



Synthesizing CARE Evidence on Agriculture Collectives for Gender-transformative Food Systems

Literature Review



Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. SHE FEEDS THE WORLD (SFTW) FRAMEWORK	6
3. METHODOLOGY	7
4. FINDINGS	8
4.1. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF CARE SUPPORTED COOPERATIVES	8
4.2. SUPPORTING WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT	11
4.3. INCREASING WOMEN’S ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OF PRODUCTIVE RESOURCES	14
4.4. ENABLING WOMEN’S ACCESS TO INCLUSIVE MARKETS	16
4.5. IMPROVING NUTRITION	18
4.6. PROMOTING SOCIAL PROTECTION	18
4.7. MULTIPLYING IMPACT, TO ENABLE CHANGE AT SCALE	19
5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	20

Acknowledgements

This publication is developed by WeResearch and has benefitted from the valuable contributions of CARE International South Caucasus colleagues, especially Natia Katsia; David Zhorzholiani, who provided expert feedback to inform the publication; as well as the WeResearch team – Lela Javakhishvili and Nana Chabukiani who conducted the interviews and provided important support during working on the publication.

The views in this publication are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily represent those of CARE or its programs, or any other partners.

Authors:

Gvantsa Jibladze
Ani Gogberashvili

Executive Summary

The present research aims to undertake a review of CARE-supported agricultural cooperatives identifying the strengths and gaps in its capacity to contribute to SFTW change areas. The research employed a qualitative approach and was carried out in three phases: desk phase, data collection phase, and synthesis phase. The key findings of the study are presented in the following eight subchapters.

A general overview of CARE-supported cooperatives examines the history of the cooperatives and the reasoning behind their creation as per cooperative members themselves. The discussion extends to the growth of cooperatives over the years in terms of the number of members and the total revenue, while also touching upon the obstacles hindering progress. Wrong understanding of cooperatives, shortcomings in Georgian legislation, access to finances, lack of agricultural knowledge and skills, insufficient cooperation with different sectors are identified as some of the main challenges slowing down the development of a cooperative model in Georgia.

Supporting women's empowerment is the first area of change of SFTW framework which focuses on three aspects of women's empowerment: (1) Building agency: strengthening women's capacities, confidence, and skills; (2) Changing relations: enabling more equal relationships and social norms and (3) Transforming structures: influencing formal and informal institutions. The existing evidence shows that while the number of women participating in cooperatives has increased under ENPARD I and there are individual cases of gender transformation, the changes are not systemic. Most of the respondents demonstrate a gender-blind attitude and the persistence of gender stereotypes is often reinforced rather than challenged within cooperatives.

Increasing women's access to and control of productive resources is an essential step towards women's empowerment according to SFTW framework. These resources include land, inputs, technologies, equipment/machinery, and information and finances. The data regarding the cooperative model's contribution towards women's access to the resources is insufficient; however, the research indicates that access to resources is especially problematic for rural women and this problem is largely embedded in traditional ideology regarding woman's role in society. These barriers need to be studied extensively in order to increase women's engagement in cooperatives.

Improving nutrition, especially for women and girls is an important program objective within SFTW framework, however, there is a general lack of evidence demonstrating the cooperatives' contribution towards improved nutrition for women and girls. Furthermore, the cooperative members do not see nutrition as a problem, therefore it is very difficult for them to respond to the questions related to it during the interviews. There are few successful cases of cooperatives' contribution towards improved nutrition on a family level, however, there is a need to collect more comprehensive data regarding this topic.

There are sporadic cases of **promoting social protection** through cooperatives, however, this area of SFTW framework needs to be examined further. Few respondents emphasized the potential social value of the cooperatives. They discussed the ways in which cooperatives promote developing strong networks that potentially improve their members' resilience towards difficult situations due to the collective nature of cooperatives.

Although certain actions have been undertaken towards **multiplying impact and enabling change at scale**, there is no data that would provide evidence supporting the cooperative's contribution towards this aspect of SFTW framework. The research respondents representing different (government, CSO, private, CARE) sectors have their own vision and strategy on supporting cooperatives from their sectors' perspective, however, all of them unite around the idea that joint and coordinated support of cooperatives would have more successful outcomes.

Based on the above-mentioned findings, recommendations to CARE Caucasus regarding the contribution of agriculture cooperatives to SFTW change areas include a **comprehensive assessment of women farmers needs and obstacles preventing their engagement in cooperatives; incorporating relevant strategies and indicators into programmatic Theory of Change (ToC) and Logframe (LF); collection of gender data beyond sex-disaggregation; collection of women empowerment related data more rigorously and routinely; coordination with other sectors/agencies in the evidence-building process.**

1. Introduction

Cooperative, as a formalized entity, was first introduced in Georgia about a century ago after the Soviet regime occupied the country and Georgia became a part of the USSR. Production cooperatives were considered as the higher form of cooperation, thus the development of Kolkhozes and Sovkhozes in Georgia diverted from the mainstream understanding of cooperatives in the West, where a cooperation on service level was a prime goal. Under the Kolkhozes and Sovkhozes, private ownership of sizable land, livestock, or other agrarian assets were practically eliminated in the country and all the production power became concentrated under- and controlled by the state that did not operate according to market economy rules but utilized assets inefficiently. This experience corrupted the notion of “cooperative” in the minds of Georgian farmers for decades and even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the Kolkhozes and Sovkhozes lands were scattered into small plots and distributed among the households across the country, people were not willing to cooperate, to aggregate their resources, and did benefit from critically needed economies of scale.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the agricultural sector in Georgia is assessed to be in the critical phase. The process of development of this sector is related to the variety of challenges at multiple levels. According to the latest data, the share of agriculture in GDP is only 8.4%¹. The experts and researchers of this sector describes Georgian agriculture “more as a missed opportunity than a success story.”²

Since 2013, European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development in Georgia (ENPARD Georgia) is being implemented with the support of European Union³. The program aims to (1) build capacity and support government institutions in the reform of the agriculture and rural development sector; (2) to improve employment and living conditions of rural populations by strengthening farmers’ cooperation skills and ease access to resources and (3) to promote diversified social and economic opportunities in rural areas, particularly for women and youth, in due respect to the environment and the cultural heritage. The program is being implemented in three phases: phase 1 - 2014-2017, phase 2 – 2016-2019 and phase 3 – 2018-2022.

To meet its goals, one of the major focuses of ENPARD I was development of agricultural cooperatives as well as developing state capacity for cooperative support in Georgia. This phase was being implemented by consortia led by four international NGOs/donors: CARE, Oxfam, Mercy Corps, People in Need (PIN) and the UNDP (in Adjara AR particularly). During this phase following major results have been achieved⁴:

- Law of Georgia on Agricultural Cooperatives was adopted⁵.
- Agricultural Cooperatives Development Agency (ACDA) was established.
- More than 1,500 agricultural cooperatives uniting over 15,000 farmers have been established and registered in ACDA agricultural cooperatives database.
- Over 1,000 agricultural cooperatives supported with over GEL 6 million grants through the state aid programmes.
- Over 280 cooperatives received direct funding and technical assistance with over EUR 4 million (about GEL 13 million) through ENPARD implementing partner organisations (Oxfam, Mercy Corps, People in Need, CARE International, UNDP Georgia).
- Up to 8,000 stakeholders (farmers and sector professionals) trained through ENPARD implementing partner organisations (Oxfam, Mercy Corps, People in Need, CARE International, UNDP Georgia).

¹ [Geostat, 2020](#)

² Kotchlamazashvili, I., Zhorzholiani, D., Kakulia, N. (2017) EU Supported Agricultural Cooperatives: A Case of Georgia.

³ <http://enpard.ge/en/what-is-enpard/>

⁴ <http://enpard.ge/en/enpard-goals-and-results/#1441874023759-fa988392-b9adabf7-9fbdfd57-0ada>

⁵ <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/download/1972742/0/en/pdf>

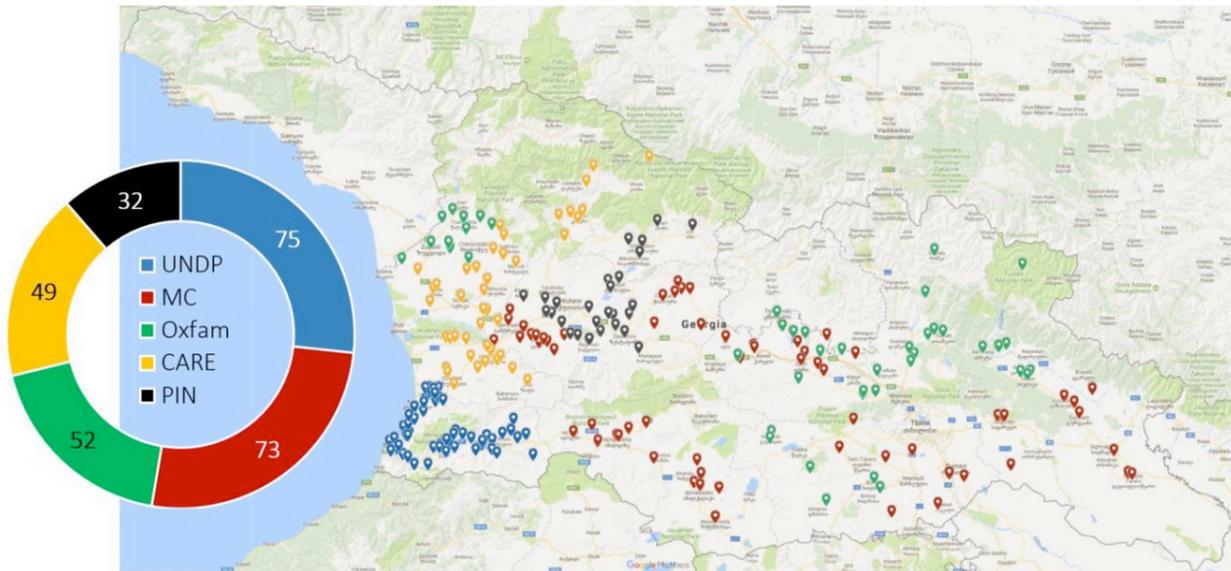


Figure 1. Locations of the ENPARD supported cooperatives. Map taken from the publication "EU supported agricultural cooperatives: Case of Georgia" (2018)

During the ENPARD I CARE international in the Caucasus contributed to the development of agricultural cooperatives in the 9 municipality in Samegrelo, Guria, Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti regions: Senaki, Abasha, Martvili, Khobi, Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti, Chokhatauri, Tsageri and Lentekhi. The overall objective of CARE's action was **the sustained increase of food production and rural poverty reduction in Georgia**, with the specific objective **of business-oriented smallholder farmer groups within a sustainable support framework cooperate and compete well in markets**. To meet its objectives CARE focused its work on four main directions: 1) Strengthening capacity of cooperative members through different activities. 2) Protecting smallholder farmers rights and interests through promoting the collaboration between cooperatives and GFA, as well as state agencies and NGOs. 3) Advocacy and policy level work with government in order to refine a strategy aimed at small farmers. 4) Supporting smallholder farmer groups through linking to improved sources of capital, such as machinery/equipment, market information, business opportunities, and farming/processing methods.

According to the Law of Georgia On Agricultural Cooperatives (first adopted in 2013), voluntary membership (1), democratic management (2), economic participation of members (3), and social responsibility, fairness and mutual assistance (4) are the guiding principles of the agriculture cooperatives and the entity might cooperate on one or multiple following activities/stages: production, processing, packing, packaging, storage, transportation, and marketing of agricultural products. The modern definition and spirit of the "cooperative" in Georgia is in line with best practices of the market economy and encourages farmers to efficiently manage their own and partners' agriculture resources as those who hold bigger share in the cooperative assets get "bigger slice of the pie", but the "bigger the total size of the pie" – the faster the benefits for all of the members grow. This tendency discourages relatively big-scale farmers to exploit the small-holders but rather encourages them to try to share the benefits among all the cooperative members fairly to guarantee the further growth of the entity to achieve even higher economies of scale.

After finalizing the ENPARD I action, CARE continues its support towards cooperatives through Cooperative Fund⁶ established in 2017. The main aim of the Cooperative Fund is to help smallholder farmers' cooperatives access financial means, reduce the cooperatives' dependence on external sources over time, and support the cooperatives to become self-reliant, more sustainable in the long-term.

⁶ <http://socialmarket.ge/en/cooperatives/about>

2. She Feeds the World (SFtW) Framework

Women empowerment and gender equality is one of the central crosscutting aspects of CARE's work reducing poverty. CARE has strongly established gender equality framework and incorporates gender transformative approaches in all models throughout its programming.

She Feeds the World (SFtW) is a framework, that seeks to contribute to realization of the rights to food and nutrition security of women small-scale producers and their families, in terms of greater sustainability, production, income, nutrition, equality and resilience. It builds on CARE's experience on collectives by putting women at the centre and working with women-focused collectives to improve their market capabilities and their productivity and to increase their earnings and decision-making power over agricultural and household incomes and assets. SFtW is structured in six interrelated areas of change:

- i. Supporting women's empowerment. CARE and partners have a strong focus on capacity building at the community level to help women increase their confidence and skills, and cope with the social and economic challenges they face.
- ii. Increasing women's access to and control of productive resources. SFtW improves access to information, appropriate agricultural and productive resources, and assets, prioritizing: (a) land; (b) water; (c) inputs (e.g. agriculture inputs); (d) information and technologies (as well as machinery/equipment); and (e) access to finance.
- iii. Enabling women's access to inclusive markets. SFtW improves women's access to markets to unlock greater production, expand profits on small-scale agriculture, and increase food security and safety. It also promotes women small-scale producers' ability to participate in collectives to negotiate better market outcomes and make decisions in market systems.
- iv. Improving nutrition. Successful programs do not assume that greater availability of food—even nutritious food—or higher incomes automatically translate into improved nutrition. CARE ensures that all programs include objectives for improved nutrition, especially for women and children. SFtW improves health and nutrition through integrated approaches, both nutrition specific approaches that directly affect nutrition for women and children, and nutrition-sensitive approaches that support improved nutrition.
- v. Promoting social protection. CARE and partners aim to assist vulnerable households to find a sustainable pathway toward food security, including at times of crisis. Major interventions in this space include food aid, school feeding, vouchers, cash- and safety net programs.
- vi. Multiplying impact, to enable change at scale. SFtW aims to transform agriculture and market systems far beyond the communities where CARE and partners work directly, via alliances and partnerships, inclusive policies and advocacy, and research and innovation that account for the needs of women small-scale producers.

The current research seeks to undertake a review of the agricultural cooperatives that CARE Caucasus engages with a view to providing learning and recommendations on where CARE Caucasus has greater competency and evidence regarding the ability for agricultural collectives to contribute to the SFtW change areas and where are the significant gaps in learning and evidence regarding the ability for agricultural collectives to contribute to the SFtW change areas. Specifically, the objectives are provided below:

Objective 1: General overview of agricultural cooperatives supported by CARE.

Objective 2: Review of the evidence and existing work related to agricultural cooperatives and She Feeds the World change areas (CARE staff/Government/private sector/NGO).

Objective 3: Review of the practices and experiences of agricultural cooperatives in contributing SFtW change areas.

Objective 4: Review the experience/practices of collaboration with various stakeholders (incl. relevant parties from

outside the agriculture sector) in terms of making agricultural cooperatives more gender transformative.

3. Methodology

The research employed qualitative approach and was carried out in three phases: desk phase, data collection phase and synthesis phase.

Desk phase

At this stage the research team conducted document review and analyzed literature and all relevant CARE-related documentation on agricultural collectives and how well they contribute to SFTW change areas. These documentations will include relevant program evaluations, policy briefs, or any other publications produced by CARE Caucasus, or other organizations that have documented evidence of the ability of agricultural collectives to contribute one or more of the six areas of the She Feeds the World Framework. The list of reviewed documents is provided in annex.

Data collection phase

At this stage the research team conducted in-depth interviews and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with the different stakeholders and collected primary data respective to the research objective. A purposive sampling method was applied to select the respondents. 12 KIIs were conducted with CARE staff, and relevant government, private sector, and non-governmental stakeholders. 23 In-depth Interviews were conducted with the members of CARE agricultural collectives in order to develop an understanding of how well these collectives strengthen gender equality, promote inclusive governance, increase resilience, and meet the needs of collective members. In overall, the research team conducted 35 interviews throughout the research.

Stakeholder	# of interview
CARE representatives	4
Government representatives	2
CSO representatives	4
Private sector representatives	2
Cooperative members	23

Key Informant Interviews and individual in-depth interviews were conducted by the research team via phone, or online communication tool - Zoom. The interviews were recorded upon the informed consent from the participants. Detailed transcripts of the interviews were developed after the interview for further analysis.

Ethical Considerations for Data Collection

The ethical principles are critically important for WeResearch. Do-No-Harm principle is intrinsic to all our projects and we are careful to observe the issues of data protection, confidentiality and privacy of respondents. Ethical considerations help not only to protect the safety of respondents and interviewers, but also to ensure data quality. The following principles were respected during the study:

- Protection of human subjects and confidentiality - Ethical guidelines were taken into consideration during data collection, including ensuring the confidentiality of respondents throughout all stages of fieldwork and data collection.
- Voluntary participation and informed consent - All the respondents were informed about the purpose of the evaluation. Respondents were only be interviewed after voluntary and informed consent has been taken from them.

Analysis

At this stage, the researcher analysed collected data and compiled with secondary data findings. To ensure appropriate integration of desk research with qualitative data analysis and allow for the triangulation of findings, a hybrid inductive and deductive thematic coding approach to qualitative analysis was employed.

4. Findings

The findings are presented in the following sequence. First general overview, main strengths and gaps of CARE supported cooperatives are discussed based on the interviews. The following subchapters provides the analysis of each domain of SFtW framework based on the desk review and interviews. Each subchapter is dedicated to each area of change of SFtW. Finally, summary and recommendations are presented.

4.1. General overview of CARE supported cooperatives

While discussing the history of their cooperatives, most of the respondents who were founding members stated that the cooperatives were created by a group of people who lived in the same area, knew each other well, and had common interests. Uniting their forces, they maximized the effectiveness of their work, with every member contributing to the best of their ability in the work towards shared goals. The cooperatives are mainly composed of a director, board members, and members. Most respondents do not see the need of altering the management structure of their cooperatives and think that the current democratic approach is what makes their work efficient. According to the respondents, the functions of the members are defined based on their past experience and the tasks are assigned according to their special expertise. Moreover, important decisions are made together, and adversities are overcome through collective resilience.

I think that teamwork is a strength because all of us have our own responsibilities and if there is any challenge, we discuss and solve it together. (Cooperative member, female)

Many respondents note that the number of cooperative members has increased over the years, however, when it comes to adding or replacing the members, the procedure is unnecessarily complex. Cooperatives are required to announce the change in the municipal newspaper 2 weeks prior and later present this newspaper to the notary which requires extra expenses. What is more, notaries are mostly located in municipal centers/larger cities and are not always accessible to those living in villages. The next step is sending all these documents to the Real Estate Registry and in case of any inaccuracies, the process starts from the very beginning. Because of these requirements, the number of members often increases unofficially.

Many cooperatives have seen growth in terms of revenue over the last few years, however, some cooperative members state that there still is a lot of work to be done for them to see major improvements in this regard and they are willing to invest their time, work, financial and intellectual resources and wait few more years for their efforts to pay off. The ongoing pandemic has affected the growth process considerably and hindered progress for many cooperatives.

The aim of the cooperative is that members also receive more revenues and get empowered economically. We were heading in that direction, and the pandemic interrupted this process. (Cooperative member, female)

While discussing cooperation with different sectors, several respondents mentioned that the state should be investing much more effort and resources in cooperatives than it currently is. Firstly, there is a need for financial resources to develop and advance cooperatives. The second important issue is education. Respondents say that there is a lack of qualified people in the agricultural sector in Georgia. Older people were educated during the Soviet times, while modern agriculture has different demands and requires continuous, up-to-date training.

Some respondents see tremendous potential for their cooperatives in their respective fields and possibilities of success on a global scale, however, they need stronger support from the state to realize/reach their full potential.

According to them, if the state prioritized these spheres and reassessed policies regarding cooperatives, everyone involved would benefit.

Our small enterprise has prevented 12 or 13 families from working on tea production in exploitative conditions for months in Turkey. People in their 80s, as well as teens, can earn minimal income in front of their houses. The policy needs to be reassessed. No one has time for agriculture. Young people need to get involved in this too. (Cooperative member, female)

As for the collaboration with the private sector, some respondents rate the experience as mostly positive, while others discuss different problems they have encountered. For example, one of the cooperative representatives spoke about difficulties with the local market, who refused to transfer money to them after they delivered their products to them. Many respondents talk about a long-standing relationship with the non-governmental sector and the opportunities this relationship has presented them with:

We have long working experience with them [NGO]. Whatever project there has been, we have participated in all of them. There are consultation agencies in municipalities, which provide us information about it. (Cooperative member, male)

Overall, while discussing the best practices in the functioning of the cooperative, many cooperative member respondents emphasize the nature of cooperatives which entails shared responsibilities, collective work process, and trust between the members. According to them, being a part of the cooperative deepened their knowledge in the field considerably, connected them to like-minded people, and introduced them to a new way of working which is far more efficient than they could have imagined before. Furthermore, respondents named shared responsibility and equal participation in decision-making processes as one of the most significant advantages of cooperative management structure.

We have gained valuable theoretical knowledge as there is plenty of new information. We improved our practical skills as well. We attended numerous meetings. We installed new technologies and implemented new methods in our work. (Cooperative member, male)

In addition to this, respondents from different sectors mentioned that women-led cooperatives tend to be more successful, although there is no evidence available proving it, this is personal observation of the research respondents. Some of them explain this with the fact that the existing gendered barriers faced by women, makes them to work harder that concludes in better results.

I wish that there would be more women leaders in the cooperatives, because based on my personal observation, cooperatives with women leaders are more stable and successful. (CSO representative)

I am more positive about establishing cooperatives by women than men. Gender equality is a global challenge. [...] Women have much more motivation to show that they can be successful as men. If men did not have cooperatives, they could drive tractors. But women have not become tractor drivers yet, and instead, they can become company owners or leaders. Women have more enthusiasm, theoretically speaking, to assert that they can be productive and bring results. However, knowledge is very important in this regard. We should develop a channel to deliver this pivotal knowledge to them. (Private sector representative)

Although the research respondents acknowledged the best practices of cooperatives, still, there are many obstacles and gaps in effective functioning of cooperative model in Georgia. Respondents from different sectors identified variety of gaps that need to be addressed to make the cooperative model successful. One of the major gaps is the wrong understanding of cooperative which often associates it with Soviet-style collective farming. According to respondents, there is still a lot of work to be done in order to fully inform agricultural workers on the

real meaning of cooperatives and the benefits they can bring. Furthermore, some CSO respondents mentioned, that developing cooperative model and adopting cooperative law was an international pressure, meaning that this was required due to international obligations Georgia have towards EU, which might be also related to the lack of understanding of cooperative model among country level decision makers.

I want to say that the project on cooperative was not an individual decision of the government, but due to the EU soft power. The main obstacle now is that there is no clear understanding of what it is and for why it is, from the decision-makers side. [...] Parliament's support to the development of cooperatives was not perceived as the support to a particular type of entrepreneurship fostering small entrepreneurs to unite their capacities, decrease expenses and increase their competitiveness. This is the real idea behind cooperation. But this was not perceived like that. This was seen as a social assistance package and of course it had its own political motivation. [...] This viewpoint made possible fundamental mistakes. (CSO representative)

Although adopting the law is considered as a significant achievement, the respondents emphasized major shortcomings in Georgian legislation on cooperatives due to the incorrect understanding of cooperative model. For example, according to CSO representatives the minimum number of members of cooperative defined is problematic and needs to be revised:

[incorrect understanding] is also connected to a blunder in the law on minimal required members of a cooperative, which is unjustifiably low. They unite 5 people and can only consist of one family members. This cannot be called a cooperative. On the contrary, cooperation as at least should encompass a community. The smallest entity cannot be a family. This is a village or a community or at least some part of a village. When a minimal number of a cooperative is low, this does not lead to an entrepreneurial organisation based on a community. (CSO representative)

Another challenge is connected to finances and financial institutions. In many cases, banks don't give loans to the cooperatives rather they prefer to give them to individuals. According to the private sector representative, financial institutions tend to refrain from funding cooperatives due to their unsuccessful loan history. Furthermore, due to the lack of financial literacy, the farmers struggle to make reasonable financial decisions.

I have seen that farmers are confused in making decisions on getting funding; they doubt if it will be a beneficial economic project for them. I am talking about investment here. As for the leasing, we do not give them funding to buy the necessary production material. They have to understand this investment plan. However, in this regard, they are too uncertain, not knowing whether they should do it or not. (Private sector representative)

According to the private sector representative, although to establish cooperatives need some essential assets which requires either savings (which farmers do not have) or loans (which are not given to cooperatives), there is still lack of understanding of the benefits from leasing. Furthermore, respondents mentioned challenges regarding leasing cooperatives that are operating under grants. These challenges are related to bureaucratic processes and needs to be revised.

Respondents from all sectors emphasized the lack of knowledge and skillset of farmers to effectively establish and manage cooperatives, as well as to get maximum benefit from this model. As mentioned by some respondents, the perception of cooperative among farmers is to get “free money”, or they engage in cooperatives to get grants/funds, which is in turn related to the challenges of sustainability of this model.

The most unfortunate in this is that we gave these people instruments without providing them any knowledge. We gave them assets and money, but no education. Thus, they splashed out these resources and gained nothing. (Private sector representative)

The state role in supporting and financing the cooperatives is big, but sustainability still remains a problem and a weakness. That's because cooperatives are created to get funds and not because of the benefits of working with other people, therefore farmers don't work towards developing the cooperative after they get funds, but despite these, the state will continue on working in this field.
(GOG representative)

Summing up, although there is certain progress towards developing cooperative model in Georgia, key stakeholders in the field identify significant gaps and challenges that still need to be addressed to make the model successful. The major challenge is the misconception of cooperatives among farmers, as well as among decision makers too. All other gaps, such as flaws in legislature, financial aspects, insufficient skills and knowledge in agriculture and sustainability related challenges – could be linked to the above-mentioned misunderstanding of the model at different levels. Accordingly, it is essential that key actors continue work on rising awareness regarding cooperative model and its benefits.

4.2. Supporting women's empowerment

The first area of change of SFtW framework focuses on three aspects of women's empowerment: (1) Building agency: strengthening women's capacities, confidence and skills; (2) Changing relations: enabling more equal relationships and social norms and (3) Transforming structures: influencing formal and informal institutions.

The data in Country Gender Equality Profile⁷ developed by UN Women (2020) provides an evidence that women especially in rural areas are in a disadvantaged position due to traditionally distributed roles in families and societies, that is manifested in lower engagement in community processes and lack of voice in decision making⁸. According to the ENPARD I CARE action narrative reports, CARE put in place specific measures to challenge this situation and promote women's engagement in cooperatives. Specifically, to ensure that information about new action reached women they organized launching meetings at schools, as much as "i) most teachers are women, ii) they are usually engaged in agricultural activities (as complementary household activity) and iii) the teachers have a close contact with other women in their communities." – as indicated in the report⁹. At the next stage, the program team added the inclusion of women as one of the selection criteria for business ideas competition. According to the narrative report, this measure has proven to be effective to guarantee a higher representation of women in the selected farmers' groups¹⁰. As a result, as reported in the Final Narrative Report, out of 703 CARE supported cooperative members women represent 32.6% (229 women in total), 20% are cooperative leaders. Furthermore, two cooperatives have included eight women with disabilities among their members.¹¹ This means that project exceeded its target of 30% women members of cooperatives, but in most cases women's roles were limited to bookkeeping, light manual labor, and sales. As mentioned above, women were less involved at managerial positions, however, as stated in the project final evaluation, wherever the cooperative leader was female, women were found to occupy more diverse and management roles¹².

The research "EU Supported Agricultural Cooperatives in Georgia" (2017), which covered all the cooperatives supported by ENPARD I, confirms the evidence that cooperatives indeed contributed to the increased engagement of women. Specifically, the research reports that from 2014 to 2017 the share of women members in cooperatives had been increased from 30% to 34%. Furthermore, the number of female employees was also increasing throughout the years from 44% in 2014 to 53% in 2017. However, only 21% of women engaged in cooperatives are presented on managerial positions¹³. Final evaluation findings of Mercy Corps action under ENPARD I supports

⁷ [Country Gender Equality Profile, UN Women, 2020](#)

⁸ [Country Gender Equality Profile, UN Women, 2020, p. 75](#)

⁹ 331-728 Final Narrative Report

¹⁰ 331-728 Final Narrative Report

¹¹ 331-728 Final Narrative Report

¹² CARE. Cooperation for Rural Prosperity In Georgia. ENPARD I. Final Evaluation, 2018

¹³ Kotchlamazashvili, I., Zhorzholiani, D., Kakulia, N. (2017) EU Supported Agricultural Cooperatives: A Case of Georgia.

abovementioned too, claiming that although female workforce is being hired mainly for seasonal works, still the action has promoted women employment in rural areas¹⁴. According to the research on “Agriculture and Rural Development in Western Georgia” (2017) women representation on managerial positions is low in non-ENPARD cooperatives too, however there are more female members in ENPARD cooperatives in general¹⁵.

In addition, CARE provided capacity building opportunities for all beneficiaries, including women throughout the implementation process. Specifically, CARE organized trainings for selected farmers in variety of topics, such as organizational development and business planning, accounting and taxation, food safety, etc. On average, 20-25% of training attendees were women, as reported in the Final Narrative Report¹⁶. The capacity building activities solely for women, or women empowerment and gender equality issues, had not been organized throughout the action, as there are no respective mentions in the report.

Interview findings

Most cooperative members could not recount any specific measures taken with the aim of involving more women in cooperatives, however, there were few who put special efforts into this matter. The majority of cooperative members have gender-neutral attitudes, believing that concentrating specifically on women is discriminatory towards men. Most respondents do not see the unequal distribution of domestic work as a major obstacle and place the responsibility to maintain balance on individual women.

If a woman wants it, she can be a good mother and a housewife and at the same time, she can do everything she sets her mind to. (Cooperative member, female)

This topic is generally overlooked and not deemed to be important by either male or female respondents, but it is clear that women have to put in a lot more effort into succeeding, for example, they need excellent time management skills to balance paid and unpaid work. On the other hand, it is also important to mention that due to lack of time, women are more likely to succeed within cooperatives than individually. There were 1-2 female respondents (cooperative members) who recognized the unfair distribution of opportunities and resources between men and women, seeing a cooperative as a tool to tackle gender inequality at home and work. Those who put extra effort for female participation were also women:

I was telling everyone that women would be a priority as long as I was a chairperson, I cannot say that we achieved our goal, but we're on our way. Talking about gender equality without economic empowerment is meaningless, therefore employment of women is necessary and I will not stop here, I plan to improve this aspect even more. (Chairwoman of a cooperative)

The strong side is that we are united and if, for instance, someone is busy, we help each other. We are united in this work and this is the strong side of the cooperative. Unity is the key, and there is a huge difference when one person works individually, and when 3 or 5 people work together. (Cooperative representative, female)

Almost all respondents noted that cooperatives changed women's lives in various ways. For example, many previously unemployed housewives got involved in the work, became more active, develop more social capital (contacts), acquire new skills and knowledge. Women started attending training sessions and meetings and started participating in decision-making processes. Even though many cooperatives do not generate substantial profits at this stage, women are still able to achieve some degree of economic empowerment. They continue to put a lot of hard work into cooperatives because they see potential in this job. Some women respondents noted that since joining the cooperatives they have become stronger and more resilient.

¹⁴ Mercy Corps. Strengthening Farmers' Cooperatives in Rural Municipalities of Georgia. ENPARD 1. Final Evaluation, 2017

¹⁵ Agriculture and Rural Development in Western Georgia. ISET-PI, 2017

¹⁶ 331-728 Final Narrative Report

I became more motivated not only in business but in life as well. Whenever I face a challenge, I am more hopeful because I know that I will not give up, I will solve it and we will move forward.
(Cooperative member)

Being a member of the cooperative awakened women and gave us so much strength that I could not even imagine before. (Cooperative member)

Other respondents also noted that after joining cooperatives, women became more autonomous; started making decisions about their own lives and stopped needing approval from male figures in their lives. Some respondents stated that women's participation and success in cooperatives reshaped public opinion towards women's societal role. It is important to support individual women who are leaders in their communities and help them become role models in order to inspire other women to follow their path; however, this is not an easy task. In patriarchal societies, the role of women is mostly limited to unpaid domestic labor and some women simply do not have time to participate in activities beyond their household. This created a need for specific approaches and incentives to involve women in cooperatives while also working on changing the attitudes in their families and communities. It is important to note that most of the women who are considered to be role models and success stories come from more privileged backgrounds, e.g. they are from the city, are highly educated, have good connections. These women invested their advantages into cooperatives, and it paid off.

Everyone knows me here, but they still could not believe that a single woman would be able to build the business and when I did it, it changed the expectations for women for many people, it played a big role in breaking the stereotypes. They realized that if I could do it, they could too.
(Cooperative chairwoman)

Despite all this, there still is a lot of work to be done in terms of women's empowerment through cooperatives. According to CARE representative, some data claims that men are more involved in agriculture than women which are not correct. While men participate more in managerial affairs, women milk the cows and work in the greenhouses. The involvement of women is very high, albeit in unnoticed affairs, where the privileges of men are more visible. Other respondents discussed harmful gender stereotypes associating womanhood with housework and childrearing, limiting women's potential. Women are also largely responsible for taking care of sick and elderly family members leaving them with even less time for economic activity. According to the respondents, these patriarchal beliefs are especially prevalent in the villages.

If a woman is married, her husband is the one who becomes a member of a cooperative, because he is the head of the household. When I moved here, I realized how big of a difference there are between lives in the city and the village. A woman practically doesn't have any rights in the family.
(Cooperative member, female)

Some respondents see traditional gender roles as a resource for the successful functioning of cooperatives. For example, they claim that women tend to be more organized – documents are done better by them; women are better at implementing HACCP standards because they are better at keeping things and places clean; men are more assertive – they are better at negotiations, etc. One of the respondents mentioned that women's cooperatives work better because they take everything into consideration, including aesthetics, whereas men look at things from a pragmatic side. According to him, you need both mindsets to achieve your goals.

In my experience, cooperatives with the good synthesis of women and men are the most effective and successful. Womens' cooperatives are characterized by the best management skills. They are very neat in financial documents and try to comply with standards either set by the grant competition or state. On another side, with few exceptions, men are better at marketing, communications, and sales. Men can manage technologies and field services as they try to solve technical issues on their own. All in all, cooperation where both men and women participate is the

most effective. (CARE representative)

To sum up, the existing evidence through desk review shows that the efforts through cooperatives, under ENPARD I, towards women empowerment was mainly limited with the increasing the number of women's representation in cooperatives. Although specific measures were employed to boost quantity of women engagement and empowerment, there are no rigorous evidence available to assess the effect of these measures. However, the evidence suggests that the efforts were missing quality component, i.e. no specific measures were introduced to ensure meaningful engagement of women in cooperatives. The interviews also show that there are successful cases of gender-transformations both at individual women, as well as local surrounding levels, however these cases are more sporadic and there is no evidence regarding its systematicity. Generally speaking, women are becoming relatively more active and involved in decision-making processes, however, this process is slow and harder for some women than others. Stereotypes are still being reproduced through cooperatives. As mentioned, both in reviewed documents as well as in interviews, women's engagement in cooperatives is mostly limited to the tasks that are traditionally considered to be "woman's job." This might be an indication that using women's workforce in this way reinforces traditional gender roles and responsibilities, instead of proactively challenging them; Although, when there are proactive measures incorporated, the cooperatives might have potential to significantly contribute to SFtW framework, currently general "gender-blind" attitude from most respondents is slowing down progress in Sftw areas of change.

4.3. Increasing women's access to and control of productive resources

The SFtW framework emphasizes the importance of equal access to the productive resources for women's empowerment. These resources are land, , inputs, technologies, equipment/machinery and information and finances. As stated in the SFtW *"[increasing access to resources] impacts their [women's] ability to engage in sustainable agriculture and markets, manage short term environmental shocks, and effectively cope with climate shifts. Women's control over assets also relates to decision-making at home and in the rural economy, which affects their children's wellbeing."*

The Country Gender Profile data shows that women are in a disadvantaged situation in terms of accessing to different production resources. Specifically, out of the total landowners, 62.3% are men and 37.7% are women, while 81% of land is owned by men and only 19 % is owned by women. According to 2016 data, women owned only 28.2% of the agricultural lands and 17% of the total farming land (including under lease). Women are also in disadvantaged position when it comes to the access to the finances. 2018 GEOSTAT data shows that average hourly earnings for men is GEL 8.00, while for women – GEL 5.10. CGP states that rural women have limited access to economic opportunities, such as starting their own business; in addition, they face barriers to taking out loans and borrowing credit, as they lack their own income or property.¹⁷ The limited access to the resources is linked with the lower rate of women entrepreneurial activities. According to the policy paper developed by ISET "Challenges and Prospects for SMEs, Particularly Women-led Businesses, during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic" (2020), lack of finances and properties is one of the factors that hinders women to start their enterprises, as a result, throughout 2013-2018, women were almost half as likely to start their own enterprises compared to men.¹⁸

Through Cooperative Fund established under ENPARD I, CARE provides access to financial means for smallholder farmers and this mechanism is deemed as successful, however the documents reviewed do not include any evidence regarding increasing specifically women's access to different resources. Although Cooperative Fund will have women beneficiaries, more rigorous evidence is needed to assess the extent of contribution of CARE's action towards this area of change.

Interview findings

According to the report "EU Supported Agricultural Cooperatives: A Case of Georgia" value of assets used by

¹⁷ [Country Gender Equality Profile, UN Women, 2020](#)

¹⁸ Tevdoradze, L., Burduli, A., Papava, G. (2020) Challenges and Prospects for SMEs, Particularly Women-led Businesses, during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic. ISET policy institute

cooperatives increased by 300% throughout 2014-2017 years.¹⁹ Interview respondents also mentioned an increase in terms of assets. Several cooperatives participated in and won grant competitions or took out loans which allowed them to purchase necessary equipment; however, land ownership is a problematic issue for some respondents. In addition, research participants noted that there is a lack of resources in rural areas in terms of agricultural technology, materials, and knowledge and without these resources, it is really hard to work in the field. This is one of the reasons why collective work is especially important and many respondents noted that they appreciate this sense of unity in terms of access to resources.

Getting land has remained an issue up to now. Those lands are not officially owned by the cooperative, but by the head of the cooperative. We wanted to take land on lease and grow honey-producing plants, but we have not achieved that yet. This is the problem. (Cooperative member, female)

When you have your own business, you are alone. You have to do everything alone, while in a cooperative, you have as many members as you want, depending on how many people you trust. (Cooperative member, female)

As indicated in the desk review, access to resources is more problematic for women, especially those who live in the villages. As they do not possess registered properties, land, or house, they cannot apply to financial institutions. Mortgages are not accessible for them until is not agreed with the “breadwinners”. According to one of the respondents, there are further obstacles for women who are beneficiaries of social assistance. Many of them are express interest in joining cooperatives, however, if they do so, they lose their social assistance.

There are a lot of socially vulnerable women seeing that we go to a field to pick herbs, get engaged in some activities or meetings. They want to join us as well. Nonetheless, because of their status, if they register in a cooperative, they will lose social assistance. For them that 50 GEL aid is very important. In addition, the work of the cooperative is seasonal, and we cannot offer a lot financially. (Cooperative member, female)

One of the CARE representatives noted that barriers in terms of access to resources for women do not exist at the legal levels and they are mostly coming from traditions. Generally, women have less access to financial resources because they require consent from their husbands or other male family members. Most women do not possess assets like a house, land, or a car and remain dependent on someone else.

Most women endure injustice like this because their parents leave all assets to their brothers and women have no opportunities. There are no gender limitations in the grant competition or loans. Traditions are the primary barriers for women. (CARE representative)

Although some respondents acknowledge the disadvantaged position of women in terms of accessing to the resources, they do not consider it valid measure to directly give women access to specific resources, rather they think that empowering women and encouraging them to engage in cooperatives would be better way to support women.

In Georgia, where cooperatives face a lot of challenges, everyone needs similar help. We should not turn men into evil. Having seen that someone gets something more easily, they can complain like children. Instead, women and men should have equal access to resources. What we can do is to attract women more to these processes, because men are inherently involved in them. Our goal is to increase women engagement not to decrease prices. (Private sector representative)

¹⁹ Kotchlamazashvili, I., Zhorzholiani, D., Kakulia, N. (2017) EU Supported Agricultural Cooperatives: A Case of Georgia.

To sum up, there is no data available directly indicating the cooperative model's contribution towards women's access to the resources. The general country level data shows that women still are in disadvantaged position in terms of property ownership, as well as access to finances. Even more, in some cases, this factor might turn to be a barrier for a woman to get involved in the cooperative. Accordingly, it is essential to comprehensively study what resources are needed to start/engage in cooperative and whether these resources are accessible for women or not, what are the barriers (both at legal, as well as cultural levels) in accessing these resources for them. This evidence will provide better understanding whether existing model of cooperatives contributes to the increased access to resources for women and develop respective strategies.

4.4. Enabling women's access to inclusive markets

Increasing women's access to markets is another area of change in SFTW, that enables small-scale women producers to participate and make decisions in market systems. According to the Country Gender Profile data women farmers face problems selling their products as they cannot compete with large food producers. Furthermore, lack of essential resources for production such as food-keeping facilities dampens the selling prices of their produce as they have to sell the product during the harvest period when there is a surplus on the market and prices are relatively low compared to off-season periods.

According to the research on "Agriculture and Rural Development in Western Georgia" (2017) in most value chains women's role is mainly harvesting, as well as they are responsible for sales and public relations in agriculture²⁰. Farmers engaged in cooperatives supported under ENPARD I received trainings in different areas, including in sales skills. Furthermore, CARE implemented variety of activities to foster farmers' linkages to the markets. There is no analysis or evidence yet showing the extent of the contribution of these efforts towards increasing women's access to inclusive markets.

Interview findings

Many of the respondents noted that the biggest challenge is that the production of the cooperatives is not enough for larger market chains. Due to small-scale production, most cooperatives are not very competitive in the market. It is hard for smaller cooperatives to access the market as there are fewer opportunities for them. Production in many fields is monopolized by few big companies while most cooperatives are forced to work on small profits. Respondents mentioned that this problem needs to be addressed by the state in order for smaller companies to be able to access local and international markets. Many cooperatives who wish to export their products lack knowledge and experience regarding European standards, transportation of the goods, different payment methods and need some sort of training in these areas. Respondents also noted that in order to place products on the market it is needed to meet certain standards, have trademarks, etc. As it all requires extra finances, many cooperatives cannot afford it and they do their own packaging for small shops. Few respondents mentioned the potential of agricultural tourism. Some help in this regard is needed.

Everything is based on personal connections and big suppliers have the monopoly, you cannot even sell your product in a small shop if you don't know the owner personally. (Cooperative member, male)

We have no capacity to compete with others. For instance, in cities, there is a lot of dried fruit, with a wide range of diversity. There are factories which produce it in large numbers. In this regard, we would love to move to agricultural tourism, but now, everything is disrupted, and there is no tourism at the moment. When everything goes back to normal, we have some plans. We are stopped for now and are waiting to see how the situation goes in general. If tourism is revived, we will be able to sell everything locally, and we can even conduct masterclasses on how our products are made. (Cooperative representative, female)

Respondents also mentioned that they need more support from the government for locally produced goods.

²⁰ Agriculture and Rural Development in Western Georgia. ISET-PI, 2017

According to them, local products are not prioritized in tenders which puts them in a disadvantaged position. Some respondents noted that their cooperatives have the potential to produce more goods but they are unable to sell them. Another challenge is that there are falsified products on the market which threatens the reputation of cooperatives. According to one of the respondents, resellers often add other materials to their product (in this instance honey) to increase volumes. In addition, engagement in the trainings equips farmers with the skills essential for being active to markets, however research respondents emphasized the gap in this regard too. Specifically, they mentioned the lack of digital skills to ensure successful selling.

It is essential to eliminate falsified honey products from the market. This is something we cannot do, and the state should use its leverage to isolate falsified products from the market. This way honey sales will grow, and there will be more customers. (Cooperative member, male)

There are only a few cooperatives that sell products through digital channels. Have you ever heard that someone bought a cooperative-made product through a digital channel? I have not. I remember only one example, where women produce strawberries. Modern cooperatives in Georgia do not use up-to-date methods to sell products, because farmers do not know that. (Private sector representative)

Cooperative members could not identify obstacles regarding access to markets specifically for women. However, other stakeholders mentioned some barriers that might be mostly faced by women. For example, barriers in accessing to markets might be linked with the lack of access to the different resources, such as transportation and finances. Transportation became less accessible for women especially during Covid-19 related lockdowns²¹. Furthermore, women might face additional challenges in accessing market due to the unequal access to financial resources and stereotypes existing towards female farmers. As mentioned by the respondents, personal connections are crucial while accessing the market, due to unequal distribution of domestic and care works, most women have less time and opportunities to make these connections and they are automatically put into a less advantageous position. CARE representative highlighted the role of cooperative in eliminating such barriers.

In many cases, the banks did not give women loans, unless the share of men is not reflected in the factory's finances. And banks see women negatively unless the man is not a guarantor. I have touched in with the large factories that require heavy machinery to process the production. Women find it hard to plan and purchase. There are stereotypes as well: sometimes people think that women cannot be aware of market prices of the designated product and they offer higher prices than the actual market price is. Once, one of the female members of the cooperative came from Zestafoni. She needed heavy equipment to process the nut and the prices she was told was so ironic to hear. Then I gave her a detailed explanation and guidance, what materials and equipment were necessary, how to plan to purchase and redirect her to the trustworthy distributor. (Private sector representative)

If the women produce relatively different product finds it difficult to contact the market. She has to find a mediatory chain to contact the final buyer (market, restaurant). Additional transportation costs to distribute the product to the major cities leaves the business without any benefit. So, there were two choices: produce and sell the products at the offered price (even if maybe the lower one) or not produce at all. Cooperative enabled them to increase production and quality with joint effort. Enhancing quality and increase in production made the market more easily accessible. (CARE representative)

To sum up, there is limited evidence regarding the women's access to the markets in the available documents. Furthermore, the research respondents find it difficult to identify any gendered specificities in this regard. Although potentially cooperatives could promote women's access to the markets through its collaborative nature, there is

²¹ Gender analysis for Covid-19 in Georgia. (2020) CARE International in Caucasus

need to collect and analyze rigorous data on the existing situation regarding women's access to markets and existing barriers (both normative as well as cultural) in accessing markets for them. This evidence would inform the measures incorporated in cooperative model in supporting in selling and accessing markets.

4.5. Improving nutrition

There is no evidence documented showing the cooperatives contribution towards improved nutrition for women and girls. Furthermore, the cooperative members do not see nutrition as a problem, therefore it is very difficult for them to respond to the questions related to it during the interviews.

Other stakeholders involved in the research shared their perspectives regarding this issue, however, those were mostly personal perception that are not based on evidence. Furthermore, their perspectives do not include gender-related aspects, instead it was more general thoughts. Specifically, the respondents believe that the cooperatives cannot produce sufficient amount of product to contribute to food security. However, at individual family levels it could have some positive effect. In addition to this, respondents highlighted that currently the cooperatives are required to introduce HACCP standards which will ensure the higher quality products, contributing to the food safety.

In general, when the standard of living increases in the family, their need for healthy food is more satisfied. Food safety has faced numerous challenges during the covid-19, however, the cooperatives try to be optimistic. One of the cooperative members told us that people who commuted from Tbilisi were purchasing only her cheese because of the high quality. So, they used crises as an opportunity. In any case, a strong cooperative produces high-quality products that allow others in the village to have access to healthy products. (CARE representative)

Cooperative, as other businesses, go through food safety standards, even baking bread should be based on HACCP standards. Nothing can justify the breaking of law, moreover, being in a cooperative should mean the development, obtaining the standards and using pesticides more correctly, but if you produce something in unsanitary conditions, your business should be closed, so no one is harmed. (GOG representative)

Although based on the interviews there might be some contributions and successful cases of cooperatives' contribution towards improved nutrition, there is need to collect more rigorous and comprehensive data regarding this topic.

4.6. Promoting social protection

There is no evidence documented related to this domain of SFTW framework, however interviews with cooperative members as well as stakeholders show that there might be some sporadic cases of how being of cooperative member helped women in different situations. While most research participants avoided the topic of gender-based violence, mainly because they could not see direct links between being a cooperative member and GBV, one of the respondents told a story of a disabled woman who was a victim of domestic violence. She employed this woman in the cooperative, increasing her independence and well-being and transforming her life dramatically. This story might be considered as an indication that cooperative potentially can be a resource against gender-based violence in some cases.

There is one case that happened several years ago. We have a disabled girl who is 30 and lives with her parents. Once women talked that her father bet her up, having seen her with a neighboring guy. The police got involved as well, because the girl called them on her own. After that, I got acquainted with this girl, and she joined [cooperative] unofficially. She was not able to work anywhere physically. Since she joined our cooperative, I notice that her family recognized her as a person and as a woman. Her earnings in the cooperative are the same as that of other members. She always comes to us, offering her help. Her mother also calls us and offers her

daughter's help. Before that, they used to say that she could not work at all. I have some experience of working with disabled people, and I have another viewpoint on that. The members also saw that disabled people can do a lot of things. If you explain everything correctly to her, she will do everything perfectly. After she came to us, I have not heard that her parents had any issues with her anymore. Maybe, the fact that their daughter got involved in the cooperative had an impact on them. However, before that, there had been some cases that her father used to beat her up. Maybe the situation changed because of us, maybe because of the police or social workers. I am not sure about that. Perhaps, they saw that society embraced their daughter. Sometimes, this change has a positive effect on parents as well. You cannot justify her father's wrongdoing, but his attitude seems to have changed. This is a factor, and even if we do not earn a lot, this cooperative has helped that girl, so it was worth creating. This girl is an unofficial member of our cooperative, and I think she cannot be an official member because of her status. However, I do not care about formalities. The most important thing for me is that wherever we are, we have some positive results. (Cooperative member, female)

Respondents emphasized the potential social value of the cooperatives. The cooperatives promote developing strong networks that potentially improves its members resilience towards difficult situations due to the collective nature of cooperatives. In addition to this, being empowered and having access to finances enables women to escape violent situations.

4.7. Multiplying impact, to enable change at scale

SFTW focuses on multiplying impact over the locations out of CARE programs through working on policy level, advocacy and research via partnerships and alliances. CARE's action under ENPARD I included national level activities, e.g. CARE was actively involved in elaborating Law of Georgia on Agricultural Cooperatives. Furthermore, as reported in the Narrative Report project partners and beneficiaries were actively involved in a variety of local and national level discussions. Some of such events focused on women empowerment issues in agriculture. According to the Narrative Report, during the action Georgian Farmers Association established partnerships and signed MoUs with different organizations, including women's organizations (e.g. "Women from Ukraine"). Similarly, to the SFTW, other areas of change, although certain actions have been undertaken with this regard, there is no data that would provide an evidence supporting cooperative's contribution towards this aspect of SFTW.

The research respondents representing different (government, CSO, private, CARE) sectors has their own vision and strategy on supporting cooperatives from their sectors' perspective, however all of them unite around the idea that joint and coordinated support of cooperatives would have more successful outcomes.

The development of the cooperative system is an issue of a national scale, which cannot be dealt with by specific international organizations. This needs the involvement of the state with its infrastructure, private sector, and educational system. This is not a separated sectorial issue. This is a multisectoral issue. (CSO representative)

Government was identified as central stakeholder which is in the position of providing enabling legislative environment, while CSO, international organizations and private sectors, together with cooperatives themselves, should be actively involved/consulted in policy and legislative level actions. Government sector representatives emphasize the need of long-term capacity building of the cooperatives and sees CSO and public sector role as key in this process.

All respondents agree that coordinated action is essential for successful popularization of the cooperatives and awareness rising among farmers regarding the benefits of the cooperatives. Furthermore, all sector representatives mentioned the importance of providing functioning space for networking and skill-sharing, which will connect cooperatives with donors and government institutions, as well as will provide them with essential information and resources.

The association should represent the interests of cooperatives in their development. There should be a dialogue between them and their potential partners, which are financial institutions, supervising organizations, and development organizations. This network should be established with intensified dialogue. We will always join these kinds of platforms and share our experiences, discontent as well as expectations. Financial institutions should provide cooperatives access to cheap resources. (Private sector representative)

CARE sees the importance of ongoing support of the cooperatives, while recognizing that many organizations and Government itself is dependent on the priorities of the donors. Currently, CARE provides support through Cooperative Fund, which was established under ENPARD I and encompasses CARE supported cooperatives. Cooperative Fund continues active functioning after the completion of ENPARD I and creates space for cooperatives to build and maintain connections with different agencies, as well as with each other. Through this mean CARE tries to strengthen cooperatives by giving them opportunities and widening their horizon.

I, as a representative of Care, try to seek more supporters to set up the movements and expand the network. We are practically the only organization (As far as I remember) that still keeps working with cooperatives. And this is a paradox, that everyone agreed on the importance of cooperatives. But getting more supporters and consolidate with them, is what we are lack. The second issue, it that supporting cooperative should be long-lasting. Even though we do not give them grants, we should treat them as economic entity and not humanitarian ones. If I aim to make cooperatives resilient, they should be seen and treated as a business entity. [...] What donors and NGOs did wrong is that they make people dependent on them and this dependence has intensified gradually. This should be changed. Proper advocacy is needed but it requires effective strategy; when to do, with whom do to and what is your target group. (CARE representative)

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The current analysis attempted to assess how agricultural cooperatives in Georgia contributes to the areas of SFtW framework through reviewing the documented evidence by CARE, as well as interviewing of cooperative members and stakeholders from different sectors, such as government, CSO, private sector and CARE itself.

The documented evidence regarding, in general, cooperatives in Georgia is limited. Research, assessments, and evaluations reviewed does not include research questions regarding gender equality, women empowerment etc. Accordingly, gender-related data in the existing evidence only includes sex-disaggregated data reporting the number of women members of cooperatives.

Relatively more data is available regarding the first area of change of SFtW – “Supporting Women’s Empowerment”. Important to mention, that this kind of data is information reported to the donors and does not necessarily entails the gender analysis. Specifically, the documents provide information on the number of women cooperative members, number of women on managerial positions in cooperatives, number of women training participants, etc. Based on this data it could be indirectly assumed that such kind of interventions would promote women’s empowerment, however no data is available directly proving it. The data regarding other areas of change of SFtW either are not available or is very limited to conclude whether cooperatives contribute to SFtW change areas or not.

The analysis of the interviews showed that, in overall, agricultural cooperatives can potentially be gender-transformative, however, the challenges that the agricultural cooperatives in Georgia are facing currently, as well as gender-blind views of the cooperative members and other key stakeholders, slows down this process significantly. The respondents mainly discussed the critical problems experiencing cooperatives, such as misconception of cooperatives among farmers and decision makers, flaws in legislature, financial aspects,

insufficient skills and knowledge in agriculture and sustainability related challenges. They struggled to identify specific barriers for women and could not link different aspects of women's empowerment with agricultural practices. Indeed, there were some sporadic cases when respondents shared success stories of gender transformations, however those are not systematic and do not provide basis to make strong conclusions regarding its contribution towards SFtW areas.

Below is provided recommendations to CARE in Caucasus regarding the building evidence on agriculture cooperatives contribution to SFtW change areas:

- ⇒ Assess women farmers needs and identify resources and barriers according to SFtW areas: the first step in building such kind of evidence would be assessing women farmers needs and identifying resources and barriers in engaging to the cooperatives according to each area of SFtW framework. The needs, resources and barriers should be explored at multiple levels, such as normative/legal, socio-cultural, educational, financial, etc.
- ⇒ Incorporate relevant strategies and indicators into programmatic Theory of Change (ToC) and Logframe (LF): develop and incorporate relevant strategies into ToC addressing identified needs and barriers and select respective indicators to be included in LF. Although the main goal of the program might not be women empowerment, having such strategies and indicators into programmatic documents will ensure that the data is being collected and evidence is available for further analysis. Furthermore, having women empowerment related strategies in ToC will ensure that learning questions on women empowerment in the context of specific program is asked and answered during the baselines, evaluations and assessments carried out through programing.
- ⇒ Collect gender data further than sex-disaggregation: sex-disaggregated data is essential to be collected, however it is not enough to capture gender transformations. It is possible that the indicators for data collection be informed by SFtW framework. Furthermore, collect data not only on outcomes (e.g. % of women accessing to markets), but also on processes – explore causes why are women facing difficulties to access to markets. In addition, incorporate intersectionality in data collection approach, to ensure that the differences between different women groups are also captured.
- ⇒ Collect women empowerment related data more rigorously and routinely: measuring same indicators using same tools will ensure the validity of the evidence and make it possible to carry out time series analysis and compare data in different time points. Such approach will provide evidence throughout time and will be able to capture how gender transformation is happening in time.
- ⇒ Coordinate with other sectors/agencies in evidence building process: coordinated research could be arranged together with different sectors to make sure that solid resources are allocated for the research and the data collection and analysis is carried out in a quality manner.

Proposed thematic areas for the evidence building could be include:

- ⇒ Analysis of what are the social value of cooperatives, along with the economic value.
- ⇒ Changes in women cooperative members economic wellbeing as a result of being involved in cooperatives.
- ⇒ Changes in women cooperative members knowledge and skills in agriculture and cooperative management.
- ⇒ How/at what positions are women represented in cooperatives and what are the reasons of it? What are the patterns of women's involvement and success in cooperatives? What barriers do women face in promotion process and why?
- ⇒ What are the attitudes towards gender equality, gender roles and relevant issues among cooperative members (both women and men) and how does those attitudes change throughout the time.
- ⇒ What resources are needed to start/engage in cooperative and whether these resources are accessible for women or not, what are the barriers (both at legal, as well as cultural levels) in accessing these resources

for them. What are their knowledge and understanding of their rights on different assets and whether and how this understanding changes throughout time.

- ⇒ What is the existing situation regarding women's access to markets, what are their resources and existing barriers (both normative as well as cultural) in accessing markets for them. How cooperative member women's capability in accessing markets changes throughout the time.
- ⇒ What is the existing situation regarding women's access to healthy food and how cooperative member women's capability in accessing and/or producing healthy food changes throughout the time.
- ⇒ What is cooperative women member's perceptions, understanding and knowledge regarding GBV and DV and respective services. How this understanding changes throughout time.
- ⇒ What are the specific obstacles faced by female members of cooperatives while working with different sectors and how can these obstacles be overcome?
- ⇒ Identifying the ways to tackle persistent gender stereotypes that are being reproduced within cooperatives.