



**HELVETAS**

# **WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

## **CAPABILITY STATEMENT**



## ABOUT HELVETAS

Helvetas is committed to a just world in which all people determine the course of their lives in dignity and security, using environmental resources in a sustainable manner. The economic empowerment of women is integral to meeting these commitments. We are an independent development organization based in Switzerland with affiliated organizations in Germany and the United States. We currently focus our work in 30+ partner countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, building on our experience of over six decades of supporting development and humanitarian priorities of stakeholders and partners in the countries we work.

## HOW WE WORK

Helvetas adopts an equitable partnership approach to development, seeking to understand the local context and to work in collaboration with multiple stakeholders to find sustainable solutions. We co-implement projects, provide thematic and methodological advice, and facilitate policy dialogue at local, regional and international levels. Our experience shows that sustainable development without women's economic empowerment risks inclusive and equitable outcomes, and requires long-term commitment and engagement with communities, governments and the private sector.

## THE CRITICAL ROLE OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The United Nations (UN) recognizes the importance of women's economic empowerment (WEE), in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 5 specifically calls for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. The UN Women's Empowerment Principles are a set of seven principles that guide organizations on how to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace, marketplace, and community. They have been endorsed by over 4,500 organizations in over 140 countries, and Helvetas is working to systematically engrain these principles throughout all our programs. The UN Women's Global Report on Women in Business and the Workplace (2021) highlights the importance of women's economic empowerment for businesses and economies. The report found that businesses with more women in leadership positions perform better financially, and that women-owned businesses are more profitable and productive. Despite these impressive statistics, women-owned businesses face several challenges, including access to finance and markets, and hurdles to growth.

**OECD Definition of WEE:** *“Economic empowerment is the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development, and market information.”*

Helvetas strives for Women's Economic Empowerment by

- valuing unpaid care work and working with gender relations in the home and community
- facilitating women's access to education and training so that they can develop the skills to pursue high quality (self-) employment.
- helping women start and grow their own businesses.
- facilitating informed access to assets, financial and non-financial services and support needed to advance economically, including responsible credit and other financial resource and tools management.
- advocating for policies and frame conditions that support women's economic empowerment.

**Economic violence** is a form of violence against women and is rooted in gender inequality and reinforced by traditional gender norms. It is considered as a form of gender-based violence. Women both contribute and lose economically, considering the value of unpaid care work they deliver and the costs of gender-based violence to national economies.

Helvetas' experience in WEE shows that economically empowered women are more likely to provide for themselves and their families, to invest in their children's education and health, to participate in civic and political life, and to be able to protect their rights and the rights of others. Our experience underlines our conviction that WEE is an essential prerequisite for creating a more just and sustainable world.

## Our approach to foster Women's Economic Empowerment

In our work we mainstream Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE). We take into consideration the objectives of WEE explicitly from the outset of project design and include them clearly in the formulation of the main objective, outcomes and outputs. Helvetas pays special attention to selecting value chains / sectors that have the potential to produce the expected benefits for women by including criteria related to gender equality, social inclusion and equal opportunities explicitly. It is thereby important to not only select sectors where predominantly women are engaged, but also sectors with opportunity to increase women's engagement, as many of the "traditional women's value chains / sectors are economically less attractive than typically male sectors. We adopt a gender-transformative approach and address specific questions regarding WEE taking into consideration individual and collective levels, as well as internal and external spheres (see figure 1). We aim to better understand the role of women and men in the selected system / value chain. This includes understanding their perception, agency, and self-belief/confidence, alongside assessing power and decision-making dynamics. Together with women, we identify their barriers to access services and goods. We identify with them the constraints as well as opportunities they have due to formal and informal rules, policies and rights as well as norms in the specific socio-cultural context. We design interventions that are gender-sensitive (mainstreamed), aiming at the target group in general, or gender-specific (targeted), aiming specifically at women) to reach the expected benefits on WEE. We pay special attention to stereotypes, bias and other forms discrimination or gender-based violence which may further marginalize women, as part of our commitment to social equity, and inclusion. We carefully identify and work with partners that show an awareness of gender inequality, demonstrate willingness to address gender inequality and inequity within their own organization. We conduct joint assessments of their capacities and motivations in implementing a gender-sensitive approach and agree on capacities to be developed. We include indicators specific to WEE and promote the use of gender-sensitive research and analysis methods to identify and measure changes in terms of WEE.

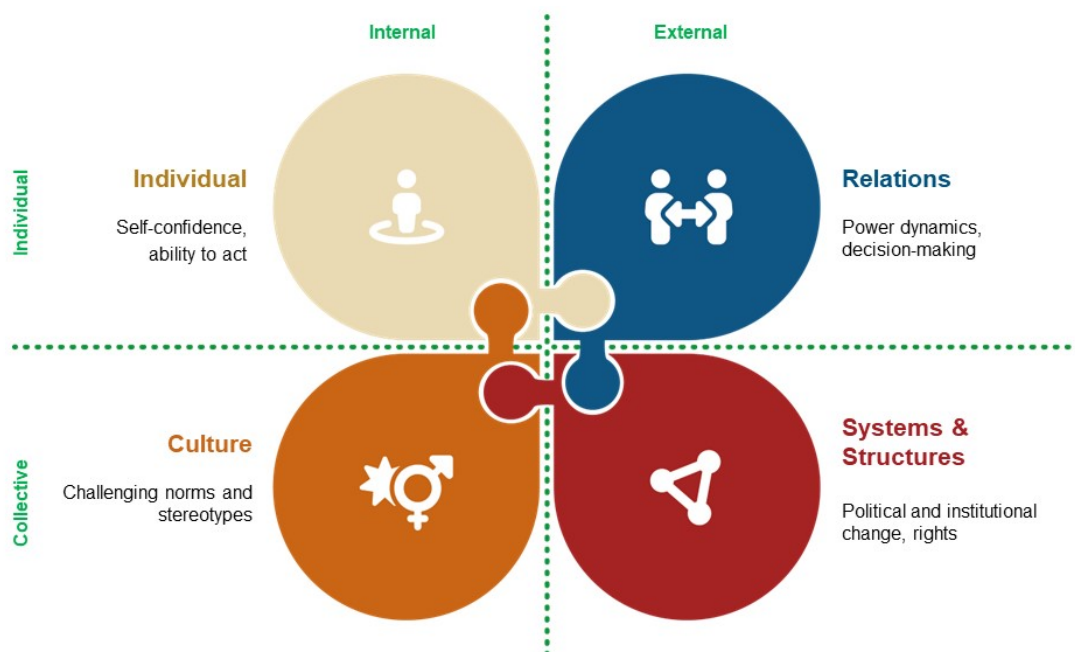


Figure 1: Gender-transformative Approach (slightly adapted from GIZ, 2020: Gender-transformative Change in Practice)



## Our lessons learnt in striving for Women's Economic Empowerment

Based on our extensive experience in promoting Women's Economic Empowerment in our project work, we have drawn the following lessons:

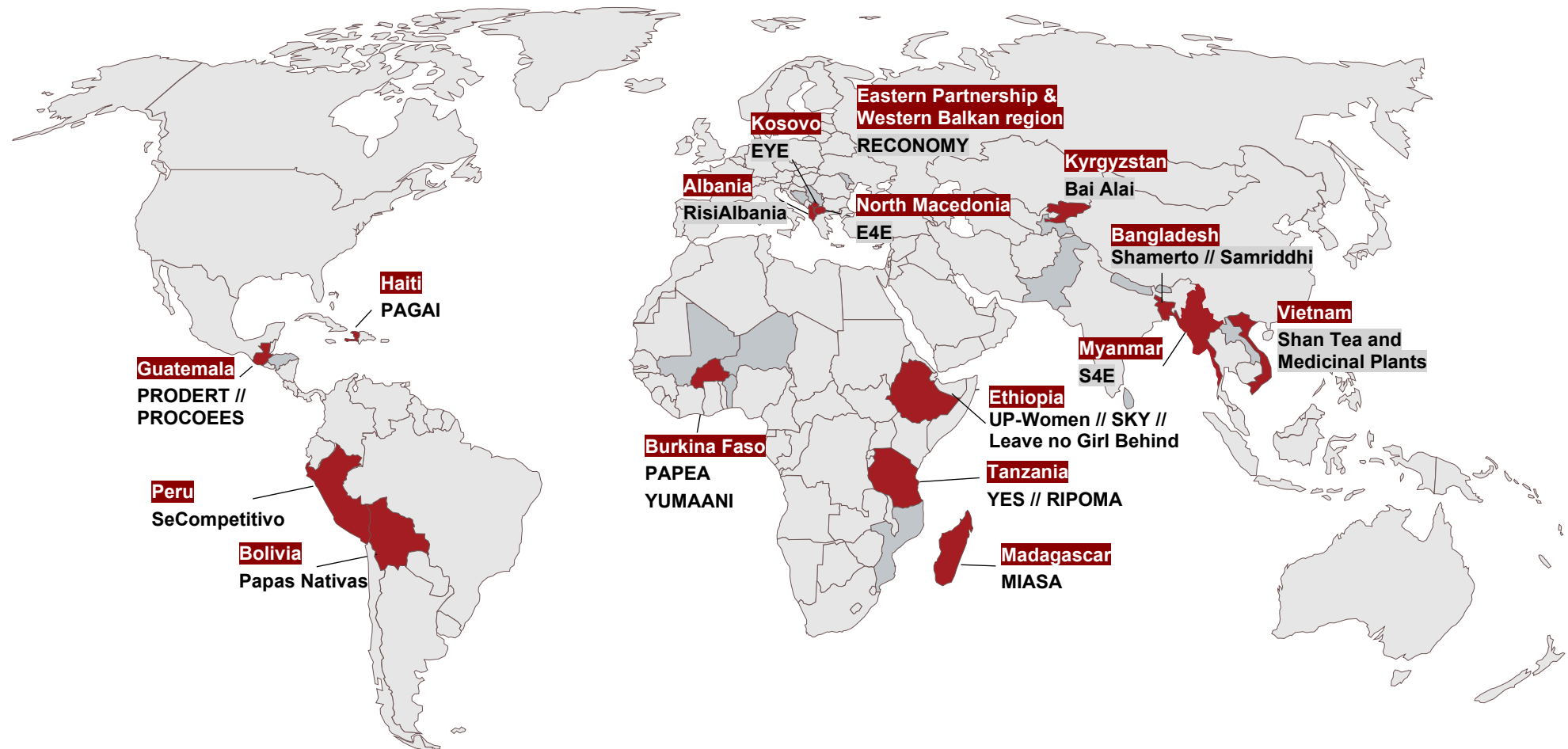
- Engaging male family members: Engaging husbands, parents or other male family members in interventions on women's economic empowerment can help them to understand what their household has to gain from the women's economic activity and how they can support them.
- Integrating women in typically male dominated training and/or employment sectors: This can bear higher income opportunities; however, it is important to pay attention that the environment is welcoming and enabling to retain women. Trainer/employer, but also male counterpart trainees and employees need to be sensitized on the topic, and facilities may need to be adapted women's needs. Career guidance can also play an important role in sensitizing women on non-traditional jobs.
- Participation in meetings and trainings: Ensuring that the timing of women's participation is convenient and compatible with their other domestic responsibilities, and that the location is easily and safely accessible, can increase women's participation in training and the world of work.
- Gender-friendly teaching: Women are more likely to complete their training if training institutes are comfortable learning environments for women, with separate toilets, child-care facilities, and training materials that illustrate both women and men on the job. As far as possible, aim to have a mixed staff of male and female trainers and ensure accessibility for differently abled trainees.
- Digitalization as a tool for inclusion: Digital financial services can reach unbanked women, digital learning offer and digital jobs (freelancing) can provide opportunities for women to better balance their other responsibilities.
- Making a business case for women: Market actors can make a significant contribution to WEE, for example by providing adequate services for women or employing them. Therefore, WEE interventions should be based on a sound business case for the market actors, providing them clear incentives (commercial, social or both) to make the necessary changes to include them.
- Female role models can make a difference.



*Young women standing up for equal rights in Albania*

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## WHERE WE WORK IN WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT (WEE)



## HELVETAS' PROJECT EXPERIENCE

### RISI ALBANIA - ALBANIA

<b>Client/Funding Source</b>	SDC
<b>Duration</b>	2013 - 2025
<b>Volume</b>	\$ 20,835,575

#### Employment opportunities for young Albanian women and men

Risi Albania is an innovative women and youth employment project supporting young Albanian women and men (aged 15 to 29) are equipped with well-informed career advice and market-relevant skills, and access to better and inclusive jobs provided by competitive businesses. The project aims to increase employment opportunities through private sector growth, demand-oriented training, and job intermediation by focusing on sectors with a high job creation potential: agribusiness, tourism, and information and communications technology (ICT).

The project is striking a balance between mainstreaming Gender and Social Inclusion (GSI) into project interventions and developing GSI-targeted interventions. The project raises awareness among employers on the business case for retaining women. The project also supported the development of shows on Albania's major television channels and radio stations, sparked off a nationwide discussion about unemployment. The shows also presented success stories of young women, even in jobs that are unusual for women, and thus creates role model function for many young women.

#### Results

- 14,043 young people (thereof 54% women and 11% marginalized) have found a job.
- 12,436 young people (thereof 49% women and 4% marginalised) have completed a training.
- 105,427 young people (thereof 52% women) have accessed intermediation and career guidance services.

### SHAMERTO - BANGLADESH

<b>Client/Funding Source</b>	European Union
<b>Duration</b>	2017 – 2020
<b>Volume</b>	\$ 5,242,000

#### Inclusive agricultural value chains

The Shamerto project was designed to strengthen the skills, employability, and income of workers and entrepreneurs (60% youth) of micro and small enterprises. The project responded to the lack of employment opportunities in rural areas and targeted the poorest segments of the population to facilitate their greater involvement as entrepreneurs, traders, employees, and producers. The outcomes of the project not only led to an improved economic and social status of an inclusive labor force in these industries, but also contributed to economic growth and inclusiveness through the product and process of upgrading in pro-poor agricultural value chains. The project built simultaneously the capacity of 4,500 agro-food processing enterprises, the major of employment providers, by linking them with 10,000 forward and backward market actors and connecting them with business development services to improve their compliance concerning decent job conditions and environmental standards.

#### Results

- More than 21,400 trainees completed skills training across 7 occupations in the agro-food processing sector, passed skills testing, and were certified by respective authorities.
- Out of the skilled trainees, more than 75% were youth, and about 16,800 (30% women and 20% belonged to disadvantaged groups)
- Skilled graduates obtained gainful employment.



© Helvetas / K M Asad  
Member from Aparajita forum

## PAPEA – BURKINA FASO

<b>Client/Funding Source</b>	SDC
<b>Duration</b>	2019 – 2023
<b>Volume</b>	\$ 10,068,800

### Young women in agriculture growing entrepreneurship and incomes

The overall objective of the “promotion of agricultural entrepreneurship (PAPEA) project is that agricultural entrepreneurship develops, generates income and creates employment for the benefit of rural and peri-urban populations, in particular youth and women.

The project mainstreams women’s economic empowerment in its interventions to (i) support agricultural enterprises to develop and promote the professional and entrepreneurial integration of young people and women; (ii) to stimulate the emergence of a market for inclusive finance products to facilitate access to and use of appropriate financial services for youth, women and agricultural enterprises in collaboration with formal financial institutions, ii) to facilitate dialogue and collaborative advocacy through regional consultation frameworks to improve the conditions for agricultural entrepreneurship.

#### Expected Results

- Economic integration of 24,000 young people and women of whom at least 50% are women, and at least 60% are young people.
- Better living conditions, increased income and sustainable and equitable employment for youth and women.
- 5,000 decent jobs in enterprises.
- Promotion of innovative inclusive finance and the support to dialogue and advocacy around agricultural entrepreneurship.

## UP-WOMEN - ETHIOPIA

<b>Client/Funding Source</b>	Private Foundations
<b>Duration</b>	2021-2024
<b>Volume</b>	\$ 3,817,024

### Unleashing the potential of underserved young women and girls

The UP-Women project aims to create employment opportunities for 3,500 young women and girls with the goal of unleashing the potential of disadvantaged young women and girls in the Sidama region through improved knowledge and skills and building the capacity of training institutions leading to gainful and decent employment. Helvetas aims to increase capacities of women through short-term vocational skills, non-formal education and other soft skills, as well as increase their awareness of Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH)-related risks, mitigation methods and access to SRH services. Up-Women is being implemented in four city administrations including Hawassa, Yirgalem, Aletawondo and Daye. Trainees are currently participating in a cooperatives training where they receive hands-on experience in the skills learned.

#### Expected Results

- Improved vocational training system.
- 3,500 women between the ages of 18 and 24 finish training in promising professions and enter the labour market.
- 1,500 girls in the age of 16-17 improve their literacy and numeracy skills to be well prepared for vocational training.
- Improve 80% of young women and girl’s knowledge on Sexual Reproductive Health & Rights



© Helvetas / Franz Thiel  
Youth garment enterprise member



## PRODERT – GUATEMALA

Client/Funding SIDA

Source

Duration 2017 – 2020

Volume \$ 5,242,000

### Promoting Indigenous Women's Agro-entrepreneurship in the Highlands

Helvetas has implemented the [PRODERT](#) project in three phases from 2013 until 2021 with the objective that vulnerable rural population, in particular indigenous women, in five departments of Guatemala's western highlands, increase income and employment building on their local sustainable productive potential.

To ensure these long-term impacts, the project stimulated and strengthened the capacities of public, private and relevant civil society actors to provide financial and non-financial services and goods (e.g., technical assistance and extension; technological innovation, best practices; information; associativity). The project expected that women are more empowered and enthusiastic, improving their self-esteem, making decisions in their businesses and exercising leadership within their families and communities, participating in local economic development processes.

### Results

- More than 26,000 persons (thereof 64% women) participated in the project and increased their income considerably (>300%).
- Almost 80% of women state that they are satisfied with their own performance in the economic activity.
- Increase in women's satisfaction with their own performance when engaging in economic activities.
- More than 60% of men in the household recognize and value the involvement of the woman in economic activities.

## BAI ALAI – KYRGYZSTAN

Client/Funding SDC

Source

Duration 2013 – 2024

Volume \$ 8,025,198

### Self-employment for women

The objective of the "[Small Business and Income Creation Program](#)" (Bai Alai) is to reduce poverty in the remote and mountainous areas of Alai and Chon Alai through increased income and (self-) employment - in particular for women and youth. The project follows thereby a two-pronged approach: (i) Support the development of the cattle, apiculture, handicraft, and tourism sub-sectors to achieve system-level improvements for the involved market players and create income and employment gains for the poor. (ii) Facilitate the development of business advisory services and better access to financial services for nascent farm and non-farm small and micro enterprises including new businesses led by youth and women and strengthening of capacities of market actors in advocating for improved regulatory frameworks. In Phase 1, the project had a particular focus on women's inclusion in economic activities and activities following a gender scoping study and included targeted activities. In total, the project intends to facilitate self-employment for at least 100 women entrepreneurs.

### Results

- 3,695 producing farming or entrepreneurs' households (18,490 beneficiaries) increased their income significantly.
- Strengthened businesswomen association as an institution.
- Facilitated a "business idea bank" for woman entrepreneurs.



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## SHAN TEA – VIETNAM

**Client/Funding** Australian Government

**Source**

**Duration** 2019 – 2021

**Volume** \$ 395,740

### Tea and Medicinal plants empower women

The «Women Empowerment through Shan Tea and Medicinal Plants» project has the overall goal to improve the social and economic status of ethnic minority women through market systems development of organic Shan tea and medicinal plants in Bac Ha and medicinal plants in Bat Xat district.

The project supports the organization of ethnic minority women in 7 communes in producer groups to efficiently develop production and processing of organic Shan tea and ethical medicinal plants that meet the requirements of high value markets. It strengthens service / training providers to enable ethnic minority women to enhance their skills and gain confidence to make informed decisions at household level and in communities. Further, it facilitates the access to domestic and international markets for selected enterprises in organic Shan tea and ethical medicinal plant processing.

### Results

- 4,500 ethnic minority women increase income by at least 10%
- 3,600 ethnic minority women increase skills and their confidence and roles in decision-making.



Tea cultivation

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## VOICES FROM OUR PROJECTS



*"I would like to prove the opposite to those who think that women are inferior to men. I was motivated to do a typically male job in order to earn well. And I'm doing great at it. Women should be considered equal. They are equal."*

Tsehay Menigstu, Ethiopia,  
UP-Women project



*"I used to sell clothes as a street vendor, but this depends a lot on start capital. I heard about the S4E facilitated trainings and decided to register to become a tailor where I'm less dependent and can manage my resources better. After the training I opened my own shop. Thanks to the project, I can now stand on my own two feet and be independent of a man".*

Tin Hla Win, single mother, Myanmar,  
S4E Project

## MORE INFORMATION

- [Helvetas](#)
- [Helvetas Gender and Social Equity](#)