

**“ACCELERATING PROGRESS TOWARD THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN”
MPTF OFFICE GENERIC FINAL PROGRAMME¹ NARRATIVE REPORT
REPORTING PERIOD: 10/2014-06/2021**

Programme Title & Project Number	Country, Locality(s), Priority Area(s) / Strategic Results ²
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Programme Title: <i>Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (RWEE) in the Kyrgyz Republic</i> ● Programme Number: <i>UNJP/KYR/013/UNJ</i> ● MPTF Office Project Reference Number:³ <i>00092002</i> 	<p>Country/Region: <i>KYRGYZ REPUBLIC, Batken, Chui, Naryn, Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces</i></p> <p>Priority area/ strategic results: <i>The strategic result is to secure rural women’s livelihoods and rights in the context of sustainable development</i></p> <p align="center">Programme Beneficiaries</p> <p>Direct beneficiaries: <i>5,817(4,547 women, 1,270 men)</i> Indirect beneficiaries: <i>19,184 (9,468 women and 9,716 men)</i></p>
Participating Organization(s)	Implementing Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Organizations that have received direct funding from the MPTF Office under this programme ● <i>UN WOMEN</i> ● <i>UN FAO</i> ● <i>UN WFP</i> ● <i>IFAD</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● National counterparts (government, private, NGOs & others) and other International Organizations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Governmental organizations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ministry of Health and Social Development of the Kyrgyz Republic</i> - <i>Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry Management of the Kyrgyz Republic</i> - <i>State agency of local-self governance</i> - <i>Ministry of economy and finance</i> - <i>Local self-government administrations</i> - <i>Southern branch of Republican Health Promotion Centre of the Ministry of Health of the KR</i> - <i>Central Election Committee of the KR</i> ○ International organizations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), project “One village one product”</i>

¹ The term “programme” is used for programmes, joint programmes and projects.

² Strategic Results, as formulated in the Strategic UN Planning Framework (e.g. UNDAF) or project document.

³ The MPTF Office Project Reference Number is the same number as the one on the Notification message. It is also referred to as “Project ID” on the project’s factsheet page on the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](#).

Other Contributions (donors) (if applicable)		
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Evaluation Completed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Date: 30.04.2021 Evaluation Report - Attached <input type="checkbox"/> Yes No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Date:	<input type="radio"/> Name: Sagipa Djusaeva <input type="radio"/> Title: National program officer <input type="radio"/> Participating Organization (Lead): UN Women <input type="radio"/> Email address: sagipa.djusaeva@unwomen.org	

ACRONYMS

ASHG	Association of Self-Help Groups
AO	Aiyl Okmot, Administration of the village municipality
CA	Conservation Agriculture
CBO	Community based organization
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSA	Climate Smart Agriculture
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GALS	Gender Action Learning System
GES	Gender Equality Strategy
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GIZ	German Development Cooperation
JP	Joint Programme
MT	Metric Tons
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSC	National Statistics Committee
OA	Organic Agriculture
PC	Pasture Committee
PO	Producer Organization
RAS	Rural Advisory Services
RF	Rural Fund
RWEE	Rural Women Economic Empowerment
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
SHG	Self Help Group
SWA	Sustainable Water Management
TOT	Training of trainers
UCK	Union of Cooperatives of Kyrgyzstan
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
WFP	World Food Programme
WPO	Women Producers' Organization
WUA	Water Users Association

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rural women and girls in Kyrgyzstan are the key agents for achieving the transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. However, rural women have limited access to productive and climate-resilient assets, skills and technologies, employment, and decision-making, which are only some of the many challenges they consistently face. These challenges are aggravated by food and economic crises and climate change consequences. Considering that women make up a large portion of the agricultural workforce in Kyrgyzstan, their empowerment is not only key for the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but it also advances the overall economic productivity.

The Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress Towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (JP RWEE) provided strong evidence that a holistic approach towards the economic empowerment of rural women delivers multiple dividends including improved livelihoods, increased food security and enhanced women's leadership in rural areas. The programme was implemented from October 2014 to June 2021 by FAO, IFAD, UN Women and WFP. The JP RWEE changed the lives of 5,817 (4,547 women and 1270 men) direct beneficiaries and 19,184 indirect beneficiaries, improving the productivity skills of rural women and their families in the agricultural sector and building their capacity on business planning, market analysis and financial literacy. This includes direct support to 3,731 beneficiaries (3,653 women) as members of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Women Producers' Organizations (POs), and to 5,817 household members (2,540 women) who benefited from both membership in SHGs and participation in GALS/BALI initiatives. The intervention also stimulated public advocacy and local partnership by promoting the active contribution of rural women in rural development processes, including standing for election in local councils, contributing to budget hearings and participating in community advocacy meetings.

Strengthened women's agency and power is one of the key transformative results of the JP RWEE, which is evidenced through the changes in women's status within families and communities. Results of the Women Empowerment in Agricultural Index (pro-WEAI) – a unique tool that collects information on women's empowerment regarding intrinsic, instrumental, and collective agency – showed that both women and men who received any of the JP RWEE interventions increased their overall empowerment, and this effect is larger for women, who increased overall empowerment by 60%. Furthermore, new tools and methodologies such as GALS/BALI increased other dimensions of empowerment that otherwise would not have been affected, such as self-efficacy.

The programme had a special focus on increasing and sustaining rural women's livelihoods, enhancing their status as leaders of rural enterprises, and empowering them to access wider value markets. SHG members have enhanced their entrepreneurial skills and knowledge, gradually marketed their products beyond local markets, and gained new professional skills. As a result, 3,731 beneficiaries (3,653 women and 78 men) of 498 self-help groups generated US\$ 1,453,605s. The average annual income of beneficiaries participating in agricultural activities was US\$ 450 and the average profit reached was US\$ 330. Women are now independently running economic initiatives with funding support from the community funds of women's POs. The cumulative revolving capital from the POs by the end of the programme was US\$ 121,886.

Beyond these economic gains, rural women also advanced their status. This enabled them to influence decision making and played a part in the transformation of power relations at family, community and local government levels. Women members of SHGs were empowered to act as agents of change, thereby also challenging the stereotype of women being unable to manage enterprises and lead effective agricultural production. The JP RWEE pilot tested innovative approaches, such as GALS, BALI, AL, and OSPA⁹. All these approaches enabled the creation of new processes and perspectives on what can work as a 'Development

⁹ Gender Action Learning System, Business Action Learning Innovation, Adaptive leadership, Oxford scenario planning approach.

accelerator'. This, in turn, contributed to the revision of traditional practices on farming, and on power relations within families and communities.

I. Purpose

The goal of the JP RWEE in Kyrgyzstan was to secure rural women's livelihoods and rights in the context of sustainable development. The JP RWEE was designed around the following four programme outcomes: (i) increased food and nutrition security; (ii) better income and livelihood opportunities; (iii) enhanced leadership and participation of rural women in decision-making processes at the local level; and (iv) a more gender responsive policy environment.

The JP RWEE aligned its work with Kyrgyzstan's national priorities, specifically the National Strategy on Sustainable Development (NSSD) of the Kyrgyz Republic of 2013-2017 and 2018-2040, and with the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2012-2020. The JP RWEE was also aligned with the priorities specified in the National Action Plans for GEWE 2015-2017 and 2018-2020. It addressed the concluding observations to the fourth periodic report of the Kyrgyz Republic to the CEDAW committee, which underlined the need to undertake actions in response to the challenges faced by rural women. Through its commitment to increasing the income opportunities and food security of vulnerable rural households, the JP RWEE also aligned itself with the National Food Security and Nutrition Programme and the Social Development Programme for the 2015-2017 and 2019-2023 periods. The programme contributed through improving knowledge and technologies on agricultural production, value chain development and nutrition. By providing technical support on the diversification of diets and on the reduction of dependency on traditional crops, the JP RWEE contributed to addressing the challenges of rural poverty which reduced from 41.4% in 2013 to 23.2% in 2019.

II. Assessment of Programme Results

i) Narrative reporting on results:

Outcome 1: Rural women have improved food and nutrition security

The main entry point for the JP RWEE in Kyrgyzstan was to ensure that women had sufficient levels of food and nutrition security which, in turn, would provide a foundation for their economic empowerment. The JP RWEE supported rural women in improving their food and nutrition security through several interventions focused on improving rural women's capacity in farming technologies. Rural women received training on the diversification of crops and the cultivation of new types of vegetables, which helped raise awareness on the importance of dietary diversity. Whilst not an expressed aim of the programme, it also contributed to the resilience of households in managing social and economic shocks.

Compared to baseline National Statistics Committee data, it was reported 40% increase in agricultural production. Women farmers cultivated high quality seeds, enabling to reduce the vegetable ripening time and get harvest one month earlier in June instead of July. This increase contributed to an average additional annual income from agricultural activities of US\$ 480 and an average profit of US\$ 350. This additional income enabled rural women to improve their livelihoods, increase resilience to food crises, and invest in the health and education of family members.

A total of 3,731 beneficiaries (3,653 women and 78 men) were able to diversify their crops, resulting in improved dietary diversity with an average of 6 different types of food. In 2014, the Dietary Diversity Score stood at 4.5, whereas in 2017, 2018 and 2018 it was above an average of 6.2. Beneficiaries improved the quality of household nutrition through adding fresh and organically grown vegetables such as tomatoes, cucumber, cabbage, carrot, broccoli, and peppers to their diets.

In 2020, exemplifying rural women's improved food and nutrition security, 300 members of Self Help Groups (SHGs) harvested 98,2 tons of vegetables and earned a total amount of 2,00,000 KGS (US\$ 23,640). Survey data showed that 30% of this harvest was used for the beneficiaries' own consumption, 42% was used for preservation, and the remaining 27,5 tons of vegetables were sold for 590,000 KGS (US\$ 6,973).

All targets planned under this outcome were achieved.

Output 1.1: Rural women have increased access to resources, assets and services critical for their food and nutrition security

The JP RWEE selected target areas based on an initial survey on existing women's groups and their operations. Beneficiaries were identified through the following eligibility criteria: a) female headed households living below the poverty line, single mothers, and families with persons with disabilities; b) income per member of the household not exceeding 1,354 KGS (approximately US\$ 16) per month in accordance with the government's eligibility criteria for social allowances; c) families with a large number of children (three or more) below the age of 14; and d) families with access to 3-8 acres of land. In total, 3,731 beneficiaries (3,653 women and 78 men) increased their capacity in organic farming through trainings in vegetable and fruit growing technologies, water-saving irrigation methods, integrated plants protection, organic farming, and fruit and vegetable cultivation. In total, 713 trainings and 472 special technical consultations were conducted, and 109 demonstration sites were established in pilot villages. The effort to improve rural women's access to resources, assets and services has led to the following results:

- 510 beneficiaries (439 women and 71 men) gained knowledge in the technologies of growing fruits and berry crops. They planted seedlings of fruit and berry crops and integrated protection methods to protect these crops from diseases and pests. By growing these non-traditional crops, as was the case for beneficiaries of 12 villages in the Naryn province who planted seedlings of raspberries and blackcurrants, beneficiaries were able to diversify their household members' nutrition.
- 3,653 rural women applied climate smart agricultural technologies and planted high-quality seeds, such as tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage, cauliflower, carrots, broccoli, and pepper.
- 498 rural SHGs improved agricultural activities through the following inputs: 3,371 sets of mini-plastic tunnel greenhouses, 14 fruit drying equipment pieces, 67 tons of fertilizers for the effective production of vegetables; 50 knapsack sprayers for plant pest and disease control, and 3 cows for 17 rural women.
- 81 SHGs applied water-saving technologies for growing vegetables by using 99 drip irrigation systems (for the size of 0.03 ha) and 10 drip irrigation systems (for the size of 1 ha). These were for 10 SHG's community gardens. The drip irrigation systems increased the yield of vegetable crops by 2.3 and 3.5 times the national average. Furthermore, this system led to a 30% increase in the use of irrigation water, which made a big difference considering the critical shortage of water resources during cultivation seasons.

Results obtained at demonstration sites in 2019 showed that the average vegetable yields obtained by beneficiaries was 34% higher when using this technology compared to traditional technologies and 99.5% higher than the average crop yield in the Kyrgyz Republic.¹⁰ Furthermore, as a result of the application of this new agrotechnology, beneficiaries received an average net profit of 21,666 KGS (US\$ 310) from 0.03 hectares, a profit growth of 130%, and a yield increase of 33%.

Output 1.2: Rural women have greater capacity to enhance and control local food security reserves

In total, 3,653 women increased their knowledge on home-based fruit and vegetable processing. Additionally, 300 (283 women and 17 men) rural farmers received access to technology inputs and training for poultry farming. The tailored trainings and practical skills on poultry farming allowed rural farmers to grow different

¹⁰ Average vegetable crops yield in Kyrgyz Republic are 18-20 tons per 1 ha. National Statistic Committee data.

breeds of chicken (focusing on eggs or meat), while using the same plot of land and food available. With this newly acquired knowledge and skills, beneficiaries in the pilot provinces were equipped to run successful businesses in poultry farming. Data revealed that most residents of rural communities grow chickens as part of their livelihood assets, yet do not consider poultry farming an income generating activity. Post-training data showed that, within one month after completion of the training, over 25% of the beneficiaries had either started setting up poultry businesses or applied the newly acquired knowledge at home.

Moreover, the JP RWEE, in close partnership with the Republican Health Promotion Centre (RHPC) and Village Health Committees (VHC), enhanced the knowledge of 1,400 beneficiaries (1,370 women and 2 men, and 28 partners) on nutrition. Special attention was given to children and to women of reproductive age.

A total of 4,224 beneficiaries (4,146 women and 78 men) from households in vulnerable conditions strengthened their livelihood skills and improved food security during lean season to reduce an overall pressure on the family budget as a result of participation in the Food for Training (FFT) modality (this includes topics on nutrition and business plan development). They received 651,98 metric tons of fortified food and oil to meet their food gap dietary needs (100-200 kg of fortified wheat flour and 10-20 litres of vegetable oil per person) in 2019 and 2020, including as part of the COVID-19 response.

Outcome 2: Rural women have increased their income and secured their livelihoods

Of the 323,262 registered farm households in Kyrgyzstan, only 62,212 (or 19.4%) are headed by women.¹¹ In the Chui province, for example, only 9.7% of the 518 collective farms and only one of the 38 government-owned farms are headed by women. Though agricultural development projects target rural women, they tend to focus on small household plots and vegetable farming. Therefore, women headed agricultural enterprises are still rare in Kyrgyzstan. In response to these challenges, the JP RWEE focused on increasing and sustaining rural women's livelihoods by enhancing their status as leaders of rural enterprises and increasing their access to wider value markets.

As a result of JP RWEE's efforts, women SHG members enhanced their entrepreneurial skills and knowledge, exposed their products beyond local markets, and secured new professions. The economic interventions resulted in a substantial income increase of US\$ 1,453,605 generated by 3731 beneficiaries (3653 women and 78 men) as members of 498 SHGs. Beyond these economic gains, rural women also advanced their status which, in turn, enabled them to influence decisions and transform power relations at family, community and local government levels. By feeling empowered to act as agents of change rather than as beneficiaries, women SHG members challenged stereotypes regarding women's inability to manage enterprises and lead effective agricultural production.¹²

Output 2.1 Rural women have enhanced entrepreneurship skills and value chains to access markets for their products

The JP RWEE started supporting the implementation of the household methodology Business Action Learning for Innovation (BALI) in 2018. The BALI methodology aims to promote women's business innovation and diversification of their opportunities within local economies. It aims to enable women from all backgrounds to develop and implement attainable business and marketing plans based on their specific opportunities and challenges¹³. As BALI is follow-on methodology for community champions who are already familiar with the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) methodologies, it also has a peer replication mechanism which facilitates autonomous upscaling among peers. As motivation amongst women was high, 98% of the trained women organized their businesses as part of SHG initiatives.

¹¹ <http://www.stat.kg/ru/publications/>

¹² The Report on 'Reflection Sessions on the Changes in Women SHGs', April 2021.

¹³ <https://gamechangenetwork.org/methodology/business-action-learning-for-innovation-bali>

A total of 6,569 beneficiaries (6,154 women and 415 men) strengthened their entrepreneurial, business management and financial literacy skills through economic trainings. The project beneficiaries produced an average income of US\$ 450 from agricultural activities (an increase of more than 40%) and an average profit of US\$ 330.

3,111 beneficiaries (all women) received vocational trainings based on individual preference. Vocational training provided included: handicrafts, bakery, sewing, mobile phone repairing, house painting, stove painting and carpet making. The women also received training in financial literacy and business management. As a direct result of the trainings, 98% of the participants (3,041 out of 3,111) started small businesses. Together with its partners, the JP RWEE created the 'Buy From Women' e-platform which gave women entrepreneurs the opportunity to market their businesses and products. By the end of the JP RWEE, the e-platform's data base consisted of 1,159 women and profiles of 300 women entrepreneurs were designed and posted on the online marketplace (<https://buyfromwomenkg.com>). The platform provides women entrepreneurs with a safe space for presenting their business ideas and enhancing their access to potential investors and buyers. It emerged as the online continuation of the 'Buy From Women' marketing campaign. The JP RWEE supported this campaign to advocate for rural women entrepreneurship and cultivate a new public perception regarding rural women's role and contribution in economic development. Two trade centres in Bishkek and Osh City organized the sales of products produced by rural women entrepreneurs. The initiative also received a wide social media coverage from bloggers and other parties raising awareness on women entrepreneurship. Though sales were not as lucrative, the 'Buy From Women' initiative received high praise from beneficiaries and partners for its promising approach to expanding the marketing opportunities of JP RWEE beneficiaries. Therefore, WPO members who had been closely involved in the design and implementation of the campaign were committed to the continuation of the initiative in their work.

Over time, rural women's training interests shifted to include more innovative business areas, such as beekeeping, fishery, and leather production. Women SHGs members started challenging conventional areas of women-led economic activities, such as sewing and handicrafts, and expressed interest in participating in trainings on new business ideas. This expansion of economic activities led to profitable results and comparative advantages on the business market.

Output 2.2 Rural women have increased access to decent wage employment opportunities

Over the course of the JP RWEE implementation period, 805 women became self-employed and, as a result, increased their average income by 29.5%. Trainings in business, marketing, and value chain development, coupled by gaining access to revolving funds, contributed to women's ability to start their own enterprises.

21 rural women successfully managed five mini-processing workshops for drying fruits and processing milk. By producing a surplus of local products, they contributed to the improvement of the existing value-chain production of agricultural goods and to the reduction of post-harvest losses. In turn, the supply of products in local markets at affordable prices increased. The workshops were established through a collaboration with SHGs, who rehabilitated the workshop premises. The JP RWEE contributed by providing equipment and technical training on dairy processing, drying fruits and vegetables, production of jams and pickles, and bakery.

As members of women's Producer Organizations (POs), SHGs are now independently running economic initiatives with support through the POs revolving funds. This model of community funds was established by the JP RWEE in the target communities. In total, 62 community funds joined 5 formally registered women's POs and reached a cumulative revolving capital of US\$ 121,886 by the end of the JP RWEE. These funds were established to ensure continuous and sustainable funding opportunities for PO members. The revolving capital of the community funds is made up of inputs from SHG members. These inputs consist of membership fees as well as of 30% of the costs of agricultural inputs (seeds and agricultural equipment) which are put back into the community funds. These cycles of repayments, as well as overall rules and procedures of

community funds, have been established by PO members and are mandatory for all members. Regularity of functioning of community funds provides an important financial basis for members of POs, as it helps them implement and expand economic activities and initiate different business ideas. Management by POs gives community funds an institutional ground for the sustainable and continuous process of joint economic activities by members.

A total of 172 SHGs have initiated and managed their enterprises with the support of small and medium sized equipment and implemented new business initiatives. Due to the growth of online sales during the lockdown, imposed to contain the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, SHGs were also highly interested in mentorship support through online platforms and marketing via social media. The mentorship included support in practical skill development on digital literacy, e-marketing and online promotion, products and service development, cost-benefit analysis of products, and sales at local markets. Women SHG members applied these skills at online expo events and on the 'Buy From Women' e-platform.

As a direct result of JP RWEE's trainings on business ideas, 72 SHGs implemented innovative business plans and set up micro enterprises. The trainings covered topics, such as: vermicompost¹⁵ (use of Californian worms), apricot processing, dairy production, and drying fruits and *kuruts* (dairy products). Resulting from one of the business ideas created, SHGs in the Southern provinces started applying composting and vermicompost methods to their businesses and, in turn, were considered the best performing organic fertilizers.

5 women's POs, of which three cooperatives, 'Kadam' in Jalal-Abad (2016), 'Iskra' in Osh (2016), and 'Nukura Oruk' in Batken (2020), and two public associations, 'Bar-El' in Naryn (2016) and 'Taaji' in Chui (2016), enhanced their organizational capacity by providing services to their members. The impact of JP RWEE's trainings is found in the strong institutional basis of these POs. As functional organizations, they formulated the objective of providing services to 1,716 rural women. The POs helped rural women with accessing revolving funds to run Joint Economic Initiatives (JEIs). By the end of the project, 165 JEIs were supported with funds which enabled the employment of 1351 women. The POs also supported the coordination and monitoring of seasonal agricultural activities. Since the functioning of the POs, rural women diversified and expanded their production of agricultural products from an initial 4-6 products to more than 10 products. Lastly, since 2020, the POs have been collaborating with the Union of Cooperatives of Kyrgyzstan (UCK). UCK is a national institution promoting the development of cooperatives in the country through legislative frameworks, institutional capacity building, and investment and marketing opportunities. By partnering with the UCK, POs now have increased access to the business community, including to investors, funds, and marketing opportunities.

Outcome 3: Rural women have enhanced leadership and participation in their communities and in rural institutions, and in shaping laws, policies and programmes

Working with local governments was considered essential for the sustainability of the programme. Therefore, the JP RWEE focused on local government capacity development along with enhancing the capacities of rural women leaders and communities to ensure that rural women's rights and priorities were reflected in local development plans and budgets. Suggested improvements in the local governance system included, but were not limited to, local planning/budgeting, support to local planning on agricultural extension services, and cooperatives. Previously, only 10% of the Water Users Association (WUA) membership consisted of women and an even smaller percentage of women (0.4) were in leadership positions in WUAs.¹⁴ Additionally, women representation in elected local councils had drastically declined from 19% in 2016 to 10% in 2020. Therefore, women's full participation in local governance systems, both at informal institutions and elected bodies, was deemed central to ensuring rural women's enhanced leadership and participation.

¹⁴ Beijing + 25 – National Report on Implementation of BPFA commitments in KR, 2019.

The JP RWEE contributed to the national achievement of an increased women's representation in local councils. During the local council elections of April 2021, a monumental increase in women's representation took place as it grew from 10% to 38.7%. The JP RWEE contributed to this result by strengthening rural women's leadership in target provinces on topics such as decision-making, leadership and networking. Furthermore, the JP RWEE was involved in widespread campaigning and created safe spaces with the aim of accelerating positive social norm change on women's leadership.

In the JP RWEE target areas, 41 women and 3 men beneficiaries became members of Local Councils, and 1 woman was elected head of a local-governance body. These 44 elected local council members represent 19% of the total number of beneficiaries who attended the comprehensive educational programme with leadership sessions on political participation, electoral processes and gender-sensitive local governance.

Output 3.1 Rural women, including young women, have enhanced confidence and leadership skills to participate in local governance

The JP RWEE promoted women's representation activities during the local elections in 2016 and in April 2021. As a result of JP RWEE support, 235 local leaders enhanced their capacities to run for elections. 19% of which (41 women and 3 men) became deputies of local councils: 20 women and 3 men were elected in 2016, and 21 women beneficiaries became deputies of local councils in 2021. This achievement was supported by the 30% gender quota in Local Election Law, as well as due to the comprehensive advocacy work on women leadership, leading to increased interest on the part of women to join JP RWEE activities and positive changes in public perceptions regarding women political participation.

The JP RWEE worked in close partnership with the Central Election Committee and the UNDP/UN Women programme on 'Support to Electoral Process', which helped with the preparations for the local elections in 2021. It contributed to a series of dialogues in all provinces with the participation of 300 local women leaders. As a direct result of participation in dialogues, 196 of these women (65%) registered as candidates to run for local elections. Many of these women stated to have never thought of registering as a candidate, as they used to believe that only prominent people (mainly men) could do so. Discussions on the true meaning of leadership during these dialogues empowered them to make the decision to participate in local elections. The dialogues were directed at strengthening the skills of potential women leaders by helping them identify in what way women leaders differs from men leaders; what obstacles prevent women from confidently entering politics; and how the approaches of men and women towards budgets differ. They covered issues ranging from women's participation in local self-government to the parameters of influence of local self-government bodies to how women can influence the qualitative transformation of local affairs. After participation in the dialogues, 126 out of 196 (64%) registered women won mandates during elections and became members of local councils.

A total of 487 elected rural women deputies of local councils from the 18 JP RWEE target districts enhanced their knowledge on the rules and procedures of local councils through training. The feedback they received from women deputies verified the importance of attending meetings with a clear understanding of the local council's work procedures and enabled them to act as vocal and decisive members of local councils.

413 rural women and men will continue to strengthen their leadership capacities through sharing knowledge, experience and ideas on an online "Women-leaders" Telegram group. This Telegram group served as a platform for consultations with the representatives of the Central Election Commission (CEC). Based on the collection of 'Frequently Asked Questions', the JP RWEE produced videos to provide support to women deputies of local councils on local self-governance normative documents and procedures. Following the election, the Telegram group continued to serve as a functional tool, with members continuing to exchange information, news, posting queries and suggesting solutions. The increase in the number of members, from 320 to 413 by July 2021, demonstrates the Telegram group members' interest in acting as a group as well as the sustainability potential of the platform.

As a result of enhanced capacities on gender-responsive local development planning processes, 35 target municipalities integrated a gender perspective in their local plans. 444 rural women leaders worked in close collaboration with local government on the process of local planning and budgeting, including on budget hearings at the local levels, and on the allocation of budget funds to identify gender sensitive priorities.

The collaboration between women groups and local government resulted in women leaders' groups implementing 35 community initiatives. The JP RWEE provided small grants of US\$ 500-2500 per joint local initiative.¹⁵ In total, 12,549 community members, including 6,726 women, benefitted from 12 local government-women groups initiatives. These initiatives were facilitated through the budgets of local government in the amount of KGS1,659,500 (US\$24,226) and constituted 43.5% of the total costs of the initiatives. The JP RWEE contributed the remaining amount.

Even in times of crisis, women SHGs continued to partner with local governments. In 2020, for example, the Jalal-Abad and Osh provinces launched 10 community initiatives in response to the COVID-19 outbreak with support from the programme's women leaders from Naryn. Women were provided with fabrics and other accessories to produce sewing masks. Furthermore, 16 villages of the pilot regions were provided with protective equipment (masks, sanitizers, gloves), soap and hygiene products, baby and adult diapers, thermometers, and baby food. In March and April, more than 2,200 families and 366 employees from the feldsher-midwife stations, Ayil Okmotu checkpoints and hospitals received equipment to help with the response.

In 2017, the JP RWEE worked with local natural resource management institutions, such as WUAs and Pasture Committees (PC), in target areas with the aim of improving their policies and increasing rural women's access to decision-making over resource management. In all pilot provinces, trainings on gender-responsive planning processes were organized for the representatives of WUAs and PCs. Analysis of the WUAs and PCs in 20 municipalities revealed that the committees' composition included only 9.8% of women. Therefore, the set of recommendations on improving women's participation in the committees was transferred to WUAs and PCs. This resulted in an increase in women's representation from 1% to 16% in the PC in the Jalal-Abad province and an increase from 8% to 23% in the WUA in the target areas of Jalal-Abad.

Output 3.2: Rural women have greater organizational capacities to form, sustain and participate into POs, cooperatives and unions

A total of 3,731 beneficiaries, including 3,653 women and 78 men, have increased self-confidence, leadership and improved status in the community by mobilizing into 498 self-help groups for joint economic activities. The main entry point for this mobilization was women's self-management of resources (savings, experience, knowledge).¹⁶

Two hundred and twenty-three (223) SHGs, representing 1,716 SHG members, joined and formally registered into 5 women POs. Through participation in these POs, rural women enhanced their confidence, leadership skills and capacities. Furthermore, participation led to a sense of solidarity, mutual help and belonging. The stories and testimonies of more than 50 women PO members during the reflection sessions on the results of the capacity assessment of POs (April 2021) confirmed this.¹⁷ During these reflection sessions, the JP RWEE team and the beneficiaries, joined by members of the National Steering Committee (NSC) and partnering agencies, analysed the changes that had occurred in the individual and household level with regards to rural women's participation in decision-making process, as well as other benefits brought about through membership of the POs.

¹⁵ improved drinking water supply, electricity supply and road conditions, improve childcare facilities, access to information, and IT resource centers for young women in rural communities.

¹⁶ Workshop on reflection of the results of WPOs' capacity assessment, April 2021.

¹⁷ Workshop on reflection of the results of WPOs' capacity assessment, April 2021.

Based on the knowledge gained through trainings, 5 women's POs (1,716 beneficiaries of which 1,666 women and 50 men) developed and adopted gender sensitive policies and regulations. As a result of the capacity assessment findings, POs improved their bookkeeping and accounting systems and introduced new optimized formats of documents (e.g., loan agreements and guaranteed agreements). By the end of the JP RWEE, the 5 women's POs had US\$121,886 in their accounts. This was accumulated through their own contributions, membership and entrance fees, revolving funds, and assets. Furthermore, the women's POs strengthened their management teams by changing the composition of the Management Board and electing three new leaders, three accountants and four revision committees. All 5 women's POs strengthened their organizational and human capacity by establishing legal rather than informal membership. The strengthening of the women's POs was considered critical for the continuation of member activities after the JP RWEE's completion. Within the last year of JP RWEE's implementation, the POs intensified their internal interactions with members and expanded their relations with relevant partners in the areas of agricultural development and agro-production. This resulted, for example, in the signing of an agreement between Chui WPO and Dairy Factory on the supply of milk by PO members.

Instrumental for strengthening the organizational capacities of the 5 women's POs has been the partnership with the UCK. As a result of this partnership, 245 SHG members from the POs increased their income to secure their livelihoods. Through its 'mentorship component', SHGs were able to carry out several economic activities –such as drying and packing fruits and vegetables, processing bio humus, producing kurut, cattle breeding, and producing dairy products– that led to increased daily incomes. The JP RWEE supported the SHGs with raw materials, cattle, equipment (for secondary drying, vacuum packaging, racks, sinks, inventory, and sewing), trainings, and consultations. Furthermore, Revolving Funds functioned as the financial basis for the continuity of PO members' economic activities. The creation of the 'Buy From Women' online platform served as another opportunity for the PO members to extend their economic activities to new markets and customers. Support measures, such as this online platform, that facilitate the marketing of agricultural products within and outside of the country are essential for the completion of the agricultural production chain. The Buy from Women online platform investigates different market options and potential investors interested in placing special orders for agricultural products from JP RWEE participants.

Output 3.3: Rural women, including young women, have increased capacity to engage in and influence relevant policy forums at national and regional levels

In total, 5,500 rural women and JP RWEE partners have enhanced their capacities for participating in and influencing policy lobbying activities at local and central levels. The 52 different regional and national activities supported by the JP RWEE resulted in rural women improving their leadership skills, their awareness of national gender policies, and their awareness of economic, political, sexual and reproductive rights. Activities ranged from the celebration of the International Women's Day and International Rural Women's Day to consultations and conferences. All activities were united by the overarching topic of women's leadership in promoting the gender equality agenda and inclusive sustainable development. As part of the 2030 Agenda, these activities aimed at raising public awareness on the history of the women's movement in the Kyrgyz Republic and women's role in nation building, and on emphasizing the importance of women's political participation for sustainable development.

In 2020-2021, 384 beneficiaries (365 women, including young women, and 19 men) provided their recommendations for the development of the National Gender Equality Strategy (NGES) for 2021-2030 and the National Action Plan (NAP) 2021-2023 at the national consultation and at five regional consultations. The set of recommendations the JP RWEE beneficiaries developed was considered in the NGES 2021-2030 and the NAP 2021-2023 drafts. The recommendations were integrated in the NGES and NAP measures focusing on support to rural women's entrepreneurship development, prevention of violence against women and girls, and changing social norms, perception and behaviours towards gender equality and women's empowerment. As a result of the different capacity strengthening initiatives, women beneficiaries gained expertise in specific

fields (e.g., the importance of diversified diets) and/or mastered their leadership capacities by running for local elections.

Output 3.4: Rural women, including young women, have enhanced awareness on their rights in a more supportive community/local environment

The JP RWEE introduced two innovative approaches, The Gender Action Learning System (GALS) and the Business Action Learning Innovations (BALI), through a network of GALS champions. These approaches aimed at transforming power relations within families and communities by addressing power relations between family members, including increasing understanding and equitable cooperation between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law (strong social norms in Kyrgyzstan mean that mothers in law perpetuate unequal gender relations within households through expectations relating to the role of daughters in law). By also engaging men in the programme implementation, their buy-in to support any transformative process – from more equal household relations to involvement in income generating activities – was ensured. The approaches supported participants in overcoming stereotypes regarding the participation of women in income generating activities.

Since 2016, a total of 11,634 people (5,817 direct beneficiaries and 5,817 indirect HH member beneficiaries) in the JP RWEE target communities benefitted from participation in GALS. This was more than the planned target of reaching 3,004 beneficiaries and 4,725 households, as there was a lot of interest from women to participate in GALS.

From 2019 to 2021, 413 direct beneficiaries participated in and benefitted from BALI and a total of 1,000 household members indirectly benefitted from the BALI approach. In this same period, the JP RWEE team trained 4 women's POs and 56 SHGs on the BALI approach and, thereby, significantly exceeded the planned target of teaching 6 SHGs the BALI tools.

As a result of the application of the GALS/BALI methodologies, 12,634 beneficiaries increased knowledge on their rights. Family members started recognizing negative patterns in household relations and developing plans to increase happiness at the household level. For JP RWEE beneficiaries, these tools helped with decreasing unnecessary family costs and increasing income through the initiation of family businesses. This led to improved collaboration and dialogue between household members. The innovative GALS and BALI pilots that were tested in JP RWEE target communities produced tangible results. In the GALS end-line assessment¹⁸, the implementation of the tool was defined as a 'development accelerator'. It had contributed to changing traditional practices on farming and housekeeping and had helped beneficiaries in making better use of the technical trainings provided by the JP RWEE. Women noted that practices on crop and seed planting were improved. Labour activities were also optimised, as family members had started sharing the responsibility of managing the farm and households (HH) rather than letting women carry all the work burden. Furthermore, livestock-keeping practices had become more productive in the HH, which resulted in an increase in the number of animals. The facilitation of a revision process of household duty allocation between women, husbands, and children also contributed to the promotion of a 'fairer workload distribution' which, in turn, improved households' livelihoods. Another impact mentioned was improved decision-making and joint discussion of household issues with all family members. Increased confidence contributed to women becoming more active in the family and community. Lastly, after participation in GALS/BALI, property issues became increasingly important to women, and even a few cases of registering property in women's names were reported.

BALI taught women to develop their business ideas and helped them to prepare clear plans for implementing those ideas. Women reported to have gained knowledge on the non-standard use of felt and production of various types of felt products, the use of leaves as a natural fertilizer, running of baking and dumpling factory,

¹⁸ End-line assessment report, UCA- University of Central Asia, 2021.

modern ways of vegetable processing, dropping irrigation, installation of greenhouses, improved animal husbandry, marketing, advertising, income, and savings.

Outcome 4: A more gender-responsive policy environment is secured for the economic empowerment of rural women

The holistic approach taken by the JP RWEE enabled linkages between the micro, meso and macro levels. The work at the local level helped to inform dialogue at the national level. This included providing rural women with the opportunity to speak up on challenges they face and advocate with national level bodies for gender responsive policies, strategies and plans for rural women. These linkages between policy, institutional, and community levels also contributed to the development of recommendations for addressing challenges in the agricultural sector. These recommendations facilitated improvements in rural women's access to resources, agricultural extension services, and new technologies.

As a result of this bottom-up approach, 35 local development work plans and budgets that included a gender perspective were designed. Twenty of these work plans allocated a total of US\$ 12,500 from annual budgets to gender-sensitive activities. This meant that 43.5% (US\$ 20,000) of the initiatives' costs was funded by 12 municipalities and the remaining costs were funded through the JP RWEE budget. To further define funding from government budgets and donors, the JP RWEE supported development of the National Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2030, however, the process of its approval by the government, along with costing exercises has been suspended due to the ongoing government restructuring process.

Government partners (sectoral ministries as members of Inter-Ministerial Working Groups) jointly worked on gender equality analysis of agricultural strategies and policies. They provided recommendations to the Ministry of Agriculture on how to integrate gender priorities in agricultural policies and localize SDGs indicators in the agricultural sector from GEWE perspectives. They did so by identifying the local data available and proposing possible indicators related to the agricultural sector.

The process of funding the implementation of the National Gender Equality Strategy (GES) 2021-2030 is currently being led by the Ministry of Health and Social Development (MHSD) through the Inter-Ministerial Working Group on GES development. This will be finalized by November 2021. Costing will allow defining budgets for implementation of gender equality commitments under the GES, including from government budgets and donor funds.

Output 4.1: Policy makers and parliamentarians have enhanced capacities to effectively mainstream gender into land, food, agriculture, nutrition and rural employment policies, laws, and budgets

521 local and national policy makers (394 women and 127 men) enhanced their capacities on innovative methods in stakeholder consultations. This resulted in a changed practice of holding consultative discussions and elaborating decisions and recommendations. Consultants and processes undertaken included:

- Batken regional and national consultations on the development of the Batken Region Development Programme 2021-2035. These consultations focused on providing conducive conditions for rural women's and men's economic activities.
- Public hearings on the impact of legal amendments to laws for rural women. The public hearings focused on introducing amendments and an agenda to the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, and on the rates of insurance payments on the state social insurance and pension provision.
- Lobbying for a draft law criminalizing the conduct of religious marriages with minors and defining specific de-jure responsibilities of the groups involved in child marriage.
- Staff members of the Ministry of Agriculture increased their knowledge on Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, with a focus on the gender-specific targets and indicators relevant for the Ministry, and on localization of SDGs in agricultural sectoral policies and strategies.

- Public hearings on the improvements in the pension support to rural women and the impact of the newly introduced legal amendments on social insurance and pension provision for rural women.
- Workshops and consultations on gender-responsive local development planning processes and budgeting, including budget hearings at the local and national levels, and publicly discussed allocation of budget funds from a gender perspective.

Output 4.2: Greater availability of tools and data to track progress in the economic empowerment of rural women

To strengthen policymakers' understanding of gender aspects in agricultural and rural development policies, the JP RWEE facilitated a three-day training which was attended by 15 staff members from the Ministry of Agriculture. In the context of SDGs, participants were trained in using gender statistics in agriculture. The JP RWEE provided further technical support, which resulted in the development and identification of localized SDG indicators in the agricultural sector.

Together with the National Statistics Committee, the representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture undertook an analysis of 14 SDG indicators in the agricultural sector and developed an indicator passport for each of them. To ensure disaggregation of the collected data, they identified formulas and sources of information with recommendations for changes in the data collection forms.¹⁹ Having sex-disaggregated data in the agricultural sector is critical for ensuring the development of gender sensitive agricultural policies. Therefore, the JP RWEE supported the National Statistics Agency through capacity building on the implementation of National Agricultural Census with improved sex-disaggregation of data.

The index for women empowerment in agriculture was piloted in Kyrgyzstan. The study focused on the quantitative impact of the programme on women's empowerment across several dimensions, using the project-Women Empowerment in Agricultural Index (pro-WEAI) survey tool developed by GAAP2 (Gender, Agriculture and Assets Project, Phase 2). The pro-WEAI is a unique tool that collects information on 12 dimensions of women's empowerment, clustered in intrinsic, instrumental, and collective agency:

- Intrinsic agency: autonomy in income, self-efficacy, attitudes about intimate partner violence against women, respect among household members.
- Instrumental agency: input in productive decisions, ownership of land and other assets, access to and decisions on financial services, control over use of income, work balance, visiting important locations.
- Collective agency: group membership and membership in influential groups

The results of the pro-WEAI study show that both women and men JP RWEE beneficiaries in the intervention areas increased their overall empowerment. However, results show larger effects for women, who increased overall empowerment by 60% (11.2% increase) with respect to the comparable control group. When focusing on the different types of interventions, the pro-WEAI study results show that women who also received the GALS/BALI interventions had an effect on all empowerment dimensions, while the JP RWEE interventions without GALS and BALI mainly affected the instrumental agency. To prove the robustness of the findings, they were tested against several confounding factors. Moreover, the effect that the recent pandemic had on individuals was analysed. This revealed that the pandemic had no negative impact on individuals' ability to make decisions about harvests, main crops, and wages.

¹⁹ These indicators are: 1.4.1, 1.4.2, 2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.4.1, 2.5.1, 2.5.2, 2.a.1, 2.a.2, 2.b.1, 2.b.2, 2.c.1, 5.a.1.a, 5.a.1.b, 5.a.2.

Output 4.3: An enabling environment is promoted to reflect rural women’s priorities in regional policy processes

A total of 527 policymakers (400 women and 127 men) and 598 beneficiaries (569 women and 29 men) enhanced their capacities to define and promote rural women’s priorities. They influenced 51 regional dialogue platforms:

- Rural women’s priorities were integrated into the new National Gender Equality Strategy (GES) 2021 – 2030, including the priority areas of rural women’s economic empowerment, women’s leadership, and support to the development of women’s entrepreneurship. Women leaders learned and applied innovative approaches, such as the Adaptive Leadership²⁰ and Oxford Scenario Planning Approach²¹ in the process of the GES development. These approaches were used to shift thinking from linear strategic planning to scenario thinking, allowing the development and implementation of strategies and plans that are adaptive to rapidly changing contexts and uncertain political, social, and economic contexts. JP RWEE beneficiaries contributed to the GES development process by bringing in rural women’s perspectives and specific needs to the scenario planning for rural women’s economic empowerment, leadership and participation in decision making. The partners from target local governments and the Ministry of Agriculture were engaged as members of the Inter-Ministerial Working Group (IMWG) for GES development.
- 40 women members of local councils from JP RWEE villages participated in a ceremony (June 2021) to pay tribute to women leaders and to celebrate the achievement of 38.7% women representation in local councils. The ceremony was held in the form of an open dialogue on the different factors enabling a breakthrough in the representation of women in local politics. JP RWEE beneficiaries shared their stories on leadership and joined ‘A community of women local council members’, which aimed at strengthening solidarity among women leaders. This was a unique opportunity for dialogue with more than 120 participants including prominent leaders, such as the ex-President of the Kyrgyz Republic, the First Lady of the Kyrgyz Republic, representatives of the Cabinet of the Ministers, the Chair of the Central Electoral Commission of the Kyrgyz Republic (CEC), and women members of the Parliament.
- On June 18, 2021, the JP RWEE team conducted the Final Conference of the JP RWEE by symbolically marking the National Day of Rural Women. More than fifty rural women beneficiaries of JP RWEE were praised for their contribution to social, economic, and political development. The conference was an open platform for partners to highlight the achievements of the JP RWEE and define the future steps to ensure sustainability of the programme’s results.
- The JP RWEE contributed to the government's initiative to develop the "Batken Region Development Programme for 2021-2035". At the request of the government, the programme supported the first consultation mission of the government to the Batken region by introducing innovative approaches to open dialogues which would ensure genuine participation and true consideration of the experience and opinions of women and men of the Batken region. This initiative allowed key ministries to integrate GEWE considerations into a regional development programme based on broad participation and inclusiveness of all social groups.

With support of the JP RWEE, gender analysis of 6 sectoral policy documents was conducted by respective Inter-Ministerial Working groups that were composed of specialists from the relevant sectoral ministries. The process, which involved wide consultations, helped members of groups enhance their understanding of gender dimensions of sectoral policies, including on the Forestry Development Strategic Plan – 2040; the Programme on Fishery and Aquaculture Development 2027; the State Programme on Food Security and Nutrition 2019-2023; the National Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2030; the National Programme on support to women’s entrepreneurship, including special measures on rural women’s economic activities; and the Batken

²⁰ <https://hbr.org/2020/09/5-principles-to-guide-adaptive-leadership>.

²¹ <https://www.sbs.ox.ac.uk/oxford-answers/oxford-scenario-planning-approach-era-covid-19>

Development Programme 2021-2035, with specific recommendations on how gender equality concerns and empowerment of rural women can be incorporated into policy documents and action plans.

Gender analysis of laws focused on: the impact on rural women of the Law on ‘Introducing amendments and addenda to the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic March 19, 2015 #60’ and ‘On the rates of insurance payments on the state social insurance’; the level of respect for the rights of rural women in the implementation of social protection measures, namely the right to a retirement pension; the Law on ‘Criminalizing the Conduct of Religious Marriages with Minors’; and lobbying for a 30% gender quota in the Electoral legislation at local and central levels (2016, 2021).

10 analytical briefs on the status of women were developed. These briefs focused on the status of rural women, women in decision-making and in unconventional professions (local governance, law enforcement, justice, economy, business activity), young and elderly women, migrant women, women belonging to minority groups, women survivors of all forms of violence, women in peace and security, women in science and innovations, women with disabilities, and women living with HIV. The analytical briefs aimed at providing users (national local policy makers and civil society actors) with a clear analysis of statistical data, information, and anecdotal evidence/practices. The gender lens applied in this analysis measured the progress on gender equality and the degree of vulnerability, marginalization, advantage and benefit that specific groups of women in Kyrgyzstan encounter. The Inter-Ministerial Working Group used the briefs for the development of the Gender Equality Strategy to ensure that the evidence was based on considerations of special needs of women from different rights groups.

Qualitative Assessment

The programme contributed to transforming the livelihoods and decision-making of rural women in Kyrgyzstan by building on the comparative advantages of each of the implementing UN agencies. As a result of the interventions, the perception of rural women and existing gender stereotypes shifted in the target areas. This led to more equitable power dynamics within families and communities, and to an expansion of women’s role beyond childcare and housework, as evidenced by the GALS endline assessment. The JP RWEE team, joined by national partners, continuously worked towards bringing transformative changes to the lives of rural women.

One of the key transformative results of the JP RWEE has been the strengthening of women’s agency and power. This result is demonstrated through changes in women’s status within families and communities. Women²² stated that they gained power for decision-making, increased self-esteem and confidence, and confirmed their ability to manage and earn profits from agricultural activities. Both JP RWEE’s work in the social mobilisation of women in self-help groups and the application of GALS as an innovative methodology were grounded in the concept of empowerment. The focus in this empowerment work has been on exploring the status of *power* in the chain of relations (family, community, and society), and examining at what level and to what extent rural women participants possessed power and could use it. The JP RWEE interventions on empowerment subsequently led to the following set of changes:

- The power of knowledge and actions: Women stressed that the opportunities for uniting in self-help groups and for gaining new knowledge on agricultural technologies were critical for changing their personal mindset about their abilities. These opportunities enhanced their self-confidence, self-consciousness, and recognition of their own power. Women testified that their first thought after a good harvest was: *‘I did it and I can do it even better’*.

²² The Report on ‘Reflection Sessions on the Changes in Women SHGs’, April 2021; Final evaluation of the Kyrgyzstan Joint UN Women/ FAO/ IFAD/ WFP Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women, 2017.

- Gained authority among family members: Women noted the changes in their status within their families. After the first evidence of success (e.g., a good harvest, additional income, direct contact with local authorities), family members, especially husbands and mothers-in-law, recognized a new role for the women. They supported their active participation in self-help group initiatives and started sharing household chores, responsibilities and childcare, particularly when women were absent due to trainings or evening group meetings. Women also noted a gradual transformation in the notion of ‘*a family breadwinner*’. This changed notion also influenced changes in family decision making power, including on family income and expenses.
- Self-respect and attention to self-appearance: Women noted a changed perception towards their self-appearance, their self-respect increased, and the inner feeling of self-satisfaction also strengthened.

Women’s empowerment was leveraged through the functioning of SHGs, as these, by enabling an increased sense of solidarity and collaboration, served as an effective mechanism for creating support networks. The SHG’s functional revolving funds also led to an increased level of mutual trust and served as mechanisms for increasing the sustainability of self-help groups. Women²³ reported an ‘*increased power from collective actions*’ and linked their personal growth to this sense of union and collaboration. Trust among the members of SHGs was gained through the achievements they accomplished together. The JP RWEE introduced the SHG concept after testing two approaches, namely (i) participatory social mobilization processes and the use of community activists as focal points; and (ii) working through local authorities and using social workers as focal points. Working through community activists/champions proved to be more effective and provide a greater sustainability potential as the JP RWEE activists were intrinsically motivated to lead community development. Due to their connection to the pilot villages, activists/champions demonstrated a larger sense of ownership and responsibility for ensuring the proper functioning of SHGs and their continuation beyond the project duration.

Women’s membership and participation in the rural revolving funds scheme created a new culture of relations, moving from receiving and spending to capitalising assets.²⁴ This is an important result from the partnership, as it forms the foundation for the sustainability of interventions. With its established structures, system of management and its revolving capital, the revolving fund, administered through women’s POs, acts as a platform for the continuity of economic activities of SHGs members. Furthermore, it also serves as a platform for seeking and managing additional funds that can be mobilised from sources beyond the POs.

The model of providing specialized support to rural women SHG members on agricultural development and food security proved sustainable and mutually reinforcing. Group solidarity and membership discipline ensured the accurate use of seeds, fertilizers, and food, as well as the consistent and systematic application of new knowledge on agricultural technologies. Subsequently, this created marketable conditions for high quality vegetables, fruits and berries that can be sold at good prices. Women started purchasing good quality seeds and seedling which attracted more competitive prices at markets. With JP RWEE support, women learned how to cultivate and harvest a diverse selection of vegetables.

Seed support, along with the provision of mini-plastic tunnels, allowed beneficiaries to plant seedlings in late winter and, therefore, reap harvests in May or early June instead of autumn. This advancement led to changes in food and cash availability. On top of that, the preservation and canning of vegetables and fruits increased food security and nutrition in pre-harvest periods.

“We used to buy seeds on the market, and we were not sure about the quality of those seeds. Sometimes we had to re-cultivate because the germination ability of seeds was very low. After we got seeds as support from JP RWEE, the situation changed and we produced juicy vegetables that are in great demand on markets.

²³ The Report on ‘Reflection Sessions on the Changes in Women SHGs’, April 2021; Final evaluation of the Kyrgyzstan Joint UN Women/ FAO/ IFAD/ WFP Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women, 2017.

²⁴ Workshop on reflection of the results of WPOs’ capacity assessment, April 2021.

Quality seeds together with knowledge of agri-technologies have tremendously improved the financial well-being of our families” (beneficiary testimony)

Knowledge of agricultural technologies, along with the provision of high-quality seeds, has helped rural women to see the possibility of producing profit by using effective cultivation/irrigation processes. Women have changed their attitude towards agricultural activities due to an increased knowledge of agro-technologies.

“I never thought how important it is to know the right time for watering vegetables. Now I know the rules of the technological cycle of vegetable growth – all my neighbours are amazed of the size of my tomatoes and cucumbers.” (beneficiary testimony)

The joint delivery of the JP RWEE allowed all four partner UN agencies to put together a comprehensive, mutually reinforcing package of activities for target beneficiaries. The partnership of four UN agencies, each with a specialized mandate, is considered a necessary condition for the complex and holistic support to economic activities of rural women that ultimately leads to improved rural livelihoods, as found by the final Global Evaluation. Considerable efforts were made to strengthen partnerships and complementarity among UN partners. At the same time, the JP RWEE encountered some difficulties related to a high turnover of the JP RWEE implementation team.

In addition to the four participating agencies (FAO, IFAD, UN Women, WFP), other UN agencies and partners were involved in JP RWEE activities through partnership and coordination arrangements:

- UNICEF, UNFPA, UNODC, UNDP, Swiss Development Agency, OSCE, USAID – partnership on the development of Gender Equality Strategy (GES-2021-2030). The JP RWEE’s role was to ensure genuine engagement of rural women in the consultations on GES priorities.
- UNDP, Swiss Development Agency, OSCE – partnership in promoting gender quota in Electoral Laws at central and local levels, and advocacy and campaigning for women’s political participation at local elections in 2016 and 2021.
- USAID ‘Agro-Trade Activity’, the Embassy of Japan – partnership for promoting women entrepreneurship and ‘Buy from Women Online Platform’.

ii) **Indicator Based Performance Assessment:**

	<u>Achieved</u> Indicator Targets	Reasons for Variance with Planned Target (if any)	Source of Verification
Outcome 1: Rural women have improved food and nutrition security			
Indicator 1.1.1: Increase of agricultural production of women farmers Planned Target: 30%	Agricultural production increased on average by 2.5-3 times, which shows in average 40 % higher yield compared to the average yield per ha as per National Statistics Committee data in relevant years. Average income of each project participant from agricultural activities in seasons was at least US\$ 480, and an average profit reached at least US\$ 350	Target achieved	Annual reports of the JP RWEE; Implementing Partner's final reports
Indicator 1.1.2: Evidence of improvement of rural women dietary diversity and consumption patterns Baseline: 4.5 Planned Target: > 6.1	Participating HH were able to diversify their consumption from on average 6 to 7 types of food items Dietary Diversity Score increased up to 6.6 (2017) as compared to the 4.5 in 2014. Diversity Score (DDS) increased from 4.5 in 2014 (consuming 4.5 food groups) to 6.6 in 2017 and 2018 and 6.2 in 2019. During 2021, the DDS has increased from 5.8 (before the project) to 5.9 (after the project), implying that households were consuming on average six types of food groups	Target achieved	WFP Post Distribution Monitoring/Household Verification
Output 1.1 women have increased access to resources, assets and services critical for their food and nutrition security.			

<p>Indicator 1.1.1: Number of rural women accessing integrated services Baseline: 231 Planned Target: 3,423 women and 77 men (3500 newly mobilized in addition to 231 t the baseline 231)</p>	<p>3,731 beneficiaries (3,653 women and 78 men) were able to use climate smart agricultural technologies as greenhouses and planting qualitative seeds, provided by the JP RWEE (tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage, cauliflower, carrots, broccoli and pepper).</p> <p>300 (283 women and 17 men) rural farmers accessed technology inputs and training for poultry farming. 3,731 rural farmers (3,653 women and 78 men) increased knowledge on agricultural production techniques and were able to do organic farming thanks to the following training: - Vegetables and fruits growing technology - Water-saving irrigation methods and soil management. - Integrated Pest management with the basics of organic farming. - Economic analysis of farm management.</p> <p>In total 713 trainings and 472 consultancy days. Established 109 demonstration plots in pilot villages</p>	<p>Target achieved</p>	<p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE; Implementing Partners final reports</p>
<p>Indicator 1.1.2: Number of rural women utilizing improved production techniques Baseline: 231 Planned Target: 3,423 women and 77 men</p>	<p>3,653 rural women and 78 men increased access to diversified Crop production</p> <p>498 SHGs received economic inputs for agricultural activities and participated in the Food for training component: - 6-8 type of vegetables seeds for agricultural production - set of mini-plastic tunnel greenhouse and - 99 drip irrigation systems for 0,03 ha were installed for each 81 SHGs to demonstrate water-saving technologies for growing vegetables - 10 drip irrigation systems for 1 ha were installed for each 10 SHG’s community gardens. - 14 fruit drying equipment, - 67 tons of fertilizers were provided for effective producing of vegetables - 50 knapsack sprayers were provided for plant pest and disease control. - 3 cows for 17 rural women</p>	<p>Target achieved</p>	<p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE; Implementing Partner’s final reports; Minutes of the JP RWEE Technical coordination meeting</p>
<p>Output 1.2: Rural women have greater capacity to enhance and control local food security reserves</p>			
<p>Indicator 1.2.1: Number of rural women trained on professions in demand at village level through Training activities Baseline: 0</p>	<p>3,111 rural women increased their knowledge through vocational trainings as handicraft, bakery, sewing, repairing mobile phones, financial literacy and business management.</p>	<p>Targets overachieved. 1. Based on demand and availability of funds the Program trained greater</p>	<p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE: Implementing Partner’s final reports</p>

<p>Planned Target: At least 240 women (2015-2017)</p>	<p>3,653 women improved and increased knowledge on fruit and vegetable processing at home.</p> <p>1,372 beneficiaries and 28 partners increased knowledge on quality nutrition through district health promotion unit specialists.</p>	<p>number of women then it was set as target in 2015.</p> <p>2. As per FAO requirements every woman received seeds supposed to master her skills on food processing/ Therefore 3,653 women received seeds and improved skills on food processing.</p> <p>3. Based on fund availability of WFP the number of trainees was increased to 1,372. In addition, 28 partners-village health committees members also trained for further dissemination of knowledge among villagers.</p>	<p>Minutes of the JP RWEE Technical coordination meeting.</p>
<p>Outcome 2 Rural women have increased income to secure their livelihoods.</p>			
<p>Indicator 2.1.1: Income generated by rural women’s cooperatives from their sales to WFP and other markets Baseline: 0 Planned Target: N/A for KYR</p>	<p>US\$ 1,453,605 income generated by 498 SHGs united 3,731 beneficiaries (3,653 women and 78 men) from vegetable production and sales.</p>	<p>Target achieved</p>	<p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE: Implementing Partner’s final reports</p>
<p>Output 2.1 Rural women have enhanced entrepreneurship skills and value chains to access markets for their products</p>			
<p>Indicator 2.1.1: Number of beneficiaries that have strengthened their entrepreneurial/ business management skills Baseline: 231 Target: 3,520 women and 30 men</p>	<p>6,569 beneficiaries, including 6,154 women have strengthened their entrepreneurial, financial literacy and business management skills</p>	<p>Targets overachieved. Initially BALI was included in the target as the methodology is an innovation pursued by the JP RWEE, launched in 2018 only. Since it is based on GALS, it also has a peer replication mechanism which facilitates autonomous upscaling among peers</p>	<p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE; Implementing Partner’s final reports</p>

<p>Indicator 2.1.2: Percentage of trained women establishing their own enterprise/business, producing agri/livestock/craft Planned Target: At least 90% (2015)</p> <p>Indicator 2.1.3: Average % of increase in household income among members of SHGs Planned Target: 20%</p> <p>Indicator 2.1.4: Number of recipients of food/cash Baseline: 231 Planned Target: 4,000 rural women</p>	<p>98% of 3111 rural women trained on business management started small businesses.</p> <p>Average income of each project participant from agricultural activities in seasons was at least US\$480, and an average profit reached at least US\$ 350 (30%). Before participation in JPRWEE average income was US\$ 270.</p> <p>4,261 project participants (4,183 women and 78 men) received 100-150 kg of fortified wheat flour and 10-15 liters of vegetable oil (651,98 MT in total)</p>	<p>Targets overachieved. Based on the high motivation of trained women, who organized their businesses as part of SHG initiatives.</p> <p>Targets overachieved. Due to the volume of yield and quality of produced vegetables sold at higher prices in market</p> <p>Targets achieved. Additional beneficiaries were covered as part of partnership with UN Women COVID-19 response project.</p>	<p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE; Implementing Partner’s final reports</p> <p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE; Implementing Partner’s final reports</p> <p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE: women economic empowerment”</p>
<p>Output 2.2 Rural women have increased access to decent wage employment opportunities</p>			
<p>Indicator 2.2.1: Number of individual/group businesses created Planned target: 110</p> <p>Indicator 2.2.2: Number of women organisations (Community Funds, cooperatives, CBOs) running economic activities Planned Target: At least 40, 2 producers’ organizations</p>	<p>5 mini-processing workshops launched to reduce post-harvest losses by contributing the value chain development and created working opportunities in the processing workshops, where involved 19 rural women and 2 men</p> <p>172 women led Self Help Groups businesses were provided with small and medium size equipment</p> <p>62 community funds united in 5 producers’ organization (3 cooperatives and 2 public associations) running economic activities.</p>	<p>Targets overachieved. Due to effective coordination more beneficiaries and women organizations were supported with small and medium size equipment than planned.</p> <p>Targets overachieved. More women organizations were created by SHGs.</p>	<p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE; Implementing Partner’s final reports</p> <p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE; Implementing Partner’s final reports</p>

	165 SHG as members of cooperatives and associations run economic initiatives with support of their Revolving fund (RF)		
Outcome 3: Rural women have enhanced leadership and participation in their communities and in rural institutions, and in shaping laws, policies and programmes			
Indicator 3.1.1: Proportion of rural women elected representatives in rural councils Baseline: Planned Target:	19% (41 women and 3 men) of 235 capacitated beneficiaries were elected to Local councils. 1 woman became a head of Local self-governance.	Target overachieved	Women’s Leadership Consultant’s report Central Election Committee’s election results report
Indicator 3.1.3: Proportion of POs led by women Baseline: 0 Planned Target: No target in KYR	100% of POs led by rural women.	Target achieved	Annual reports of the JP RWEE: Implementing Partner’s final reports
Output 3.1 Rural women, including young women have enhanced confidence and leadership skills to participate in local governance			
Indicator 3.1.1: Number of women candidates for elections in rural councils Baseline: 0 Planned Target: 10 rural women	41 women and 3 men beneficiaries of the Program became deputy of local councils.	Targets overachieved as in Local election in 2021 was established a quota: 30% of women participation. More women beneficiaries were elected to Local councils in 2021.	Annual reports of the JP RWEE; Implementing Partner’s final reports
Indicator 3.1.2: Number of women participating in decision- making process at the local self-government level Planned Target: 290	444 rural women leaders participating in the process of local planning and budgeting	Target overachieved due to the comprehensive advocacy work on women leadership, leading to increased interest of women to join JP RWEE activities	Annual reports of the JP RWEE: Implementing Partner’s final reports
Indicator 3.1.3: Number of community initiatives addressing specific needs of rural women Planned Target: 35	35 community initiatives addressing specific needs of rural women, including in response to the COVID-19 outbreak in their communities.	Target achieved	Annual reports of the JP RWEE: Implementing Partner’s final reports

<p>Indicator 3.1.4: Number of local development plans/budgets developed on participatory processes Planned Target: 30</p>	<p>35 local governments integrated gender priorities in their local plans</p>	<p>Target overachieved. Based on demands of Local self-governance bodies and budget availability of the Program.</p>	<p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE; Implementing Partner's final reports</p>
<p>Output 3.2: Rural women have greater organizational capacities to form, sustain and participate into POs, cooperatives and unions</p>			
<p>Indicator 3.2.1: Number of informal rural women's groups who join formally registered POs, cooperatives and unions Baseline: 0 Planned Target: 65 SHGs, 2 Producer Organizations</p> <p>Indicator 3.2.2: Number of rural women mobilized in self-help groups for joint economic activities Baseline: 231 Planned Target: 3,423 women and 77 men</p> <p>Indicator 3.2.3: Number of POs, cooperatives and unions that adopt a gender policy/strategy and/or a women's quota for their board Baseline: 4 Planned Target: 4 Producer Organizations</p>	<p>223 SHGs out of 498 uniting 1,715 beneficiaries joined formally registered 5 POs (3 cooperatives and 2 public unions).</p> <p>3,731 beneficiaries, including 3,653 women and 78 men united in 498 SHGs</p> <p>5 WPO developed and adopted gender sensitive policies to regulate internal activities of WPOs. All 5 POs are headed by women.</p>	<p>Targets overachieved due to the high potential of SHGs and WPOs to provide services to rural women.</p> <p>Targets achieved</p> <p>Target overachieved. By request of beneficiaries of Batken province additional PO was established.</p>	<p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE; Implementing Partner's final reports</p> <p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE; Implementing Partner's final reports</p> <p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE; Implementing Partner's final reports</p>
<p>Output 3.3: Rural women, including young women, have increased capacity to engage in and influence relevant policy forums at national and regional levels</p>			
<p>Indicator 3.3.1: Number of rural women participating in policy lobbying activities at local and national levels Baseline: 0 Planned Target: 558 rural women</p>	<p>5,500 rural women participated in policy lobbying activities at local and central levels</p>	<p>Target overachieved due to the high number of policy lobbying event and commitments of rural women to participate.</p>	<p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE; Implementing Partner's final reports; Database of conducted events and number of participants.</p>
<p>Output 3.4: Rural women, including young women have enhanced awareness on their rights in a more supportive community/local environment.</p>			
<p>Indicator 3.4.1: Number of households receiving the GALS/BALI tools and engaged in joint economic activities Baseline: 0 Planned Target: 3,004 beneficiaries and 4,725 of households, 4 WPOs and 50 SHGs receiving the GALS/BALI tools and engaged in joint economic activities</p>	<p>11,634 beneficiaries (5,817 direct beneficiaries + 5,817 HH members) have increased knowledge of their rights though GALS and awareness raising events</p> <p>413 people (direct participants) (47 members of WPOs and 366 women in 56 SHGs) learn how to use BALI methodology for better livelihood planning and business development</p>	<p>Targets have been overachieved due to the high interest of beneficiaries to participate in GALS/BALI. Moreover, GALS has a peer- replication mechanism which</p>	<p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE; Implementing Partner's final reports.</p>

		facilitates upscaling among family members and friends, increasing its dissemination without additional costs for the project.	
Outcome 4: A more gender responsive policy environment is secured for the economic empowerment of rural women			
Indicator 4.1.1: Proportion of government budgets and donor funding allocated to programmes benefitting rural women Baseline: N/A Planned Target: N/A	35 local development work plans/budgets developed with integrated gender priorities, out of which 20 allocated a total of US\$ 12,500 from the annual budgets for gender-sensitive activities	Target achieved	Annual reports of the JP RWEE: Implementing Partner's final reports
Indicator 4.1.2: Number of countries passing laws to secure rural women's land ownership Baseline: N/A Planned Target: N/A	National GES 2021-2030 developed and the costing exercise is ongoing (<i>to be finalized in October 2021</i>) to define funding from government budgets and donor funds to benefit women, including rural women.	N/A	National gender equality strategy for 2021-2030; National action plan for 2021-2024
Output 4.1: Policy makers and parliamentarians have enhanced capacities to effectively mainstream gender into land, food, agriculture, nutrition and rural employment policies, laws and budgets			
Indicator 4.1.1: Number of policy makers participated in the learning and advocacy events Baseline: 0 Planned Target: 140 women/30 men governmental officials	521, including 394 women local policy makers participated in learning and advocacy events on rural women's empowerment.	The target has been overachieved due to the increased number of events, which were in the areas of interest of government partners.	Annual reports of the Joint Program "Accelerating progress towards women economic empowerment"; Implementing Partner's final reports; Database of conducted events and number of participants.
Output 4.2: Greater availability of tools and data to track progress in the economic empowerment of rural women			
Indicator 4.2.1: Number of countries where the women's empowerment in agriculture index is piloted Baseline: N/A Planned Target: N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Indicator 4.2.1: An in-depth assessment of GALS and BALI results, providing a qualitative understanding of	WEAI was conducted in Kyrgyzstan with a value of 0.66 versus 0.56 of the control group (10 points higher)	Target achieved	WEAI survey report

<p>the changes occurred in the beneficiaries that would complement WEAI Baseline: 0 Planned Target: Study conducted</p> <p>Indicator 4.2.2: Percentage of recommendations for filling data gaps in gender statistics integrated Planned Target: At least 60 % of recommendation integrated</p> <p>Indicator 4.2.3: The census and agriculture units of NSC integrate gender-inclusive methodologies in agricultural census and/or surveys on rural populations</p>	<p>Recommendations for 14 SDG indicators provided, indicator passport developed (Gender statistic reports) (2017)</p> <p>In 2016 JPRWEE supported the implementation of National Agricultural Census with improved gender-disaggregation of data</p>	<p>Target achieved</p> <p>Target achieved</p>	<p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE</p> <p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE</p>
<p>Output 4.3: An enabling environment is promoted to reflect rural women’s priorities in regional policy processes.</p>			
<p>Indicator 4.3.1: Number of regional dialogue mechanisms on agriculture, rural development and land that involve rural women’s groups Baseline: 0 Planned Target: 45</p> <p>Indicator 4.3.1 a: Number of government partners Planned Target: 235</p> <p>Indicator 4.3.1 b: Number of beneficiaries Planned Target: 205</p> <p>Indicator 4.3.1 c: Number of studies/strategies analysed where gender concerns are integrated Planned Target: 10 studies/strategies analysed</p>	<p>51 regional dialogue mechanisms conducted on promotion of women’s rights in regional and national policy processes during 2014-2021</p> <p>521 policymakers, including 394 women participated in dialogues</p> <p>598 beneficiaries of JPRWEE participated in 52 participated in dialogues</p> <p>Gender analysis of 6 sectoral policy documents completed: Forestry Development Strategic Plan – 2040, Programme on Fishery and Aquaculture Development 2027; and State Programme on Food Security and Nutrition 2019-2023; National Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2030; National Programme on support to women entrepreneurship, including special measures on rural</p>	<p>Target overachieved due to the increased number of events, which were in the areas of interest of government partners.</p> <p>Target overachieved due to the increased number of events, which were in the areas of interest of government partners.</p> <p>Target overachieved due to the increased number of events, which were in the areas of interest of beneficiaries.</p> <p>.</p>	<p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE: Implementing Partner’s final reports; Database on conducted events and number of participants.</p> <p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE: Implementing Partner’s final reports; Database on conducted events and number of participants.</p> <p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE: Implementing Partner’s final reports; Database on conducted events and number of participants.</p> <p>Annual reports of the JP RWEE: Analytical briefs.</p>

	women economic activities; Batken Development Program 2021-2035		
	10 analytical briefs developed		

iii) Evaluation, Best Practices and Lessons Learned

The JP RWEE's country level mid-term evaluation conducted in 2018²⁵ confirmed that the JP RWEE design and results were well-aligned with the needs of the target beneficiaries. All interviewed SHGs members, their families, and village activists were positive about the changes the programme induced. Yet, the evaluation also shed light on the common barriers to participation in the JP RWEE as mentioned by the participants of the focus groups. JP RWEE's targeting criteria excluded the most vulnerable people – those without access to three to eight acres of land, those having to take care of small children, those with disabilities, and those facing resistance from their husbands.²⁶ In addition, because JP RWEE recruitment in a village took place only once, early adopters were recruited whilst eligible people who are less open to innovations were left behind. The programme adapted to these evaluation learnings and addressed the shortcomings by targeting the most vulnerable that were left behind in previous phases.

The final evaluation conducted at global level found that, in relation to Kyrgyzstan, a shared vision for delivery between agencies had been challenging at times. Agencies had differed in their approach to targeting criteria (most vulnerable versus those with agricultural potential) and what methods to use for achieving the organizational development of SHGs (participatory social mobilisation processes and use of community activists as focal points versus working through local authorities and using social workers as focal points). In the end, the agencies managed to consolidate their visions and agree joint approaches.²⁷ These findings led to important lessons on the need to ensure adaptive approaches for targeting, a balance between defining drivers of change, and safe platforms and entry points for genuine participation of different groups based on the Leave No One Behind principle.

In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, the JP RWEE continued its work with women's groups to reduce the impact of the pandemic on their lives and livelihoods. The JP RWEE showed flexibility and adaptability in its approach, and JP RWEE beneficiaries showed a good level of resilience to shocks. Mutual help and solidarity between SHG members proved a good coping strategy enabling members to jointly address hardships during the crisis. Facilitated by the JP RWEE team, SHG members were able to continue interventions during the lockdown period and accelerate implementation of planned activities. Furthermore, due to the wide network coverage in the country and the relatively high level of access to digital services, the JP RWEE team was able to adapt its implementation modality through online mechanisms.

To measure the impact of the JP RWEE on women's empowerment across several dimensions, including, but not limited to, the GALS/BALI methodology, the pro-WEAI survey was used as a final assessment. Results showed larger effects for women, mainly driven by the GALS/BALI intervention. The BALI intervention affected all the dimensions of empowerment of the pro-WEAI index, while the JP RWEE interventions without GALS and BALI mainly affected the instrumental agency. The most important increase in empowerment was found in villages that were treated with the newly introduced GALS/BALI methodology. Women in these villages experienced the largest empowerment effects, both through an observed increase in their instrumental and collective agencies as well as through an increase in their intrinsic agency. The increase in intrinsic agency can be linked to improved autonomy of income and self-efficacy. Similarly, men living in villages that received GALS/BALI experienced an additional improvement in their empowerment due to this improved sense of self-efficacy and increased respect for other household members. In conclusion, the traditional policy tools had a positive effect on instrumental agency, whilst the new tools introduced by BALI also led to increases in other dimensions of empowerment. The most significant result being an increased sense of intrinsic agency for both men and women.

²⁵ Final evaluation of the Kyrgyzstan Joint UN Women/ FAO/ IFAD/ WFP Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women, 2017.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Decentralized Evaluation: Global End-term Evaluation of the JPRWEE, 2021.

Findings from the WEAI, which was piloted in Kyrgyzstan, reveal that households (encompassing 2059 JP RWEE women) have started practicing better family relations, with women getting more support and respect from other family members, unfair workload distributions being redistributed and women having more access to decision making and resource distribution. Women's increased income has resulted in them being able to contribute to the household budget, and their role as women in general has been given greater value and recognition within the household, which in turn has enhanced their confidence.²⁸

Best Practices and Lessons Learned

Programmatic:

At the onset of the pandemic, the JP RWEE team in Kyrgyzstan reacted quickly to the change in modality of programme implementation and used the opportunity to increase the digital skills of beneficiaries and implementing local government staff. As a result, training for women in vegetable growing technologies continued during the period of lockdown in Kyrgyzstan through the online Zoom platform, the facilitation of online support and the establishment of a mobile phone 'WhatsApp' group. Taking advantage of the widespread internet availability and access to smart phones in the country, a month-long training was organised for 80 participants, which subsequently enabled a successful switch to online implementation for trainings, consultations and meetings. Planned trainings went ahead through established internet platforms and WhatsApp groups were used for discussions between women, including on the evolving situation and ways to address the emerging challenges. For newly established SHGs, weekly meetings were carried out online. Furthermore, women were able to apply their newly acquired IT skills and use them in helping to make efficient and effective business decisions and plans. For example, one women's Producer Organization initiated an online survey of members to identify how many hours a day they spent baking bread. As a result of the findings, they started an internal bakery service to make bread for the women and reduce the time they were spending on this task at home. This proved to be very successful and has led to the women making plans to extend the business into the wider community.²⁹

The ability to adapt businesses through product diversification in response to sudden changes in context and circumstances is an important strategy for resilience and surviving economic shocks. In Kyrgyzstan, women's groups, using the knowledge and skills acquired through the programme, were able to adapt their core business to produce products that were in increasing demand due to the pandemic.³⁰

One of the findings was the reconsideration of the assumption that increasing women's access to economic resources would automatically lead to their advanced social status and decision-making power. The JP RWEE experience confirmed that prevailing social and cultural norms which restrict women's role in decision-making at the household, community, and national levels, are the root causes of widespread inequalities and rural women's subordinate position. At the initial stage of JP RWEE activities, women participants faced the challenge of family members opposing their participation in the programme. In response to this, the JP RWEE team started strengthening its work by applying the innovative GALS approach with the aim of more expansive and in-depth transformations of gender/generational power dynamics at all levels.

Internal analysis of rural women's businesses showed that interventions aimed at women's economic empowerment should focus on creating maximum additional value for the unit of time spent by women. It should be taken into consideration that the burden of care work primarily lies on the shoulders of rural women, as shown by the '*Gender Rapid Assessment on consequences of COVID-19*'. This assessment also indicated the growing hardships on rural women during lockdown time; the time that women spent on cleaning, cooking

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

and food services, games, talks and reading with children increased by 35.6%, compared to a 15% increase for men.³¹

The work strengthening women's POs proved that uniting women SHG members into larger organisations is beneficial for their collective negotiating power. Results also showed that, compared to small household agriculture, the sectors of service provision and off-farm employment had a greater potential for the empowerment of rural women, as women had a higher degree of control over the use of profits from their productive activities and re-investment into their businesses.

The JP RWEE focused on household level livelihoods, which proved to be an effective starting point for economically vulnerable families. Ensuring the effective use of household plots by rural women led to improved livelihoods. However, as proposed by rural women, the next phase of economic empowerment should move support from small household land plots to expanded cultivation of crops on large land areas. These women also reflected on how local land auctions are currently mainly accessible to men farmers. The lack of women's participation entraps them in a vicious circle of minor and economically less sustainable economic activities. Therefore, future programme interventions should prioritise promoting rural women's access to land auctions by ensuring measures for transparency and accessibility to information and processes.

Access to large-scale crediting/leasing is traditionally limited to men who own land and other property resources. The increased number of women elected to local councils may be instrumental for raising this issue on the local development agenda, together with a set of measures for addressing existing challenges to women's access to land, water and agricultural extension services.

The need for exchange of experiences and good practices among members of self-help groups was noted as critical among villages/regions. Women POs have the capacity to expand access to new members from other villages who are willing to join and fulfil membership responsibilities. The findings of the women's PO capacity assessment also showed that expanding the POs to new members would be beneficial from a market perspective, as it would allow POs to respond to the demand of the market by accounting for ensured quality and quantity of market products and continuity of products' supply as per market demand.

In the period of 2019-2021, instead of focusing on mobilizing new beneficiaries, the JP RWEE team focused on an exit strategy and on ensuring the sustainability of the results achieved. Therefore, the number of newly mobilized beneficiaries was limited to one province in 2020 compared to five provinces in previous mobilisation processes. Instead, the JP RWEE team worked on the consolidation of results and focused on strengthening the capacity of rural women self-help groups to successfully continue their economic activities beyond the programme's duration and to promote capacity building and resilience of 5 women's Producers' Organizations. An implementing partner, the Union of Cooperatives, was engaged in supporting the capacity assessment and strengthening of POs. The established culture of teamwork provided a solid ground for POs to join efforts and expand business and entrepreneurship opportunities through branding, marketing, and improved production capacities.

Operational:

During large parts of the JP RWEE's implementation period, funding was secured on an annual, rather than multi-annual basis. This created constraints in terms of planning activities with a longer-term vision.

In 2020, the JP RWEE team focused on an exit strategy aiming at measures which would help ensure the continuation of activities beyond the duration of the programme. The focus was on strengthening women's Producers Organizations which united all self-help groups mobilized through the course of the JP RWEE

³¹ COVID-19 Impacts on Livelihoods of Women and Men in the Kyrgyz Republic. Gender Rapid Assessment, May 2020, UN Women, UNFPA, Swiss Development Cooperation.

implementation. The revolving funds mechanism functioned to ensure the financial basis for continuity of economic activities of PO members. Furthermore, the ‘Buy From Women’ Online Platform is a platform for investigating the possibilities for markets and investors who may be interested in making special orders for agricultural products from JP RWEE participants. Support measures for ensuring marketing of agricultural products within and outside of the country are important for completing the agricultural production chain. Therefore, the creation of the ‘Buy From Women’ Online Platform signified another opportunity for women PO members to extend their economic activities to new markets, to expand their customer base, and to seek investment and partnership opportunities.

iv) Success Story

Rural Women’s Election to Local Councils

The JP RWEE supports women's leadership in local development and decision making.



Tursunai Akmatova lives with her family in the village of Baizak in the Naryn region. After graduation, she started working as a teacher in a rural school, but thanks to the project she became a member of the local *kenesh*. “I believe that thanks to this project, many women were able to awaken their ‘I’, they believed in themselves and started doing what they love,” says Tursunai.

In recent years, the representation of women in local councils (*Aiyl Keneshes*) has greatly decreased, in most cases men were elected as members, and in some villages women themselves believed that politics was only for men. In 2019 a quota of at least 30% women deputies in local *keneshes* was introduced into legislation.

Tursunai Akmatova became a member of her local *kenesh* in 2017, even before the approval of this quota. Thanks to the knowledge and skills learned through the JP RWEE, she was able to overcome existing stereotypes and began contributing to the development of her village, where she was born and raised.

“While participating in this JP RWEE, I understood a lot, I realized what needs to be said so that we can be heard and that women have the same rights and opportunities as men. In 2017, I put forward my candidacy for the local *kenesh* and was able to win, our society supported me. I was able to develop my leadership skills, I was able to prove that politics is not only for men, that women can and should do it too,” said Tursunai.

As part of her work in the local *kenesh*, she tried to contribute to the development of the village and the local community. In addition to community work, she also developed women's entrepreneurship; together with like-minded women, she founded a fund, which already includes 50 women. Together they are engaged in farming, growing vegetables and fruits, and in 2018 they developed a new business in which they are engaged in the procurement of canned goods to order.

“Over the years, I have been able to achieve a lot and I am very grateful to my husband and family, who always support me. My husband is an activist himself and he practically forced me to do all this, although initially I was against it, because I already had a job. But then I was so fond of all this, work in the *kenesh*, a fund, a self-help group. I just cannot imagine my life without all this now” Tursunai says.