armenia Country Strategic Plan (2019–2024*, the *Work, Armenia*" initiative, the *Decent Work Country Program (2019-2023* and the *Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Armenia 2021-2025*, which prioritizes gender equality and women's empowerment to strengthen governance, civil society, and the social contract within Armenia.

## Expected Results

In Armenia, WEESC-II contributes to the goal of women's economic empowerment (WEE), through the following seven outputs and three outcomes:

Table 7: WEESC-II Outputs and Outcomes in Armenia

Outputs	Outcomes
<b>1.1:</b> Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, obtain skills and access information, networks, economic opportunities and support services to become farmers/entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector	
<b>1.2:</b> Women and women's groups are empowered to participate in local planning and budgeting (e.g. GRB discussions), and greater awareness around the harmful social norms is created in the communities	<b>1:</b> Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, use skills, economic opportunities, relevant information, network and support to become farmers/entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector in Azerbaijan ( <i>grass-roots level</i> )
<b>1.3:</b> Businesses have an increased understanding of the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) and have the skills to implement measures that benefit women, specifically in rural areas	
<b>2.1:</b> Data and evidence is generated to develop legislative and policy frameworks that enable women's economic empowerment in Armenia and Georgia	<b>2:</b> Armenia and Georgia implement adequate legislative and policy reforms and frameworks to enable women's economic empowerment ( <i>policy</i> )

<sup>55</sup> UNECE, *Measuring the Gender Pay Gap Armenia*. The adjusted gender wage gap differs from the unadjusted gender wage gap as it takes into account factors such as education and hours worked to develop a more fair comparison between the work of men versus women.

Outputs	Outcomes
<b>2.2:</b> The national gender machineries of Armenia and Georgia are supported to carry out changes in policy and legislative frameworks enabling women's economic empowerment	<i>and legislation level)</i>
<b>3.1:</b> Targeted government, public and non-governmental institutions are strengthened to mainstream gender in their operations, and their personnel have adequate knowledge and skills	<b>3:</b> The government, public and non-governmental institutions are strengthened to develop and deliver gender-responsive programmes, policies and services for women's economic empowerment in Armenia and Georgia ( <i>institutional level</i> )
<b>3.2:</b> Targeted government and public institutions develop specific programmes and institutional amendments to support women's economic empowerment	

### Achievements

WEESC-II social mobilization, training and information programmes reached 521 women in Armenia, 72% of them poor and socially excluded compared to a target of 300 poor and vulnerable women.

Women reported receiving training in business plan writing, taxation, CV writing, computer skills, and using social media for marketing as well as training in cultivation practices in agriculture and livestock management and the use of equipment for specific businesses e.g. sewing, beauty care, etc. Women in the Shirak region reported participation in decision making processes after Gender Responsive Budget (GRB) training and that they have been able to use the financial planning and management for their household income and expenditure.

Women in the Gegharkhunik region expressed frustration that they had not been able to apply many of their new skills as there is little economic activity in the area and most of the women met reported that the lack of financing was a constraint for improving their income through entrepreneurial activities. Nonetheless 148 of the 521 women (28%) reported increased income due to participation in WEESC-II.

Table 2 shows that as of December 2023, WEESC-II had met 93% of its target for the number of women with increased incomes in Armenia with six months remaining in the project.

Table 8: Women in Armenia with Increased Incomes

Category of Women	Number with increased Income by Dec. 31 2023	End of Project Target	Percentage Achievement to Dec. 31 2023
Smallholder women farmers with increased incomes from agricultural production	70	70	100%
Women with increased incomes from entrepreneurial (non-agricultural) activities	45	60	75%
Women having new or better employment	33	30	110%
Total	148	160	93%

Women also reported significant non-financial benefits from participating in WEESC-II, including improved social capital, awareness of their rights and confidence. Some reported a reduced workload due to machinery purchased with WEESC-II grants and some women were able to use their skills to apply for other grants, particularly from government and other development projects. Women also reported improved perceptions of men and other household members of their role in economic activity and some women reported reduced Gender Based Violence (GBV) as a result of their economic activity.

Ninety-three women beneficiaries (against a target of 100 women) reported contributing to local planning and budgeting discussions aimed at addressing their socio-economic concerns, however, only 15 of the advocacy initiatives facilitated by women beneficiaries were successful compared to a target of 45. Women reported that in some places they have been able to directly approach the municipality and the gender-sensitive budgeting training helped build trust with local authorities but only in some instances. Monitoring reports show that as of December 2023, 7 out of 52 municipalities conducted one or more elements of GRB.

A total of 15 private enterprises in Armenia have signed the UN Women/UN Global Compact Women's Economic Empowerment Principles (WEP) with a focus on implementing gender-responsive corporate policies/practices. The majority of these companies are from the Finance and IT sector and a few from the hospitality and construction sector.

WEESC-II has also made progress on the enabling environment for WEE in Armenia, including helping the Statistical Committee of Armenia (ARMSTAT) recognize the significance of gender analysis and of gathering gender disaggregated data for policy use. Better statistical data helped to meet community needs for example in Shirak region, where statistical insights prompted adjustments to planned kindergarten construction.

Improved data also helped the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Armenia (MLSA)'s Gender Strategy Analysis which was used as a basis for updating the *Armenia Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2028* and the *Draft Employment Strategy (2023-2030)*. In addition, the project helped with the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) for the ratification of ILO Convention No. 189 (Domestic Workers) and research into the situation of Domestic Workers in Armenia which contributes to ratification of ILO Conventions No. 189, No.183, and No.156 and was involved in amendments to the Labour Code, to include prohibitions of violence and harassment in the workplace, an important step towards ratification of ILO Convention No. 190 in Armenia.

The Health Inspection and Labour Body (HILB) of Armenia highlighted how engagement with the project improved protection of women's rights, particularly in relation to maternity and paternity leaves and gender pay gap. They worked with the project to develop content such as posters for awareness raising and discussions, addressing legal issues while highlighting instances of violations of employees' rights. This initiative significantly increased public engagement and inquiries, particularly on their inspection body's social media page. Given the success and requests from citizens, they plan to continue the relationship.

Finally, the Deputy Prime Minister's Office now has a full time Adviser on Gender Mainstreaming in all Government Policies.

## Conclusions

WEESC-II was well aligned with the priorities of Armenia and relevant to the needs of the target beneficiaries. It is compatible with other Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) interventions in the country and aligned with UN Women's Strategic Plan and with UNDP priorities in the South Caucasus Region.

WEESC-II has exceeded its targets for the number of women reached and reached 93% of its life of project target for the number of women whose incomes are increased as a result. It has also increased women's social capital, awareness of rights and confidence and improved community attitudes towards WEE. It has also increased business understanding of and application of WEPs and made progress on the enabling environment.

## Lessons Learned

- Women value the training they have received but are unable to put it into practice if there are few economic opportunities available in their communities.
- Women's entrepreneurship and income generating activities are most successful when they build on women's existing economic activities, and are constrained by the lack of financing. While this is true for both micro-level income generating activities and larger businesses, their needs are different.
- Giving women a voice in municipal planning requires ensuring that the municipalities are willing to listen as well.
- Influencing policy and legislative frameworks always takes time, and institutionalizing changes takes even longer. Both also depend on the priorities and ongoing willingness of government and face budget and human resource challenges.

## Recommendations

- Gender-sensitive value chain analysis might help to identify economic opportunities for women in more disadvantaged communities and could be considered for WEESC-III.
- Assist women to acquire alternative sources of financing for example by linking them to existing government bodies or institutions (e.g. Azerbaijan Micro-Finance Association) with programs and products to support women or micro and small enterprises, and helping those who do not have bank accounts to open them.
- Expand and reinforce awareness of WEPs in businesses.
- Continue work with government on the enabling environment.

## Next Steps

WEESC-I reached 171 women in Armenia and WEESC-II reached 521 for a total of 692 women. Under WEESC-I 141 women secured jobs or self-employment lasting more than six months and

under WEESC-II an additional 148 women had increased incomes from employment or self employment for a total of 289 women. Roughly 14% of women were employed in WEESC-I and 22% were employed in the second phase with the rest being self-employed. During WEESC-I 140 women were trained in GRB and 79 of them in seven communities engaged on community planning, and in WEESC-II a further 93 women were trained and engaging with municipal governments. During WEESC-I 11 companies in Armenia signed up to WEPs: this increased to 15 companies under WEESC-II.

During WEESC-I Work started with ARMSTAT including a Gender Assessment of the National Statistical System and a Time Use Survey. This work has continued under WEESC-II. Work on the RIA for ILO Conventions number 156, 183 and 189 was started under WEESC-I and guidelines were created for risk assessment of harmful and hazardous work for pregnant and post-partum women and nursing mothers. WEESC-II has built on all these initiatives however staff turnover and budget constraints limit the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming in government.

Under WEESC-III greater attention needs to be given to sustainability. Consideration should be given to enhancing women's linkages to existing sources of support, such as micro-finance institutions for women entrepreneurs and gender-sensitive agricultural extension workers for farmers. Consider having "WEPs Champions" engage with other companies. Engagement with government needs to continue with emphasis on ensuring there are budget allocations to support ongoing work such as gathering and analyzing gender disaggregated data for policy use.

## Azerbaijan

# Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus Phase II

## CASE STUDY - AZERBAIJAN



June 2024

## CASE STUDY – AZERBAIJAN

Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus – Phase II (WEESC-II) is a three year (August 2021 to July 2024), US\$4.7 million regional project, supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Austrian Development Agency. It builds on WEESC – I (2018- 2021) and operates in three countries in South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.) The project aims to ensure that women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, are economically empowered and participate in relevant decision-making.

In Azerbaijan, the project is managed by UN Women Georgia and UNDP Azerbaijan, and implemented at the grassroots level through Women's Resource Centres (WRCs) in Baku-Khazar, Fuzuli, Gusar and Sabirabad.

This case study is based on the evaluation of the WEESC - II project which included a careful study of Project documents, gender-related policy documents, 20 Key Informant Interviews (KII) with 22 participants (17F, 5M) including 4 project staff, 2 donor representatives, 5 representatives of implementing partners, 5 government and 5 private sector representatives and 12 focus group discussions (FGD) with 84 women beneficiaries.

### Background

Since becoming an independent state in 1991, Azerbaijan has made progress on gender equality, which is guaranteed by the country's constitution and legislation including the *Criminal Code* and the *Labor Code*. Azerbaijan ratified the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) in 1995 and its optional protocol in 2002, adopted the *Law on State Guarantees of Equal Rights for Women and Men* in 2006 and a law to prevent domestic violence in 2010. While the Government of Azerbaijan is committed to supporting the equal and balanced participation of women and men in public and social life, according to the World Bank's Gender Data Portal in 2024:

- Female labor force participation rate is 67.4% compared to 73.2% for men. While labor force participation has dropped for both women and men since 2020, it dropped more for women (1.2%) than men (0.7%).
- More women are in vulnerable employment (informal work arrangements without social protection or safety nets to guard against economic shocks) than men: vulnerable employment among women is 59.4% and among men is 47.5% in Azerbaijan for 2022. 62% of informal workers in Azerbaijan are women (Guliyev, 2015) and the proportion of women in vulnerable employment has remained virtually unchanged since 1991.
- Female financial inclusion is low. Only 38.8% of women report having an account (by themselves or together with someone else) at a bank or another type of financial institution or report personally using a mobile money service in 2022 compared to 54.6% of men.
- Azerbaijan remains the South Caucasus country with the highest gender pay gap at 39%.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> UNECE, *Azerbaijan Statistical Database* (2019 data) from <https://w3.unece.org/CountriesInFigures/en/Home/Index?countryCode=031>

In this context, the UN and the Government of Azerbaijan agreed to implement the WEESC project based on the theory of change that postulates that if women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, are provided with skills, economic opportunities, relevant information, network and support to become farmers / entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector; and government, public and non-governmental institutions develop and deliver gender-responsive programmes, public services, strategies and plans for women's economic empowerment, then women will be economically and socially empowered.

WEESC-II's objectives are aligned with Azerbaijan's *National Gender Policy*, the *State Program on the Development of Official Statistics*, and *Azerbaijan 2020: Vision for the Future* and *Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-economic Development Strategy*. In addition it supports *Decree No. 500 on the State Programme for the Socioeconomic Development of the Regions of Azerbaijan* (2019), containing specific measures to improve the development of women-owned small businesses and the enhancement of vocational training, and *Order No. 602* (2018) on the employment strategy for 2019–2030 to promote inclusive employment and reduce unemployment among women. WEESC-II is also aligned with Azerbaijan's commitments to achieving *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) 1, 5, and 8.

Although there are other donors and project's supporting WEE in Azerbaijan, WEESC-II and the WRCs developed by UNDP were considered to complement other programming. The project was unique in providing support and opportunities specifically tailored to women in rural areas, addressing their needs and challenges with a range of services including skills development, employment opportunities, and psycho-social support. Interviewees emphasised that the WRCs provide women with access to resources, training, and networking opportunities as well as a reliable place for support. Partnerships with the private sector emphasize the importance of women's inclusion and promote the adoption of gender-sensitive practices in workplaces.

## Expected Results

In Azerbaijan WEESC-II contributes to the goal of women's economic empowerment (WEE), through the following five outputs and two outcomes:

Table 9: WEESC-II Outputs and Outcomes in Azerbaijan

Outputs	Outcomes
<b>1.1:</b> Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, obtain skills and access information, networks, economic opportunities and support services to become farmers/entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector	<b>1:</b> Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, use skills, economic opportunities, relevant information, network and support to become farmers/entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector in Azerbaijan ( <i>grass-roots level</i> )
<b>1.2:</b> Women and women's groups are empowered to participate in local planning and budgeting (e.g. GRB discussions), and greater awareness around the harmful social norms is created in the communities	
<b>1.3:</b> Businesses have an increased understanding of the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) and have the	

Outputs	Outcomes
skills to implement measures that benefit women, specifically in rural areas	
<b>3.1:</b> Targeted government, public and non-governmental institutions are strengthened to mainstream gender in their operations, and their personnel have adequate knowledge and skills	<b>3:</b> The government, public and non-governmental institutions are strengthened to develop and deliver gender-responsive programmes, policies and services for women's economic empowerment in Armenia and Georgia ( <i>institutional level</i> )
<b>3.2:</b> Targeted government and public institutions develop specific programmes and institutional amendments to support women's economic empowerment	

### Achievements

388 women were reached with WEESC social mobilization, training and information programmes compared to a target of 300.

Women reported receiving training in business plan writing, taxation, CV writing, computer skills, and using social media for marketing as well as training in cultivation practices in agriculture and livestock management and the use of equipment for specific businesses e.g. sewing, beauty care, etc.

The ability of women to use their training varied, with women already active in business or economic activities and in areas with more opportunities better able to apply their training. Women in Sabirabad, Gusar and Khazar expressed higher effectiveness of the trainings compared to Fuzuli, which is in a conflict area where women had fewer opportunities. Agriculture, where many women were already working, enjoyed greater success in some of the regions. The absence of financing was also a limitation for those women unable to secure WEESC grants. Women in Azerbaijan highlighted the importance of WEESC-II financial assistance to purchase assets such as machinery and tools and the need for technical guidance and mentorship on using them efficiently.

In all, as of December 2023, 137 of the 388 women (35%) were able to increase their incomes due to participation in WEESC-II, meeting 86% of the end of project target with six months remaining. The highest proportion of women with improved income used their new skills to secure wage-employment.

Table 10: Women in Azerbaijan with Increased Incomes

Category of Women	Number with increased Income by Dec. 31 2023	End of Project Target	Percentage Achievement to Dec. 31 2023
Smallholder women farmers with increased incomes from agricultural production	34	70	49%
Women with increased incomes from entrepreneurial (non-agricultural) activities	34	60	57%
Women having new or better employment	69	30	230%
Total	137	160	86%

Women also reported significant non-financial benefits from participating in WEESC-II, including improved social capital, networking and social skills, increased participation in social life of their villages, and better ability to make use of social media. Some reported a reduced workload due to machinery purchased with WEESC-II grants and some women were able to use their skills to apply for other grants, particularly from government and other development projects. Women also reported improved perceptions of men and other household members of their role in economic activity and some women reported reduced Gender Based Violence (GBV) as a result of their economic activity.

A total of 21 private enterprises in Azerbaijan have signed the UN Women/UN Global Compact Women's Economic Empowerment Principles (WEP) with a focus on implementing gender-responsive corporate policies/practices. The majority of these companies are from the Finance and IT sector and a few from the hospitality and construction sector. One-third of the companies have applied or are in the process of applying some changes to their practices as result of their engagement with WEESC-II and some of the large companies have initiated outreach events at universities for potential female employees without project support.

WEESC has provided training to WRC Coordinators and Staff, including Training of Trainers (ToT) on business operations. WEESC has been able to foster networking amongst women through the WRCs. Use of the facilities at these centers is appreciated by women and they have become sources of information on economic opportunities, social capital and awareness of women's rights. WRCs serve as one-stop shops for women in Azerbaijan and there are few alternatives available. However, some women in remote villages have difficulties accessing the WRCs, even though they try to help cover travel costs. The WRCs receive some support from the State Committee for Family, Women, and Children's Affairs and they work closely with local government deputies on social, political, and humanitarian issues under the Chair of the Local Executive Committee. WRCs are provided with office spaces to carry out training and social mobilization activities for women and they have secured other grants to run the activities, however, they are currently are highly reliant on WEESC project funding.

## Conclusions

WEESC-II was well aligned with the priorities of Azerbaijan and relevant to the needs of the target beneficiaries. It is compatible with other Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) interventions in Azerbaijan and aligned with UN Women's Strategic Plan and with UNDP priorities in the South Caucasus Region.

WEESC-II has exceeded its targets for the number of women reached and reached 86% of its life of project target for the number of women whose incomes are increased as a result. It has also increased women's social capital, awareness of rights and confidence and improved community attitudes towards WEE. It has also increased business understanding of and application of WEPs, and enhanced the capacity of WRC to deliver gender responsive programmes.

## Lessons Learned

- Women value the training they have received but are unable to put it into practice if there are few economic opportunities available in their communities.
- Women's entrepreneurship and income generating activities are most successful when they build on women's existing economic activities, and are constrained by the lack of financing. While this is true for both micro-level income generating activities and larger businesses, their needs are different.
- Most people do not want to be entrepreneurs and will seek paid employment when it is available. WEESC-II seems to have underestimated the desire for employment and employment opportunities available to women in Azerbaijan. In this context, expanding awareness of gender-responsive work place practices is highly beneficial. Employment income also empowers women.

## Recommendations

- Gender-sensitive value chain analysis might help to identify economic opportunities for women in more disadvantaged communities and could be considered for WEESC-III.
- Assist women to acquire alternative sources of financing and business mentorship and guidance for example by linking them to existing government bodies or institutions (e.g. the Small and Medium Business Development Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan or the Azerbaijan Micro-Finance Association) with programs and products to support women or micro and small enterprises, and helping those who do not have bank accounts to open them.
- Expand and reinforce awareness of WEPs in businesses.
- The WRC are vital resources for disadvantaged women in Azerbaijan. WEESC-II should liaise with the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs to develop a sustainability plan and need to ensure inclusivity by helping with transportation for those living in remote villages.

## Next Steps

WEESC-I reached 422 women in Azerbaijan and WEESC-II reached 388 for a total of 810 women. Under WEESC-I 94 women secured jobs or self-employment lasting more than six months and under WEESC-II an additional 137 women had increased incomes from employment or self employment for a total of 231 women. Roughly 50% of women were employed and 50% self employed in each phase. During WEESC-I four companies in Azerbaijan signed up to WEPs. This has increased to 21 companies under WEESC-II.

Under WEESC-III greater attention needs to be given to sustainability. Consideration should be given to enhancing women's linkages to existing sources of support, such as micro-finance institutions for women entrepreneurs and gender-sensitive agricultural extension workers for farmers. Consider having "WEP Champions" from larger firms visit the WRC to talk to local employers and the community.

As mentioned, the WRC are an important resource for women. More attention should be paid to the long-term strategic planning - self-sufficiency and sustainability of WRCs. Activities such as proposal writing, fundraising, and capacity building in project management should be provided to WRC team in order to ensure long-term financial feasibility of the program.

Sustainability planning should answer questions such as: Can the government continue to provide space for WRCs, will it finance some staff or programmes, or contract the WRCs to provide services for women? Will the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs Khazar, Gusar, Sabirabad Regions include allocations for the WRCs in their budgets? Should WRCs be formally registered, and if so should they be civil society organizations, cooperatives, or businesses? What grants might be available to WRCs? What services could they sell, ensuring that they do not compete with the women they are set up to help?

## Georgia

# Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus Phase II

## CASE STUDY - GEORGIA



June 2024

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Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus – Phase II (WEESC-II) is a three year (August 2021 to July 2024), US\$4.7 million regional project, supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Austrian Development Agency. It builds on WEESC – I (2018- 2021) and operates in three countries in South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.) The project aims to ensure that women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, are economically empowered and participate in relevant decision-making.

In Georgia, the project is managed by UN Women Georgia, and implemented at the grassroots level by with Kakheti Regional Development Foundation (KRDF) and TASO Foundation in 12 municipalities and four regions in Georgia: three municipalities in each of Kakheti (Akhmeta, Lagodekhi, Telavi), Kvemo Kartli (Bolnisi, Marneuli, Tetri Tskaro); Mtskheta-Mtianeti (Dusheti, Kazbegi, Tianeti) and Samtskhe-Javakheti (Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, Aspindza).

This case study is based on the evaluation of the WEESC - II project which included a careful study of Project documents, gender-related policy documents, 20 Key Informant Interviews (KII) with 42 people (33 F, 9 M) including 3 project staff, 4 donors, 6 NGO implementing partners, 24 government and 5 private sector representatives and 6 focus group discussions (FGD) with 38 women beneficiaries.

### **Background**

Since independence in 1991, Post-Soviet Georgia has made efforts to improve gender equality. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) is one of the main goals that Georgia has committed to politically and legally. Georgia is a signatory of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and it has the obligation to support women's equal participation in decision-making spaces that entails all necessary measures (including temporary special measures) at the national level, aimed at achieving the full realization of *de facto* equality between men and women. In addition the 2014 Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union (EU) requires Georgia to bring national legislation on gender equality into conformance with international standards.

Under the framework of the Social-Economic Development Strategy of Georgia, *Georgia 2020*, the country took steps to improve and harmonize labour and employment legislation with European standards. As a result, the unemployment rate dropped from 23.6% in 2013 to 17% in 2020. However, challenges persist in the area of women's economic participation. The World Bank's Gender Data Portal in 2024 reports:

- Female labor force participation rate in 2023 was 54.4% compared to 72.4% for men. Since 1990, female labor force participation has decreased.

- More women are in vulnerable employment (informal work arrangements without social protection or safety nets to guard against economic shocks) than men: vulnerable employment among women is 44.3% and among men is 49% in Georgia for 2022.
- The rate of financial inclusion is low compared to other upper middle income countries but similar between women and men. 70.7% of women report having an account (by themselves or together with someone else) at a bank or another type of financial institution or report personally using a mobile money service in 2021 compared to 70.3% of men.
- The adjusted gender wage gap in Georgia is 24.6%.<sup>57</sup>

WEESC responded to the existing context and challenges with a holistic approach, linking interventions at three levels: grassroots, policies and legislation, and institutions. WEESC's theory of change that postulates that if women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, are provided with skills, economic opportunities, relevant information, network and support to become farmers / entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector; and adequate legislative and policy frameworks are in place and implemented to enable women's economic empowerment government, and public and non-governmental institutions develop and deliver gender-responsive programmes, public services, strategies and plans for women's economic empowerment, then women will be economically and socially empowered.

The project aligns and contributes to the effective implementation of several strategic Government of Georgia documents supporting GEWE, including the *Human Rights Strategy 2021-2030* (in development), the *National Human Rights Action Plan 2018-2020*, the *National Strategy 2019-2023 for Labour and Employment Policy of Georgia*, the *Action Plan 2019-2021 of the National Strategy for Labour and Employment Policy*, the *National Strategy for the Development of Official Statistics of Georgia 2020-2023*, and the *National Strategy for the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises in Georgia 2021-2025* (in development).

### ***Expected Results***

In Georgia, WEESC-II contributes to the goal of women's economic empowerment (WEE), through the following seven outputs and three outcomes:

*Table 11: WEESC-II Outputs and Outcomes in Georgia*

Outputs	Outcomes
<b>1.1:</b> Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, obtain skills and access information, networks, economic opportunities and support services to become farmers/entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector	<b>1:</b> Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, use skills, economic opportunities, relevant information, network and support to become farmers/entrepreneurs or to join the formal labour sector in Azerbaijan ( <i>grass-roots level</i> )
<b>1.2:</b> Women and women's groups are empowered to participate in local planning and budgeting (e.g. GRB discussions), and greater awareness around the harmful social norms is created in the communities	
<b>1.3:</b> Businesses have an increased understanding of the	

<sup>57</sup> UNSDG, *Gender Gaps to Gains: UN efforts for Georgia's Girls and Women*, March 2024.

Outputs	Outcomes
Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) and have the skills to implement measures that benefit women, specifically in rural areas	
<b>2.1:</b> Data and evidence is generated to develop legislative and policy frameworks that enable women's economic empowerment in Armenia and Georgia	<b>2:</b> Armenia and Georgia implement adequate legislative and policy reforms and frameworks to enable women's economic empowerment ( <i>policy and legislation level</i> )
<b>2.2:</b> The national gender machineries of Armenia and Georgia are supported to carry out changes in policy and legislative frameworks enabling women's economic empowerment	
<b>3.1:</b> Targeted government, public and non-governmental institutions are strengthened to mainstream gender in their operations, and their personnel have adequate knowledge and skills	<b>3:</b> The government, public and non-governmental institutions are strengthened to develop and deliver gender-responsive programmes, policies and services for women's economic empowerment in Armenia and Georgia ( <i>institutional level</i> )
<b>3.2:</b> Targeted government and public institutions develop specific programmes and institutional amendments to support women's economic empowerment	

### Achievements

WEESC-II social mobilization, training and information programmes reached 496 women in Georgia, 70% of them poor and socially excluded compared to a target of 300 poor and vulnerable women.

Women reported receiving training in business plan writing, taxation, CV writing, computer skills, and using social media for marketing as well as training in cultivation practices in agriculture and livestock management and the use of equipment for specific businesses e.g. sewing, beauty care, etc. Women from an ethnic minority community in Georgia appreciated training to improve their language skills and other Georgian women mentioned they were able to use the grant writing skills for other NGOs or government projects.

Those intending to start businesses but unable to secure WEESC or other grants found it difficult to invest in the economic activity and apply their new technical skills. Women interviewed in the Telavi Municipality of Kakheti region and Akhalsikhe Municipality in Samtskhe Javakheti region mentioned the absence of sources of finance as a constraint. In addition, women in Akhmeta and Telavi Municipalities of Kakheti region reported a lack of opportunities in their area. Nonetheless, 191 of the 496 women (38.5%) reported increased income due to participation in WEESC-II.

Table 2 shows that as of December 2023, WEESC-II had met 119% of its target for the number of women with increased incomes in Georgia with six months remaining in the project.

Table 12: Women in Georgia with Increased Incomes

Category of Women	Number with	End of Project	Percentage
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	increased Income by Dec. 31 2023	Target	Achievement to Dec. 31 2023
Smallholder women farmers with increased incomes from agricultural production	80	70	114%
Women with increased incomes from entrepreneurial (non-agricultural) activities	68	60	113%
Women having new or better employment	43	30	143%
Total	191	160	119%

Women also reported significant non-financial benefits from participating in WEESC-II, including improved social capital, awareness of their rights and confidence. Some reported a reduced workload due to machinery purchased with WEESC-II grants and some women were able to use their skills to apply for other grants, particularly from government and other development projects. Women also reported improved perceptions of men and other household members of their role in economic activity and ethnic Azerbaijani and Armenian women living in Georgia have been collaborating, meeting and exchanging practices throughout the project, despite ongoing war in Karabakh.

Women also reported contributing to local planning and budgeting discussions: 203 women (target of 100) reported participating in municipal discussions aimed at addressing their socio-economic concerns. They facilitated 107 successful advocacy initiatives (target of 45 initiatives). Women indicated they had the ability to engage and voice their opinions with the local authorities and they are increasingly attending roundtables, village meetings and women's rooms to share their opinions and advocate for their needs. During some of the roundtable meetings the local municipal offices report taking into consideration 60% of women's demands and being successfully able to implement roughly one-third of their requests.

According to WEESC-II reports the advocacy cycle in 2023 resulted in a total expenditure of 25 million GEL on women's initiatives, sourced from the budgets of 12 municipal and village support programs. Project monitoring reports show that 12 out of 64 municipalities (19%) in Georgia reported conducting one or more elements of GRB. In Akhmeta municipality in the Kakheti region the municipal authority is piloting the allocation of GEL 10,000 specifically for women's services and Akhalsikhe municipality used to rely on local NGOs to organise meetings with women but now do so on their own.

A total of 215 private enterprises in Georgia have signed the UN Women/UN Global Compact Women's Economic Empowerment Principles (WEP) with a focus on implementing gender-responsive corporate policies/practices. The majority of these companies are from the Health, services and production sector which includes companies working primarily in food and retail, agro-processing, health, agriculture, distribution and, textiles. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce indicated that many companies have taken initiatives to promote training of employees on sexual harassment; trained their management and other HR on the WEP principles and developed training materials supported by UN Women, for further developing

their company's internal training modules focused on specific topics such as sexual harassment, termination and stereotypes, diversity and equality, and violence.

UN Women works with national partners in Georgia to advance legislative and regulatory frameworks aligned with international labour standards, strengthen gender-sensitive data collection and usage for evidence-based policy development. Achievements at December 2023 include aligning or implementing three legal and regulatory frameworks for creating decent work for women with international standards and developing or implementing nine new or improved gender responsive policies or programmes enabling WEE.

UN Women also worked to build the capacity of institutional partners to deliver gender-responsive programmes, policies and services for WEE. Two government departments developed and institutionalized gender mainstreaming tools and policies, one state funded economic development programme which visibly mainstreams gender, and adoption of seven out of ten recommendations on Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) for the Plant of the Future and GIA recommendations on Gender Pay Gap incorporated.

### ***Conclusions***

WEESC-II was well aligned with the priorities of Georgia and relevant to the needs of the target beneficiaries. It is compatible with other GEWE interventions in the country and aligned with UN Women's Strategic Plan and priorities in the South Caucasus Region.

WEESC-II has exceeded its targets for the number of women reached, and for the number of women whose incomes are increased as a result. It has also increased women's social capital, awareness of rights and confidence and improved community attitudes towards WEE. It has increased local awareness of and resourced for WEE. It has also increased business understanding of and application of WEPs and has met or exceeded targets on improving the enabling environment.

### ***Lessons Learned***

- Women value the training they have received but are unable to put it into practice if there are few economic opportunities available in their communities.
- Women's entrepreneurship and income generating activities are most successful when they build on women's existing economic activities, and are constrained by the lack of financing. While this is true for both micro-level income generating activities and larger businesses, their needs are different.
- Giving women a voice in municipal planning has been much more successful in Georgia than the other WEESC-II countries.
- Influencing policy and legislative frameworks is partly dependent on building high levels of trust with government bodies, which increases the willingness of government to take advice. The much higher level of achievement in Georgia likely reflects partnerships and

relationships built up over some time as UN Women has a country office in Georgia as well as the incentives under the EU Association Agreement.

### ***Recommendations***

- Gender-sensitive value chain analysis might help to identify economic opportunities for women in more disadvantaged communities and could be considered for WEESC-III.
- Assist women to acquire alternative sources of financing for example by linking them to existing government bodies or institutions with programs and products to support women or micro and small enterprises, and helping those who do not have bank accounts to open them.
- Expand and reinforce awareness of WEPs in businesses.
- Continue work with government on the enabling environment.

### ***Next Steps***

WEESC-I reached 453 women in Georgia and WEESC-II reached 496 for a total of 949 women. Under WEESC-I 181 women secured jobs or self-employment lasting more than six months and under WEESC-II an additional 191 women had increased incomes from employment or self employment for a total of 372 women. During WEESC-I 150 women were trained in GRB and engaged in 32 advocacy activities, and in WEESC-II a further 203 women were trained and engaging in 107 advocacy initiatives with municipal governments. During WEESC-I no companies in Georgia signed up to WEPs but under WEESC-II 215 companies were participating.

Under WEESC-III greater attention needs to be given to sustainability. Consideration should be given to enhancing women's linkages to existing sources of support, such as micro-finance institutions for women entrepreneurs and gender-sensitive agricultural extension workers for farmers. Perhaps regional exchanges of "WEPs Champions" will help companies learn implementation ideas from their peers and might be arranged through Chambers of Commerce. Similarly, exchanges between for example National Statistics Office of Georgia (GEOSTAT) and the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia (ARMSTAT) might be useful.

The presence of UN Women in Georgia seems to have greatly enhanced engagement with government and the adoption of changes and perhaps there is a need to increase UN Women's work in Armenia and Azerbaijan.