

Public-Private Dialogue

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Armenia / Gender Project: Women Business Association led PPD in Armenia

by

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Background and Context

Armenia Gender Project (#601359) is an innovative new pilot project that will begin in May-June and expand to other countries based on result. Interventions would promote women's economic empowerment by focusing on relatively unregulated agriculture sector with high female representation and high growth potential. Working through Women's Business Association (WBA), the project will improve efficiency of women in the wild harvest sector leading to enhancing inclusion in economic activities and boosting women participation in wild harvest value chain. In parallel, the project will work with the Ministry of Agriculture to identify the weak implementation of policies for women's economic empowerment, improve the regulatory environment for the sector and include women in the process.

Youth and Inclusion Dimension

The Project is designed to implement a series of activities that support women's economic empowerment and gender equality to foster inclusive and productivity-led growth. The wild harvest value chain was selected for interventions, since the poorest people in the regions rely on it as their main income source. This sector has high number of women who can acquire skills needed for profitable value addition opportunities through processing product and diversification. There are low entry barriers for women (time and mobility, access to technology and assets, cultural constraints) and it offers new opportunities for women (only 4-5 percent are being harvested). The Ministry of Agriculture identified the wild harvest value chain as an important sector guided by the objectives of poverty reduction and socially and environmentally sustainable development, i.e. in disadvantaged mountain areas and border regions.

The project will assist the Government in developing legal and policy mechanisms to address the constraints that women face in wild harvest sector. Regular consultations will be conducted with the Ministry of Agriculture to address emerging needs likely to impact economic outcomes of women producers. The sector is currently a collection of informal producers, which over the period of this project is likely to mature into more structured formal sector. When it happens, specific legal, regulatory, and institutional issues will arise, such as proper and managed permitting of the harvest, land rights, safety and quality standards, skills upgrading, contractual arrangements with wholesalers/aggregators, incentives for increased mechanization/value addition services. Wild harvest holds a great potential to become one of the well-developed and profitable value chains, since no capital investment is required and there are low barriers for entry. The Ministry of Agriculture, ArmForest (state unit for the coordination of forest issues) and ArmCoop (Union of regional and local cooperatives organizing the supply of the food and everyday consumption products around the country) used to organize the procurement of thousand tons of wild products. Currently, the regulation related to collection and use of wild products is in place, but not enforced. Potential volumes of usable wild products are measured by tens of thousand tons, and currently only small part of it is collected. Commercialization level of wild products is also very low. In recognition of benefits for women, there is a strong case for the Government to adopt a policy, which is more proactive towards the sustainable development of the sector through improving the productivity and business viability, with a view to maximizing its contributions to well-being of women in the value chain.

In addition, the project will assist the Government in identifying the weak implementation of policies for women's economic empowerment. It will be done by developing policies and mechanisms on integrating women in the consultations and decision-making process on issues of importance to the economic advancement of women. Formal policies promote gender equality, but in practice women are under-represented in decision-making processes and lack access to resources and services that affects production and supply to other actors along the chain. The project will facilitate women's participation in council, administrative, and legislative hearings and public events to change the societal gender roles and increase their bargaining powers.

Partnership, Structure and Processes

The project will help establish a PPD or PPD like structure under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture that can be anchored and co-led by the Armenian Young Women Association. While the exact working groups and their composition will be informed through stakeholder mapping, additional consultations, sensitization sessions, and consensus building efforts, pre-implementation findings suggest that the focus of the PPD will be on: (i) legal and institutional constraints, (ii) skills/knowledge training/upgrading, (iii) access to finance, (iv) improving market links, (v) standards/mechanization, and (vi) social issues (cultural issues, business policies on women i.e. wage parities, ability to borrow, social counseling etc.). The PPD will have a steering committee composed of public, private stakeholders with the aim of guiding

and overseeing the work of the secretariat, while also ensuring that the recommendations endorsed by the PPD are channeled into the appropriate implementing agencies/ authorities/formal channels. Recommendations from the PPD will necessarily be fact based and will seek to establish broad consensus and support in advance of the recommendations being forwarded formally for implementation. In this regard, the PPD will also undertake strategic communications that will include sensitization and advocacy efforts. The PPD with its agenda when coupled and supported by the training/incubation center planned under component 2 will offer the right mix of interventions necessary to strengthen the sector and women to increase economic empowerment of the women in the wild harvest sector. Therefore, it will be the most important that the sector itself continues to grow as a sustainable sector. This will require formalization of the sector. It will be important that women organize themselves for improved coordination and voice on this agenda. This will require working across stakeholder groups, such as women's business associations, NGOs, chambers of commerce, Ministry of Agriculture, buyers, industry networks, local government etc. As such a PPD or PPD like structure will be essential to the delivery of this agenda/objective. The PPD or PPD like structure will seek to (without creating too much burden or cost) convene stakeholders with the aim to establish a common mission/vision, increase stakeholder ownership, identify constraints, establish priorities, and recommend solutions for implementation/action by local/national authorities and other stakeholders. Such an effort will improve coordination, communication, transparency, knowledge and voice of women.

Expected Results

The project expects to achieve the following results:

- Women Business Association (WBA) serving as a public-private dialogue platform for women in wild harvest value chain;
- 5 advocacy initiatives undertaken;
- 5 policy recommendations made by WBA for implementation.

Biography of the Author

Ms. Gayane Mkrtychyan

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She works with public and private sector clients in Armenia, promoting and implementing regulatory simplification reforms.

Gayane joined WBG in 2011, assisting the Project related to investment policy and promotion, trade logistics, tax, inspections, and food safety. She is licensed to practice law in the State of New York and the Republic of Armenia. She has an extensive professional experience, including work in the U.S. for a Connecticut State Senator, and a major Corporation in New York.