**MINUTES**

**Outcome Board Virtual MEETING**

**Women and Youth for Innovative Local Development (WYILD)**

**Women’s Economic Empowerment in South Caucasus (WEESC)**

**Date: 16 April 2020**

**Attendance:**

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| Vache Terteryan | Deputy Minister of RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (RA MTAI) |
| Ashot Giloyan | RA MTAI, Head of Department on Local Self-Government Policy |
| Sergey Hovhannisyan | SDC, Programme Officer |
| Mehjabeen Alarakhia | UN Women, Regional Programme Manager |
| Dmitry Mariyasin | UNDP, Resident Representative |
| Alla Bakunts | UNDP, Head of Governance and IBM Unit |
| Natalya Harutyunyan | UNDP, Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE) Programme Manager |
| Zhanna Harutyunyan | UNDP, WYILD Task Leader |
| Armen Bezhanyan | UNDP, WEESC Task Leader |
| Rubina Devrikyan | UNDP, Project Expert |
| Yelena Minasyan | UNDP, WEGE Programme Associate |

**Purpose:**

The main objective of the meeting is to share achievements for the year 2019, discuss strategic development and current context in which the project operates; discuss and endorse the activities for the year 2020.

**Overview of the Meeting Discussions:**

On April 16, 2020 the Outcome Board Meeting for “Women and Youth for Innovative Local Development” and “Women’s Economic Empowerment in South Caucasus” projects took place virtually with participation of representatives from RA MTAI, SDC and UN Women.

**Dmitry Mariyasin (DM), UNDP Resident Representative,** greeted the meeting participants and presented the main purpose of the board meeting and its format. **DM** highlighted the importance of the projects in the development work of UNDP and appreciated the fruitful collaboration between UNDP and the RA MTAI, SDC and UN Women in the joint efforts for women empowerment and promotion of gender equality in communities of Armenia. It is noteworthy that all the job would not be possible without regional and local government too.

**DM** highlighted that two additional boards will be invited within the WEGE portfolio in the near time. The projects discussed at the present Outcome Board are successfully progressing, building on the results of past Women in Local Democracy 2 project supported by SDC

In the context of pandemic caused by outbreak of COVID-19, UNDP took a step to repurpose part of its activities to provide support to people of Armenia in response to emerging needs. **DM** expressed his appreciation on behalf of UNDP for SDC’s flexibility and the agreement to allow repurposing part of WYILD project activities and provide emergency assistance kits and food to the lonely older people in several communities of Armenia.

**Vache Terteryan (VT), Deputy Minister of RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (RA MTAI),** greeted the meeting participants and highlighted the importance of such coordination and validation meetings. **VT** proposed to periodically arrange such programme meetings at least once a month (or two months), especially when it is possible to benefit from online solutions in the given situation. VT suggested to arrange the first meeting next month, hopefully face to face.

**Natalya Harutyunyan (NH), WEGE Programme Manager**, introduced the Task Leaders of the projects who would present the respective projects with thematic directions, achievements, challenges and opportunities. NH mentioned the main areas that WEGE portfolio is working in with four ongoing projects. Two SDC-funded projects, Women and Youth for Innovative Local Development (WYILD) and Women’s Economic Empowerment in South Caucasus (WEESC), the progress of which is on the agenda of the Outcome Board, are in full implementation phase. However, COVID-19 and the emergency situation stemming from it, changed the path of number of planned activities. Thanks to the donors and their responsiveness and flexibility, UNDP was able to provide a rapid response to the vulnerable ones. UNDP also formed the pool of capacitated youth force for quick mobilization for the rapid response. Respective user-friendly data matrix to easy tackle down the locations and map the interventions.

**WOMEN AND YOUTH FOR INNOVATIVE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT (WYILD)**

**Zhanna Harutyunyan (Zh.H), Technical Task Leader of Women and Youth for Innovative Local Development** presented the project (presentation attached).

**Zh.H** also highlighted how the COVID-19 situation affects project implementation and progress. Partial re-adjustment of the project is initiated in response to emerged reality.

**Q&A and observations re WYILD project presentation:**

**Q1-VT:** When it is said that women advisory councils are formed or will be formed, it narrows and limits the representation.,. **VT** proposes to broaden the potential target groups to be represented in the councils with e.g. youth (or even beyond), highlighting that very often youth is observed as actual driving force in communities.

**Response1-Zh.H:** The proposal is well noted and will be considered; however, it is worth to mention that when speaking about women’s groups UNDP had in mind to create opportunities in the communities where women are not represented in decision making bodies (as head of community or community council member) and ensure their voice is raise and heard. The women-led councils will not deal only with women’s issues , they may have broader functions.

**Response1-NH:** To complement what Zh.H said, the formation of women’s groups is an explicit recommendation from the WiLD project Evaluation, on which this component is basing on to further strengthen women’s voice in communities. However, as requested we will find a solution to ensure broader and more inclusive representation in the proposed councils, which will have strong focus on women affairs too.

**Sergey Hovhannisyan (SH), SDC Programme Officer**, highlighted that within Local Governance Programme GiZ also works on citizen engagement issues where not only women, but men also are under the focus of the overall project.

**SH** also observed that the project’s achievements were mainly expressed on output level and reflected through the output level indicators. It would be interesting to follow the outcome of the intervention such as the anticipated results of future funding of youth or formed groups etc., SH **SH**, from the donor’s point of view, recommended to cover in progress on outcome level in the report to be submitted in June 2020. He also highlighted that it would be good to include in the report information on whicht recommendations submitted by project regarding legislative changes are adopted by the RA National Assembly. **SH** also mentioned that SDC is quite flexible in terms of adjustment of activities to the current realities. Therefore, if UNDP notices that something does not go as planned it is always possible to advise and discuss remedy actions and adjust the project activities respectively.

**Zh.H** mentioned that the team will address the raised issues in upcoming report. In response to the question on results of funded projects, she informed that three ideas were approved for funding but the teams have not yet delivered the activities, which are currently frozen because of the COVID 19 situation. There are limitations in shifting these activities to online mode, sinc e the mini projects have many direct (offline) activities with residents in the settlements.

**NH** highlighted good collaboration and merging efforts with GiZ, not only on Local Governance Programme, but also in very specific joint activity on Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) and joint UNDP, UN Women and GIZ manual on GRB is developed, which will hopefully become the unified one for all communities. To note, WEESC is the only WEGE project on economic empowerment t and well-established cooperation with UN Women. **NH** flagged that WEGE portfolio projects are interlinked and synergized, enriching one another with findings, human resources and knowledge base, altogether resulting in more complex and systematic approach to towards women empowerment.

**WOMEN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN SOUTH CAUCASUS (WEESC)**

**NH** introduced Armen Bezhanyan, the new Task Leader of WEESC project, to the partners, thanked the former Task Leader Rubina Devrikyan for her contribution to the project in 2019 and informed the partners that Rubina will continue support selected project activities in Expert’s role.

**Armen Bezhanyan (AB), Technical Task Leader of Women’s Economic Empowerment in South Caucasus (WEESC) project,** presented the project scope and achievements. (presentation is attached).

**AB** complemented NH’s information regarding the GRB manual and informed that it is already in a finalization stage and will be published soon.

**Q&A and observations on WEESC project**

**Mehjabeen Alarakhia (MA), UN Women, Regional Programme Manager**, noted that the project started on October 2018. Regarding the WEPs component there are 11 companies in Armenia overall. In terms of GRB methodology this is indeed an example of positive and effective collaboration , and the manual can be used by other projects as well. MA raised the issues of employability especially in the COVID-19 situation. This is an aspect that requires continuous observation and generation of ideas on mitigation measures.

**MA** highlights that mid-term evaluation of the WEESC project which is planned be done in the last year of the project will go as planned in 2020.

**DM** asked if there are any feedback or observations from Deputy Minister Terteryan or Mr. Giloyan as representatives of programme main government counterpart.

**Q1-Ashot Giloyan (AG), RA MTAI, Head of Department on Local Self-Government Policy**, asked how the number of targeted women were set from 11 communities of Armenia and on what criteria the selection was made, as well as to what extent representatives of local government were involved in the project.

**Response Q1- Rubina Devrikyan (RD), WEESC project Expert**: the main clear-cut selection criterion is the social vulnerability, and the project works closely with the local self-government bodies on the ground to get the list of the vulnerable beneficiaries. Marzpetarans were extensively involved in the response plan, they were supporting the project with provision of physical space for events as well.

**Q2-AG:** another question refers to the 45 self-employed women and to those who have jobs. What are the jobs they undertake and what are the fields of self-employment?

**Response Q2-RD:** the main focus is bakery, processing of agricultural products including the dry foods. There are also textile enterprises, which employ 12 women, the others work from home again in textile. There are number of women who work for Sanitek.

**Q3-AG:** which communities were targeted in Amasia and who were the selected women beneficiaries.

**Response Q3-RD:** the selected women were those from the list of vulnerable people’ provided by Marzpetaran, who deal with wool, yarn etc.

**Q4-AG:** to what extent the overall goal of the project has been reached, since half of the project have already passed?

**Response Q4-RD:** at local level most of the targets were achieved in 2019, even with respect to the overall project, and the main efforts in 2020 should focus on the sustainability. Regarding the national level there are some delays, caused by the on-going governmental reforms, however it is planned to meet the targets this year.

**Q5-SH:** Is there any information about the mentioned 45 employed women? They could have been involved in production of some protecting items as part of COVID-19 response? Agricultural sphere also can be considered as actual.

**Response Q5 - AB:** further to the discussion with Green Lane NGO, the project partner, the sewing of protection masks were the only option to be produced, however the production prices of these masks are higher than those in the general market and also this production cannot be considered continuous and continuous n. Green Lane explores the items that can be produced in-house such as beauty materials, products that can be made in the “unusual” business environment. The trainings and workshops on social marketing are shifted to online mode and are continued. For those who are engaged in agriculture they receive seeds which will be planed soon. This part is not in danger since they do not have too large production and the seeds are of those products of high demand.

**NH** on behalf of overall programme expresses deep appreciation for all the suggestions and advice received. All of them will be taken into consideration and integrated in future plans of the programme. In terms of other points flagged, programme fully supports the proposal of MTAI in arrangement of regular programme meetings, and WEGE from its side is ready to help MTAI in organization of these meetings. Regarding the situation triggered by the COVID-19, the team is looking forward to soonest return to normal work and life hopefully in the 2nd half of the year.

**Closing remarks:**

**Dmitry Mariyasin** thanks all participants and calls on perceiving the COVID-19 situation and the lockdown not only as challenge but also an opportunity, e.g. to focus on new generation of services, on building up the system that works in crisis. It is crucial to focus on adaptability and sustainability of citizen-driven services that will operate after months of COVID-19. It is important to concentrate and make a bigger picture on cooperation, keeping in loop the decentralization, I in line with the government vision. **DM** noted that projects shall not only be in the process, but also the change of lives of people. DM proposes to talk more about that changes during the next board in order to monitor the milestones on the way of that change.

**DM** flagged, that UNDP shares the commitment to increase women participation in local self-governments, as a guiding principle, though considering 50/50 target by 2030 as very ambitions for Armenia, that is why the ultimate goals of the projects are to be kept in mind.

The Economic Empowerment projects mostly imply field activity, and all the operations are affected by the COVID-19. Small businesses are particularly hit, but that also can be an opportunity: it’s important to think how this year can be used to create women-led new small business, that could be resilient against such crises or a natural disaster. It’s a test to re-think the way of support to women on the ground. COVID-19 is a test for all of us to check how we can operate in a crisis. The project can be very instrumental in reaching out to some of the vulnerable population in terms of data collection and once we have the assessment in-hands we need to re-look at the data to re-think of our interventions. **UNDP** is very much keen on following-up the development of GRB activities and hope it will be lately rolled soon.

*The Outcome Board has validated the progress recorded in 2019 and endorsed the proposed activities and the annual work plan presented for 2020 for both projects.*

*Prepared by Yelena Minasyan*

*WEGE Programme Associate*

*Cleared by Natalya Harutyunyan*

*WEGE Program Manager*