

Mid-term evaluation of the Joint Programme on “Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women” in Kyrgyzstan – Main Findings

UN Women Country Portfolio Evaluation of Kyrgyzstan Strategic Note (2015-2017)



This document is based on the report presenting the main findings, conclusions and recommendations of the UN Women Kyrgyzstan Country Portfolio Evaluation (CPE), which was undertaken by two external, independent consultants under the overall supervision of UN Women Regional Evaluation Specialist at the Europe and Central Asia Regional Office.

This CPE, finalised in September 2017, focused on the normative, coordination and operational/programmatic work of the UN Women Country Office under its 2015-2017 Strategic Note. The evaluation assessed the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and human rights/gender responsiveness of the country portfolio. The evaluation was premised on a human rights-based and gender responsive approach founded on the principles of inclusion, participation, and fair power relation. The Joint Programme on “Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women” (JPRWEE) was included in the evaluation under the thematic area of “Women’s Economic Empowerment”¹.

In Kyrgyzstan, the JPRWEE operates in Chui, Naryn, Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken provinces, across approximately 75 villages, and has so far indirectly improved livelihoods of about 8,500 people. This summary outlines the main findings in terms of the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and human rights and gender equality of the JPRWEE. The full evaluation report, including the methodology used, is also available upon request.

¹ The other areas of work are: Normative, Coordination, and thematic areas of Violence against Women and Girls, Women, Peace and Security, and Gender Responsive National Planning and Budgeting.



MAIN FINDINGS

Relevance

Strategic Alignment and Positioning

A mapping of Human Rights Treaty Body Concluding Observations (COBs) and UN Resolutions with the work of the JPRWEE provides evidence of strong alignment:

Human Rights Treaty Body COBs and UN Resolutions	JPRWEE positioning
CEDAW COB (2015)	
8(a) Increasing awareness among rural women and girls about their rights & CEDAW	Rural women and girls received training and knowledge about their rights and CEDAW through the following programmes: a) Promoting Gender Justice and Empowerment of Young Women in Kyrgyzstan; b) Building a Constituency for Peace; b) 'FinWater' project; and c) JPRWEE programme.
14(b) Increasing the participation of women who are underrepresented in political and public life, decision making and employment. 24(c) conduct awareness raising activities for politicians, community leaders and journalists on the importance of women's participation.	Through the JPRWEE, UN Women has provided leadership support to 93 women (32 of whom are now members of local councils). Several national level public dialogues also took place to lobby for higher representation of women in local councils (First Forum of women members of local councils and National Women's Forum in January and March 2017).
28(a) Create an enabling environment that enables women to become more independent	Through the JPRWEE programme, women were able to increase their household incomes and to develop skill sets to further expand their businesses, thus increasing their independence.
32(a) Combat poverty among rural women (access to safe drinking water & employment including income generation, formal employment and skills development	UN Women and its joint and implementing partners have adopted multidimensional approaches to poverty reduction through the JPRWEE programme in these areas.
33(a) Ensure access to non-discriminatory services for all women, in particularly those facing intersecting forms of discrimination	Through the JPRWEE programme, rural women and women heads of households are targeted.
Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights COB (2015)	
9 Address the root causes of unemployment and adopt targeted measures, including programmes aimed at reducing unemployment among women, young women, persons with disabilities and marginalized groups	The JPRWEE programme addressed the root causes of unemployment in its design and implementation although further efforts are needed to address the specific needs of marginalized women
21 Address chronic food insecurity and malnutrition and ensure the right to adequate food	Through the JPRWEE programme, UN Women, WFP, FAO and IFAD supported interventions to address food insecurity and nutrition.

In addition to the above examples, the JPRWEE also directly supported implementation of the UN General Assembly Resolution 50/165 on Improvement of the Situation of Women in Rural Areas through its efforts to: a) increase the participation of rural women in the decision-making process; b)

support measures to give rural women full and equal access to productive resources, including the right to inheritance and to ownership of land and other property, credit/capital, natural resources, appropriate technologies, markets and information; and c) meet their basic requirements in water and sanitation.²

Key national trends and their alignment with the JPRWEE are also analysed below:

KEY TREND	OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS FOR GEWE	JPRWEE POSITIONING
Economic activity among women is declining in Kyrgyzstan, dropping from 52.3% in 2010 to 50.4% in 2014. This figure is almost 1.5 times lower than that for men. In rural areas, women have de-facto limited access to property, assets and financial services.	<p>Threats: There is a risk of increased feminization of poverty. There is also a tendency for women to be pushed into the informal labour market, and to be forced to migrate in order to find work, exposing them to workplaces with limited legal and social protection</p> <p>Opportunities: Existence of women’s cooperatives/associations as a result of the JPRWEE programme</p>	The JPRWEE programme contributed to the engagement of 1,712 women in productive agriculture and resulted in 805 women running their own small businesses; however, greater efforts are needed to increase women’s participation in the formal economy and advocate for greater legal and social protection for women in the informal economy.
Increasing labour migration	<p>Threats: Women represent 40% of all migrants and they usually engage in low pay and risky occupations; women are left in a particularly vulnerable position as heads of households and often lack sufficient financial means to support their family.</p> <p>Opportunities: New evidence is available through the GSPS³ migration pillar report to support greater policy engagement</p>	The JPRWEE programme has engaged a large number of female heads of households.
About 10-27% of rural areas do not have access to drinking water supply.	<p>Threats: There has not been a specific focus on integrating excluded and vulnerable sectors of the populations in water governance systems.</p> <p>Opportunities: Collaboration with the Government of and SKYKE the Finnish Environment Institute through their programming in the water sector.</p>	The JPRWEE programme, through local Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB), promotes addressing drinking water supply needs, and directly co-funded drinking water supply in one village in Naryn.

Effectiveness

Overall Progress towards Results

➔ In the normative area, the UN Women Country Office, through the JPRWEE, provided

² UN General Assembly Resolution 50/165 on improvement of the situation of women in rural areas, 22 December 1995.

³ A country-wide research “Gender in Society Perceptions Study” (GSPS) is being finalised within the framework of the joint programme “Building the evidence base to facilitate responsive gender policy and programmes for equality and lasting peace in Kyrgyzstan” by UN Women, UNFPA and IOM in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Development and the National Statistical Committee.

expertise and advocated on the amendments to the law on social insurance tariffs.

- ➔ In 2015-2017, major interventions in the area of Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) focused on the provision of skills and knowledge training to rural women in selected areas in order to help them increase their income. Since 2014, when implementation of the JPRWEE started in the country, 1,712 women have been mobilized and trained on productive agricultural technologies, nutrition, business, and marketing. Of them, 805 are operating a small business, having increased their income by 29.5% in average.
- ➔ Another area of progress has been the development of gender-sensitive policies and practices at the local level, where increased capacity of public officials contributed to gender-responsive local development plans, inclusive decision-making and gender-responsive development planning. Some policy advances were also achieved as a result of rural women's advocacy efforts and gender analysis of agricultural strategies.

Outcomes (Operational/Programmatic Results)

- ➔ Through the JPRWEE, one of the most significant results has been the strong integration of gender across the work of four UN agencies. Interviews with the Participating UN agencies and their partners confirmed the important role that UN Women had in technically supporting greater accountability on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) and results among its partner agencies.
- ➔ The JPRWEE also achieved important normative results; more broadly in supporting the implementation of a number of human rights treaty body recommendations, but also in achieving community-driven policy change. An example of this was changes made to the law on social tariffs as a result of rural women's lobbying efforts which were facilitated through the established Self-Help Groups⁴.
- ➔ Operational results under the programme **also exceeded the expected results and there were clear examples of transformation and impact already evident in a timeframe of less than three years.**⁵ One of the key reasons for this was the integrated and comprehensive approach employed under the programme. In its design and implementation, the programme has been effectively applying a multidimensional approach to poverty reduction through its broad focus on food security, women's livelihoods and economic participation. In each community, and with the same group of beneficiaries, **all agencies carefully coordinated and focused their work to apply this integrated approach.**

"The GALS training helped us to achieve more equality in our family. Before, my husband was the only decision maker. After the GALS training, I started participating in family decisions and purchasing decisions – now we always make decisions together."

JPRWEE Joint Programme Beneficiary

⁴ Self-Help Groups are the main entry point for the JP in the country.

⁵ The JPRWEE was launched in 2012 but activities at field level commenced only in 2014 when resources allocated to the programme were received.

- ➔ Transformative results were most evident in how the programme was able to address structural barriers to women's economic participation and empowerment through changed power relations in families as a result of the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) methodology designed and led by IFAD and further refined and documented by the national JPRWEE Coordinator, and implemented through the Community Development Alliance. In each community the evaluation team visited, it heard transformative stories from beneficiaries, as well as community members not directly involved in the programme, about how the programme changed social norms and enabled women to participate equally in decision-making at the household level which, in a number of instances, also transcended to increased participation in community-level decision making bodies. **The evaluation team also heard testimonies from stakeholders about how division of care work changed within the household**, which created an enabling environment for women's increased economic and political participation.
- ➔ Gender Responsive Budgeting trainings were also rolled out during the JPRWEE in order to increase the capacity of rural women to influence and inform local planning and budgeting processes.

"I am happy that my wife is part of the project because now our children get enough fresh and free vegetables and we can sell extra to our neighbours. I like that my wife is an active member of the community now and shows interest in irrigation issues, election matters and drinking water issues and pasture management. She also speak at different gatherings and community meetings so I like this transformation. Our family budget is also winning from this change."

Spouse of woman participant

Innovation and Up scaling

- ➔ The Gender Action Learning System (GALS) methodology developed by IFAD and adopted to Kyrgyzstan's context to support transformative changes at the household level within the JPRWEE has built on the economic agency of rural women and helped them start re-negotiating power relations within the household with an ultimate aim of women's increased participation in decision-making, redistribution of reproductive duties, better recognition and appreciation of women's contribution to family's well-being. There is evidence that the methodology has not only been innovative and entertaining for beneficiaries, - it is being up-scaled by the latter through knowledge sharing (there are cases when a beneficiary trained all her neighbours and relatives, and where husbands became GALS champions).
- ➔ Under the JPRWEE, there has been a **multiplying and cascading effect** where the 1,712 rural women systematically translated their knowledge to other women. During the site visits, the evaluation team inquired about the approximate number of women each community trained (in terms of sharing knowledge from the leadership training and related to their acquired agricultural skills) and most beneficiaries responded that they had shared their knowledge with at least five women on average. Through the transfer, the reach and the scale of the programmed was increased to at least 8,560.

Efficiency

Strategic investment and leveraging/management of resources

- ➔ **Cost-efficiency of interventions on WEE through the JPRWEE programme was high:** as a joint programme and with an investment of approximately 690 USD per beneficiary, it generated

income of 500-600 USD annually per person, with estimated 190 USD for an indirect beneficiary; and resulted in significant scale-up due to knowledge transfer from direct beneficiaries to their neighbours and relatives. Responding to urgent needs and spending small funds on expert fees, **the JPRWEE influenced important changes into gender-related legislation that would benefit a significant part of Kyrgyzstan's population in the long run.**

Sustainability

- ➔ Results from the JPRWEE programme can also be further deepened and sustained through greater policy engagement at the macro- and meso-levels. This aligns with one of the key findings from the corporate evaluation of UN Women's work on WEE (2015) which identified the need to shift away from micro projects that provide loans and grants to women towards supporting women at a collective level in identifying and addressing bottlenecks at the macro-level (through national and international policies, finance, institutions and legislation) that deny women (and poor men) economic opportunities, such as lack of access to finance, credit and markets.
- ➔ Under the JPRWEE, the combined use of strategies to provide leadership and technical training for agricultural actives positioned beneficiaries as leaders in their communities and through their acquired knowledge and confidence, they were able to actively engage with other women and to transfer their knowledge. This had a significant cascading effect, which increased the number of programme participants from the planned 1,712 to over 8,000.
- ➔ The emergence of a critical mass of GEWE champions (including a large number of boys) is also an important result that will contribute to further sustainability and effectiveness of results.

Human Rights and Gender Equality

- ➔ The JPRWEE addresses multidimensional aspects of poverty and aims to prevent feminization of poverty through increasing rural women's income opportunities and food security, enhancing their participation in local decision-making process at the local level and also within the family. As patriarchal traditions and attitudes have a major impact on women's participation and empowerment, and often taken precedence over legal frameworks in local communities, UN Women through the JPRWEE has also prioritized work on social norm change at the national and community level, including with men and boys aimed at advancing a positive model of masculinity, non-violence, equality and respect.
- ➔ Although the JPRWEE programme does include female heads of households, the need to ensure that programme strategies are designed to maximise inclusion was raised by programme participants. For example, under most of the agricultural work, women with disabilities are excluded, so finding interventions that can engage a broader group of marginalised women is needed in future programming in order to ensure that no one is left behind.
- ➔ The JPRWEE developed criteria and conditions for beneficiary targeting including marginalised groups.
- ➔ Important efforts were also made to ensure inclusion of programme stakeholders through joint site monitoring visits under the JPRWEE programme whereby government partners actively joined and participated in assessing the projects progress and results. The value of being involved in these visits was confirmed by a number of stakeholders.



Recommendations

- ➔ Broadly sharing the successes and lessons learned on work on women's economic empowerment, and GALS methodology in order to contribute to country, regional and global knowledge about what has worked to advance women's empowerment and social norm change through the JPRWEE programme and to maximize learning from the transformative results achieved;
- ➔ Continuing to prioritise interventions focused on social norm change through an integrated programmatic approach;
- ➔ Leveraging the various UN Agencies around their respective mandate in WEE;
- ➔ Supporting women at a collective level in identifying and addressing bottlenecks at the macro- and meso- level that deny women economic opportunities, such as lack of access to finance, agricultural credit, infrastructure investment and markets and the burden of unpaid care work.