



Scale X Design

# Scale X Design Accelerator Cohort 3

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## Initiative and/or Program Name

WomENTrepreneur

## Technical Sector

Water

Food Security

Humanitarian

Health

✓ Gender

Agriculture

✓ Economic Development

✓ Capacity Building/Governance

Education

✓ Dignified Work

✓ Social Enterprise

Youth and Adolescence

**Check this box if your application should NOT be entered in the Accelerator as a finalist.**

No response

**Check this box if your application is a social enterprise or consulting practice that does NOT fit within the Cohort 3 theme: Women's Economic Empowerment.** Hidden

No response

**Are you submitting your application in English?**

✓ Yes

No

## **Problem Statement**

WomENTrepreneur is a social enterprise model for women with disabilities living in the country of Georgia putting them in charge of their destiny. This model provides a sustainable mechanism for improving women's quality of life and social integration while also challenging the negative stigma. Women with disabilities are one of the most marginalized groups in Georgia who face a multitude of challenges beginning in childhood. There is a general lack of understanding of their capacities leading to isolation from any social-economic activity. In the absence of state policies and programs, women with disabilities often face double discrimination, as they not only lack access to social services but women are more disadvantaged compared to men as an accepted societal norm. This is especially prominent in rural areas, where social norms limit women in their choices to lead an active and engaged life. The only source of income is social allowance which is Gel. 100 (USD\$ 40) per month which is insufficient for minimum basic needs let alone care. This is below the World Bank poverty line and 3 times less than the average income per capita in Georgia. Economic and social activity of women with disabilities is extremely low due to a) lack of proper access to education, healthcare, services and absence of adapted environment; and b) social stigma preventing private sector and government to offer adapted solutions. Additionally, compared to men with disabilities, women with special needs are often victims of domestic violence. WomENTrepreneur is a CARE-developed program in Georgia designed to stimulate systemic changes in the lives of women with special needs, change the way women are viewed by society and promote the active support for women with disabilities by private and public actors by putting them in charge of their destiny. CARE supported the establishment of social enterprises, which are run by and employing women with disabilities and address a variety of problems at once. The high invisibility of women with special needs is addressed by creating role models for successful business and community participation, stimulating other women to follow the example and creating awareness in families about their rights. It improves livelihoods by creating an income for women. Besides improving economic well-being and weakening social stigma, most importantly it stimulates the confidence of women with special needs empowering them to take an active role in demanding improved support and transforming their attitude from considering themselves as "useless" to people who can change their own lives. This has been documented in the following video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4u3iPz2IFnU>

**a) Explain how your initiative solves the problem. What evidence exists to prove your initiative solves the problem?**

WomENTrepreneur addresses the isolation of women with disabilities through economic empowerment in three target municipalities of West Georgia. It has been operating as a pilot that has shown great potential in changing social stigma at the local level through entrepreneurship. There are eight active social enterprises, employing 47 women, which has shown to 1) improve livelihoods; 2) create grassroots social platforms; 3) advocate for women's rights; and 4) create leaders for change.

WomENTrepreneur first addresses the gaps in business and technical capacities of women with special needs and provides advocacy for their rights raising awareness about best practices to best respond to women with special needs. Business ideas submitted by women with disabilities are then collected and are reviewed for further development of proposals. Finally, the model commits to supporting the best business proposals that are economically viable and can create social impact.

In just 1.5 years of operation, the enterprises have already proven to increase women's income and have expanded awareness of the needs of women with disabilities among their families and local municipalities. To add to these remarkable successes accomplished in such a short time, all of the enterprises are sustainable and are generating a profit. Seeing the success of these enterprises, local authorities have started supporting the enterprises through financial and in-kind contributions, and have financed the local promotion of the enterprises. There were also business links established with local private sector actors.

Overall, women engaged in the social enterprises increased their income by a minimum of 50% with some of them becoming the main breadwinners in their families. The evidence shows that these women, when employed, can be a critical piece to helping their families rise out of poverty. Based upon the feedback of the beneficiaries and local stakeholders, socialization and employment of women with disabilities is regarded as the innovation in target regions.

Developing links between women with special needs and private sector released the stigma around disability and women's abilities, and made women more visible within their communities, which itself created more promotional opportunities and the possibility to advocate for their rights, expand, build their skills and believe in themselves.

Promotion of the enterprise model worked to engage different actors in the process, including influencing local governments to improve their policies towards more inclusion of women with disabilities in social-economic life. The local government became actively involved in taking care of the women with special needs by providing necessary transportation services and facilitated advocacy for the women. The social service agency put some of the beneficiary women into their program and started to pay them salaries. Social integration and public activities, such as workshops and exhibitions served to promote women with disabilities and their work and advocate for increasing their rights. The model strengthened already existing networks of women with disabilities such as "Union of Disabled Persons in Samtredia Municipality". The evidence promises that based on the social enterprise model, the expansion of networks and partnerships can happen in other regions.

**b) How does the initiative apply the CARE approach? (Increased Resilience, Promoting Inclusive Governance and Gender Equality and Women's Voice – The initiative does not have to apply all four to qualify)**

No response

**b) b) How does the initiative apply the Women's Economic Impact Strategy?**

Financial inclusion-In social enterprises, women have their own income and are becoming financially independent. Women became open to additional income opportunities including their own initiatives, or government services.

Dignified work- Women have increased awareness of their rights. Social enterprises ensure the dignified treatment of women, aligning work schedule with their needs so that women feel comfortable and are encouraged to continue work.

Entrepreneurship- CARE encouraged women entrepreneurship by building women's skills, technical capacities and increasing awareness about their rights. Women were able to submit business proposals independently. Women gained ownership of their income and are able to control economic resources and use their skills to help support their families. Promotion within the project gave them opportunities to seek additional support from private actors and engage in business activities, which helped promote women's leadership.

Overcoming cross-cutting barriers to economic empowerment-The main barrier towards economic empowerment in a society is social stigma. With active social inclusion, women overcame fear of their disabilities and became more confident. Through the enterprises, the social stigma around employing people with disabilities has been weakened and women are now invited to job exhibitions and fairs and are encouraged to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

**c) Why is your initiative better than what's been done before or by others?**

Within the initiative, CARE addressed the needs of women with disabilities as a particularly vulnerable group, whose sensitive and specific needs have traditionally been neglected, which hasn't been done before. The project identified the priority needs of the women and accordingly included them in a social enterprise model to address those issues. The initiative took first steps towards inclusion of these women into CARE International in the Caucasus strategy by revision and fine-tuning of the existing criteria by adding specific indicators such as women with disabilities-headed social enterprises, women with disabilities below the poverty line who report that their priorities/needs are addressed by economic planning and social services, women with disabilities below the poverty line who benefit from services provided by Civil Society organizations(CSOs), women with disabilities who report they have knowledge/capacity to capitalize on existing market opportunities.

CARE 's social enterprise model includes women with disabilities, not as a passive actors, but as active agents of change by giving them a leadership role and promoting entrepreneurship, forming extensive linkages with different actors and building their self-confidence.

The initiative strengthened women and their communities to advocate for their rights themselves and form as active leaders in their communities. The initiative managed to engage different private and public stakeholders to fight against social stigma and make women more visible in their communities. Through active lobbying with partners, women became actively engaged in decision-making process at municipal level through coordination councils-a platform to present their needs on local agenda.

**a) Describe how this initiative could further impact 1million+ people by 2020? How can this be taken to scale, either at the national or international level?**

During the 1.5 years of implementation of the project, CARE supported eight social enterprises, employing 47 women with disabilities, led by partnerships and associations working with women with disabilities. Based on official statistics, there are approx. 50,000 women with disabilities in Georgia, but the real numbers are much higher and estimated to be around 200,000. The model brings forward the partnerships and networks who advocate and promote for more impact and scale at the national levels, and the initiative can be taken up by similar associations and private sector actors.

Development of partnerships and involvement of associations for women with disabilities will involve more people by raising awareness and can be done on an international level by other countries. The model has proven the potential and interest in supporting women with disabilities exists and has been increasing. CARE plans to build an alliance of partners with social enterprises at the center combining private sector, American Chamber of Commerce and the enterprise agency under the Ministry of Economy of Georgia. The pilot proved that through initial funding, capacity building and providing business opportunities, the enterprises generate profit and become viable in the long-term.

**b) Who will pay for taking this initiative to scale? (i.e. what is the funding model? Will government adopt the innovation? Will the initiative be scaled through market-based approaches? Will it be supported through traditional philanthropy or replicated by other NGOs?)**

Scaling up will be funded through traditional philanthropy, government subsidies and Corporate Social Responsibility. CARE believes that WomENTrepreneur has the potential to generate interest and can be used as a major source for stimulating CSR in Georgia. CARE relies on a network with the American Chamber of Commerce and Government of Georgia to scale-up this work.

**c) Based on your experience so far, what is the major obstacle or challenge you feel CARE faces in taking this initiative to scale?**

The major obstacle for scaling is the prominent stigma placed on people with disabilities in Georgia and the systematic discrimination of women as a result of deeply rooted patriarchal institutions. This prevents crucial actors from prioritizing support for the disabled. The social enterprises aim to find a sustainable solution that only requires temporary support while moving toward a sustainable model. Part of the network CARE intends to establish coupled with the advocacy CARE continues to do is slowly addressing these obstacles.

**a) What is evidence or the analysis that proves there is demand or interest for this initiative? (i.e. is there interest from the government? Are stakeholders such as partners or communities interested in scaling? Have donors or investors shown interest?)**

Women and associations for people with disabilities, regional CSOs and NGOs-Women with special needs are the most marginalized group in a society. There's an increasing demand to address the problems they face, particularly unemployment and lack of economic inclusion, seeing that the social enterprise model can properly address their needs. The CSOs and NGOs working with women with disabilities have interest to engage and collaborate.

Government- In light of ratification of a UN convention for persons with disabilities, there's an increased demand on government to take necessary measures towards providing accurate statistical data on persons with disabilities, and increase their inclusion in government work and services. Based on 2014 statistics, in Georgia, out of 100,000 government employees, only 24 were people with disabilities. Local governments of target municipalities are currently engaged with women with disabilities, providing transportation services to women as the enterprises become sustainable and are continuing to provide economic opportunities for these women.

Enterprises and private sector-Private sector actors and businesses are interested in enhancing their business representation through involving women with special needs and taking up corporate social responsibility.