

Women account for 40% of the total global workforce<sup>17</sup>



## The lessons in this leaflet have been extracted from the following evaluations:

- ◆ **South Africa (2015):** Mid-Term Evaluation of the Women Entrepreneurs Project
- ◆ **South Africa (2015)** Final Evaluation of the Pro-Poor Governance, Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment from a Human Rights Perspective in Namibia
- ◆ **UN Women Corporate Evaluation (2014):** UN Women's contribution to Women's Economic Empowerment
- ◆ **Sudan (2014):** Consolidating efforts that contribute to Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment in Sudan
- ◆ **Kenya (2014)** Government of Kenya (GoK)/UN Joint Programme on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (JP GEWE)
- ◆ **Zimbabwe (2013):** Final Evaluation of The Gender Support Programme (GSP)
- ◆ **Ethiopia (2013):** Joint Flagship Programme on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (JP GEWE)
- ◆ **Kenya (2012):** Final Evaluation of Gender, Human Rights & Governance Programme 2007-2011
- ◆ **Kenya (2012):** Mid-Term Evaluation Joint Programme on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
- ◆ **South Africa (2011)** Evaluation of UN Women Capacity Development Activities in Southern Africa (2009-2010)
- ◆ **Sudan (2011):** Final Evaluation: Defending and securing the human rights of women and girls in the humanitarian crisis, South Darfur, Sudan (2008—2010)
- ◆ **Zimbabwe (2010):** Mid-Term Evaluation of the National Gender and Women's Empowerment Strategy & Action Plan and the Gender Support

All UN Women evaluations are available on GATE ([www.gate.unwomen.org](http://www.gate.unwomen.org)) & the Gender Equality Evaluation Portal (<http://genderevaluation.unwomen.org/en>)

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## Lessons Learned from Evaluations: Sustainable Development in Women's Economic Empowerment Programmes

### UN Women & Women's Economic Empowerment: what's the issue?

Investing in women's economic empowerment sets a direct path towards gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth. Women make enormous contributions to economies, whether in businesses, on farms, as entrepreneurs or employees, or by doing unpaid care work at home.

But they also remain disproportionately affected by poverty, discrimination and exploitation. Gender discrimination means that women often end up in insecure, low-wage jobs, and constitute a small minority of those in senior positions. It curtails access to economic assets such as land and loans. It limits participation in shaping economic and social policies. And, because women perform the bulk of household work, they often have little time left to pursue economic opportunities.

### 1. WHY is Sustainable Development in Women's Economic Empowerment programmes important?

## 1 WHY is Sustainable Development in Women's Economic Empowerment programmes important?

**Balancing need & responsible development:** UN Women's interventions need to have sustainability or sustainable development as a core operating principal; programming should focus on capitalizing on the resources available to achieve results, but with longevity and continued, manageable growth in mind.

### 2. WHAT do we know about ensuring Sustainable Development in UN Women WEE programmes?

**Ensuring continuity & consolidation of programme gains:** Through evaluations, UNW's implementing partners have identified that to them, longer term continuity of programmatic interventions to enable real change is one of the biggest concerns. During implementation, IPs depend on the reliable flow of external resources for the sustainability of projects. Programmes also need to be designed with a clear exit strategy to ensure consolidation and continuation of gains.

### 3. HOW can UN Women better ensure the sustainability of WEE programmes?

**Meet and manage expectations:** UN Women is strategically positioned and also held in high esteem by partners regarding gender and development work. To meet related expectations, UN Women has to generate sufficient programmatic resources and also synergize its capacities and energies in programme management and planning for the sustainable future of interventions after the organization no longer provides financial support. As such, interventions need to be planned for their possibility to be scaled up and longer term partnerships need to be built on a sustainable basis to address women rights issues. It is also essential that partners' capacity to mobilize their own resources be built.



# WHAT do we know?

## Lessons on 'Sustainable Development' from UN Women WEE programmes across the region

**Business financing & skills training:** lessons from the Mid-term evaluation of the Women's Entrepreneurs Project in South Africa.

This evaluation noted that the project demonstrated an innovative approach when targeting beneficiaries who have already started a business, instead of promoting reactive engagements (i.e. working with beneficiaries without any experience or previous interest in business). This was noted to be an effective approach and good indicator of success. While most economic empowerment projects promote the starting up of new activities, and the distribution of start-up financing for these, the South Africa Women Entrepreneurs Project aimed instead at improving existing micro and small businesses by providing tailor made training and problem solving guidance.

For sustainability, the importance of strengthening Peer Support Groups in these communities whilst also promoting business network opportunities to women was highlighted. Additionally, as projects progress, the participation of beneficiaries in the elaboration of new training material contents should be promoted to encourage ownerships and a context-specific programme that meets identified needs.



## 2 WHAT do we know about ensuring Sustainable Development in UN Women WEE Programmes?

- ◆ **Lack of strategic & context-specific planning:** issues of sustainability are often not explicitly addressed in programme planning. These must be noted from the beginning, also to ensure plans for an appropriate **exit strategy** are developed with IPs. Answers must be given for questions on how programmes will continue after the end of the partnership with UNW, for example how will service provision be financed?
- ◆ Interventions must understand the contextual reality well; initiating the component/activity without using existing structures, at least partially, can also jeopardize sustainability.
- ◆ Strategic and sufficiently long-term support is needed to consolidate the gains achieved by programmes.
- ◆ **Insufficient resources:** for sustainability and longevity of interventions, it is imperative that they are adequately resourced both in terms of human and financial resources. The amount of capital dedicated must be sufficient to make a substantial impact with effects that can be carried on following the financial withdrawal of UN Women.

◆ **Short-term partnerships:** this leads to a lack of continuity in programme interventions.

The absence of explicit long-term partnership frameworks and preference for short-term planning and programming can affect the partnership momentum and performance, and the sustainability of results. Partnerships that lack a broad, long-term partnership agreement which identifies overarching partnership objectives beyond specific and time-bound initiatives will not be sustainable. They are also unable to influence longer-term changes, or to track and sustain that change over time.

◆ **Funding for growth:** Results often need time to "mature" – this needs to be understood and engagement & funding provided for appropriate amounts of time to allow for growth. Short grants have proven to not be effective for changes that take longer to materialize. For these types of changes which include policy and social transformation, programmes should increase the grant period to multi-year.

◆ **Encourage national gender mainstreaming:** evaluations found that working with Government structures, especially the Gender Machineries, to develop capacities in gender-sensitive programming and even establish gender Units is often effective. Gender Units are those in institutions responsible for oversight and integration of gender concerns.



## 3 HOW can UN Women ensure the sustainability of WEE programmes?

- ◆ **Base programmes on evidence & lessons-learned:** planning at the beginning based on lessons from previous evaluations from similar programmes or contexts is essential. Added to this, mid-term evaluations can be useful instruments for adjusting programme implementation based on identified achievements and bottlenecks. Building on this, programmes should then seek to extend the implementation of successfully tested strategies (through a pilot testing approach) to the wider community for greater impact.
- ◆ **Take a long-term view:** Partnership agreements should be made for longer periods and projects be implemented with partners in 3-5 years cycles. The longer duration is more likely to help establish structures & mechanisms that will sustain the benefits of a programme or
- ◆ **Follow a demand-driven approach:** Programmes should be flexible and respond to local demands & needs. They should also evolve and change as programmes grow and the context may change. Evaluations advise also that space be given to indigenous solutions that are in line with local traditions and norms to foster local ownership of the interventions.

### TIP! IDENTIFY EXIT STRATEGIES DURING PROGRAMME PLANNING

Strategies should be identified during programme planning & implementation on how to transfer ownership to the community.

For example, in economic empowerment projects, an exit strategy should identify key performance indicators where certain minimum standards should be reached by projects as minimum preconditions for sustainability. For example, in terms of basic skills in business numeracy, business management, organizational capacity etc.

At the programme outset, a good practice is to develop sustainability guidelines to support IPs in the development of individual agency exit plans & sustainability strategies providing adequate time for re-sourcing & integration into agency plans before the end of the UNW programme & support.

When a programme provides a key service, such as for survivors of VAW & GBV, it is crucial to secure commitment from the Government to take over responsibility for the operational budget of the service.

# HOW can we improve our approach to sustainable development in WEE?

- ◆ **Improve the enabling environment:** this is done through work at the national level & building capacities of duty bearers.
  - ◆ **Invest resources wisely:** it can be learnt that to enhance the sustainability and follow up of interventions there is a need for strategic investment of financial & technical resources that allow for impact to be sustained organically after the specific project intervention ends.
  - ◆ **Build the right capacities:** Focus on building the capacity of partners to be able to enhance their influence, coverage and ownership level. It is essential to integrate strategies for capacity development of partners into the programme as one of the mainstream activities.
- Further related to capacity building, evaluations shows that to induce sustainability at the community level there is a need for investing more in local community groups to gradually build their capacities and resources to continue their interventions in the longer run and without external support.
- ◆ **Consider joint programmes & sustainable exit strategies:** Sustainability can be ensured in the longer run by investing in joint initiatives where state institutions, CSOs and communities join hands to implement joint interventions.
  - ◆ **Work through inter-agency partnerships:** UNW programme evaluations have identified the benefits for sustainability from fostering inter-agency work, to strengthen the enabling environment and also engage existing structures for broader & more sustainable impact.

