

Promoting Inclusive Women's Economic Empowerment in the Fisheries Sector

Final Evaluation Report



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List of Acronyms

CEDAW:	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO:	Civil Society Organisation
DC:	District Council
FGD:	Focus Group Discussion
GBV:	Gender Based Violence
GESI:	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
ISF:	International Solidarity Foundation
KII:	Key Informant Interview
M & E:	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoF:	Ministry of Fisheries
NGO:	Non Governmental Organisation
OECD DAC:	Organisation for Economic Co operation and Development Development Assistance Committee
SGBV:	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
ToC:	Theory of Change
TOR:	Terms of Reference
TVET:	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
VAWG:	Violence Against Women
VAWG:	Violence Against Women and Girls
VFM:	Value for Money
YOVENCO:	Youth Volunteers and Development Organisation

Executive Summary

This evaluation examines a two year project implemented in Berbera that aimed to strengthen women's economic empowerment, improve their participation in the fisheries value chain, and promote safer and more inclusive working environments. The project brought together the district authorities, YOVENCO, women cooperatives, and community actors to operationalise the fish market, equip women with practical tools and skills, and create stronger linkages between women, institutions, and economic opportunities.

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the project's relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. The assessment aimed to understand the extent to which the project addressed the needs of women, achieved its intended results, influenced broader community attitudes, and created conditions for long term change. It also sought to identify lessons that can guide future programming in the fisheries sector and beyond.

A mixed method approach was used, combining quantitative data collected by YOVENCO with qualitative evidence gathered through focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and field observations. Financial records, project documents, and monitoring data were reviewed. Triangulation was applied to validate findings and resolve inconsistencies, and a validation workshop was held with community members, women vendors, authorities, and implementing partners to confirm conclusions and refine interpretations.

The evaluation found that the project achieved significant and measurable progress. The market became fully functional and now supports 64 active women vendors. Women experienced improvements in income, confidence, and leadership. Application of processing and hygiene skills increased from zero to more than 80%. Savings practices strengthened, with all women now saving regularly. Violence experienced by employed women was reduced by more than half compared to baseline levels. Most incidents of violence continue to occur within the home, particularly involving intimate partners, which mirrors the wider pattern of domestic and partner based abuse documented across Somaliland. The most common form reported by employed women is verbal and emotional abuse, followed by restrictive behaviours that limit movement or economic participation. Physical violence still occurs but at lower levels compared to the baseline. Women emphasised that such violence rarely happens in the market space, which has become a safer environment due to increased visibility, stronger social networks, and higher confidence in reporting. The shift in violence from public spaces to private settings reflects both progress and ongoing challenges that require sustained attention.

Community attitudes toward women's participation in fisheries improved, and duty bearers demonstrated growing support for safer and more equitable environments. Challenges remained though. Business record keeping was not adopted by women. Access to fish during low seasons and male control of supply chains continued to limit

women's autonomy. Energy shortages affected cold storage and caused losses and limited women's potential. Employment outcomes for TVET graduates were mixed, with some still seeking sector relevant opportunities.

Key lessons include the importance of strong coordination with district authorities, the need for early delivery of TVET training, the value of integrated approaches that combine infrastructure, tools, and capacity development, and the ongoing influence of gender norms on women's economic participation. The project also showed that without energy resilience, supply chain access, and adequate monitoring systems, some benefits may not be fully sustained.

Recommendations include strengthening supply chain negotiation for women, improving business and financial literacy, reinforcing monitoring systems, investing in reliable cold storage and energy solutions, engaging traditional and religious leaders more deliberately, and designing earlier job placement pathways for trainees. Further collaboration with district authorities should continue, as their support has been critical to sustaining market operations.

The project has delivered meaningful and lasting improvements in the lives of women in Berbera. With targeted adjustments and continued investment in enabling systems, its impact can be deepened and sustained into the future.

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of the endline evaluation of the Promoting Inclusive Women's Economic Empowerment in the Fisheries Sector Project implemented in Berbera. The initiative was delivered by YOVENCO with support from the International Solidarity Foundation (ISF). ISF brings long experience in women's economic empowerment, having supported market-based livelihood initiatives and gender-inclusive community development efforts across Somaliland. Its approach focuses on strengthening local systems while expanding opportunities for women in traditionally male-dominated sectors.

The project brought together local institutions, women vendors, TVET graduates, the cooperative, and the district council to strengthen women's participation in the fisheries sector and to address some of the social and economic barriers that have long limited their opportunities. YOVENCO contributes its technical expertise in TVET training, cooperative development, and community mobilization, with a proven track record of equipping youth and women with practical skills that lead to improved livelihoods. The geographic focus of the evaluation is Berbera city, specifically the central fish market and surrounding supply chain points. The thematic scope includes women's economic empowerment, market operationalization, cooperative strengthening, skills development, gender equality, and the wider fisheries value chain dynamics affecting women's participation

The project was developed in direct response to the challenges women in Berbera were facing. Many had no stable income, limited access to basic tools, and very few opportunities to gain the practical skills needed to participate meaningfully in the fisheries value chain. Although the central fish market had been constructed and equipped with large infrastructure level machines, it remained non functional because it lacked the essential day to day tools required for actual operations. The market could not run without items such as fridges, basic processing tools, cutting equipment, reliable cold transport, trained vendors, and an organised system for managing daily activities. At the same time, women in Berbera faced broader social challenges. Concerns about violence against women and girls were common, and harmful norms that restricted their movement and participation in public spaces. Awareness of rights was limited, and the lack of safe and supportive working environments made it difficult for women to engage in the fisheries sector confidently.

The project sought to address these constraints by making the market fully operational, equipping women with practical tools and skills, establishing and strengthening a women led cooperative, and building constructive relationships with district authorities. It also worked to create safer, more inclusive, and more dignified working conditions so that women could participate in the fisheries sector with confidence and recognition. The evaluation was conducted to understand the extent to which the project achieved its intended results and how it contributed to wider social and economic changes in the community. It examined the project's performance against the key OECD DAC evaluation criteria which include relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. The evaluation also focused on cross cutting issues such as

women's empowerment, social inclusion, institutional strengthening, and the reduction of violence against women and girls. The evaluation covers activities implemented between January 2024 and December 2025, including the inception phase, market operationalisation, skills development, and support to the women's cooperative.

The evaluation addressed several guiding questions. These included whether the project responded to the real needs of women, whether the interventions were implemented effectively, how resources were used, what kinds of changes took place in women's lives and in the wider system, and whether the benefits are likely to continue after the project ends. The evaluation also explored how attitudes, practices, and community relationships evolved and how the project's design and assumptions held up in practice.

This report is organised into a series of chapters that walk the reader through the evaluation process and its findings. The introduction is followed by a description of the evaluation methodology. The main body presents detailed findings organised around the evaluation criteria and thematic analysis. This is followed by an integrated synthesis section, conclusions, lessons learned, and recommendations. The structure is intended to guide the reader through the evidence in a clear and logical way while providing an in depth understanding of the project's performance and the experiences of the women and stakeholders who shaped its outcomes.

2. Evaluation Methodology and Approach

2.1 Evaluation Design

The evaluation was designed as a summative mixed methods assessment, conducted to determine the extent to which the intended results were achieved and to generate lessons for future programming. A summative approach was suitable because the project was concluded and there was a need to assess outcomes, validate progress against targets, and understand the sustainability of project contributions.

A mixed methods design combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to produce a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of project performance. This design captured both measurable changes and the processes, motivations, and contextual factors behind them.

The evaluation focused on multiple units of analysis including individuals such as women beneficiaries, cooperative members, TVET graduates, and community members; households to understand indirect effects; cooperatives as economic and organizational structures; and institutions including YOVENCO, TVET centers, local authorities, and private sector partners. This multi-level analysis allowed examination of results from micro to institutional levels and how interventions interacted across the project ecosystem.

Quantitative data was collected through structured surveys, monitoring systems, attendance records, production data, and savings tracking tools. This provided evidence on income, skills application, production volumes, savings balances, and changes in gender attitudes, showing the scale, distribution, and consistency of results.

Qualitative data included key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory observation. These methods explored lived experiences, empowerment dynamics, cooperative performance, market interactions, and social norm changes, revealing why outcomes emerged, how women applied skills, what barriers persisted, and institutional contributions or constraints.

By integrating quantitative evidence of what happened with qualitative insights into why and how it happened, the evaluation produced a balanced, multidimensional assessment. All methods aligned with OECD DAC criteria and emphasized participation, cultural sensitivity, and gender responsiveness, ensuring women's voices and community perspectives guided interpretation. This holistic design strengthened the credibility, depth, and practical usefulness of the findings for future programming.

2.2 Theory of Change / Evaluation Framework

The evaluation was guided by the project's Theory of Change, which posits that strengthening women's technical skills, business capacity, and access to markets leads to increased income and economic independence, which in turn enhances social empowerment, decision-making, and resilience. The methodology focused on assessing both the economic and social pathways, including skills development, enterprise expansion, market access, and shifts in gender norms.

Quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to capture results and underlying causal mechanisms. Quantitative indicators measured income, savings, employment, skills application, and changes in gender attitudes. These indicators were directly linked to the project's intended pathways, providing evidence of progress toward economic and social outcomes. Key informant interviews targeted actors influencing employment and market systems, while focus group discussions explored cooperative dynamics, social norms, and women's empowerment. Surveys collected measurable changes among women, households, and community members.

The evaluation also examined institutional and community-level effects, including YOVENCO's organizational performance, TVET partnerships, and engagement with private sector actors such as SOMTUNA and Zakia Fish Factory. These elements provided insight into the sustainability of results and the enabling environment for women's participation in economic activities. Community engagement activities, outreach with traditional and religious leaders, and sensitization efforts in factories were assessed to determine their influence on social norms, gender equality, and violence prevention.

The methodology integrated evidence from multiple sources to link outcomes to the causal pathways envisioned in the Theory of Change. This approach ensured the evaluation captured not only what results were achieved but also why and how they occurred. Data collection and analysis were aligned with OECD DAC evaluation criteria, emphasizing effectiveness, impact, sustainability, and relevance. Participation, cultural sensitivity, and gender responsiveness were central to the methodology, ensuring women's voices and community perspectives were integral to interpretation and conclusions.

2.3 Evaluation Questions and Indicators

The evaluation was guided by a set of core questions designed to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact of the project. These questions focused on key areas including women's economic empowerment, social and gender outcomes, cooperative performance, and institutional support systems. They were structured to capture both the results achieved and the underlying factors influencing those results.

Each evaluation question was linked to SMART indicators to ensure that progress could be measured clearly and systematically. Indicators captured quantitative measures such as changes in income, savings, employment, skills application, production volumes, and participation in cooperative activities. They also included qualitative dimensions, such as shifts in gender attitudes, community support for women's economic activities, experiences of empowerment, and institutional responsiveness.

The data collection strategy was directly aligned with these indicators. Quantitative surveys were used to measure numerical changes among women, households, and community members. Focus group discussions explored social norms, cooperative dynamics, and empowerment experiences. Key informant interviews provided insights from institutional actors, private sector partners, and community leaders on enabling conditions, barriers, and system-level outcomes. Participatory observation complemented these methods by capturing real-time practices and interactions within cooperatives and communities.

By linking evaluation questions to SMART indicators and matching them with appropriate data collection tools, the evaluation ensured that both what had changed and why those changes occurred could be captured. This approach provided a clear, evidence-based understanding of project performance, highlighting achievements, challenges, and lessons for future programming.

2.4 Data Collection Tools and Sources

The evaluation used a combination of quantitative and qualitative tools to capture a comprehensive picture of project performance. Quantitative tools included structured surveys administered to women beneficiaries, households, and community members, as well as administrative records such as attendance sheets, production data, savings tracking, and routine monitoring reports. These sources provided measurable evidence on income, employment, skills application, production volumes, and changes in gender attitudes.

Qualitative tools included focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and participatory observation. Focus group discussions captured collective experiences, social norms, and cooperative dynamics. Key informant interviews provided insights from institutional actors, private sector partners, and community leaders on system-level outcomes, collaboration mechanisms, and barriers to progress. Observation allowed the evaluation team to assess real-time practices within cooperatives, workplaces, and community settings.

The evaluation also incorporated observations and self-assessment exercises, enabling participants to reflect on their own performance, skills application, and cooperative practices. Case studies and life story documentation were used to highlight individual trajectories, experiences of empowerment, and the practical application of project support over time.

All tools were closely aligned with the evaluation questions and SMART indicators. Quantitative tools captured numerical changes, qualitative tools explored underlying factors and contextual influences, and case studies and self-assessment exercises provided in-depth understanding of outcomes at the individual and institutional levels. This integrated approach ensured that both what had changed and why those changes occurred were documented, supporting robust, evidence-based conclusions and practical lessons for future programming.

2.5 Sampling Framework and Data Coverage

The evaluation used a sampling framework designed to ensure broad and meaningful representation of the diverse groups involved in or affected by the project. Both probability and non-probability methods were applied depending on the type of data and characteristics of each target group.

For the quantitative component, ISF and YOVENCO applied probability-based sampling using updated beneficiary and community lists. In the quantitative data collection 140 respondents were surveyed. Data collection team included respondents from marginalized households and, where possible, individuals with disabilities to ensure inclusive representation.

The qualitative component employed a non probability, purposive sampling approach, which is appropriate for evaluations that require depth, diversity of perspectives, and exploration of context. Among women beneficiaries, a dedicated FGD was conducted with 11 women, complemented by 8 in depth interviews to capture individual level narratives. Within the community, 12 participants took part in a mixed stakeholder FGD followed by 8 interviews, ensuring inclusion of youth, community elders, and other influential actors. The qualitative sampling strategy allowed the consultant to reach saturation, meaning that data collection continued until no new themes or insights were emerging.

Institutional stakeholders represented a smaller but critical group, including government offices, education institutions, private sector actors, YOVENCO and ISF. Given their limited number and strategic importance, the evaluation used purposive selection, conducting 10 KIIs to ensure adequate coverage of institutional roles, collaboration mechanisms, and system level outcomes.

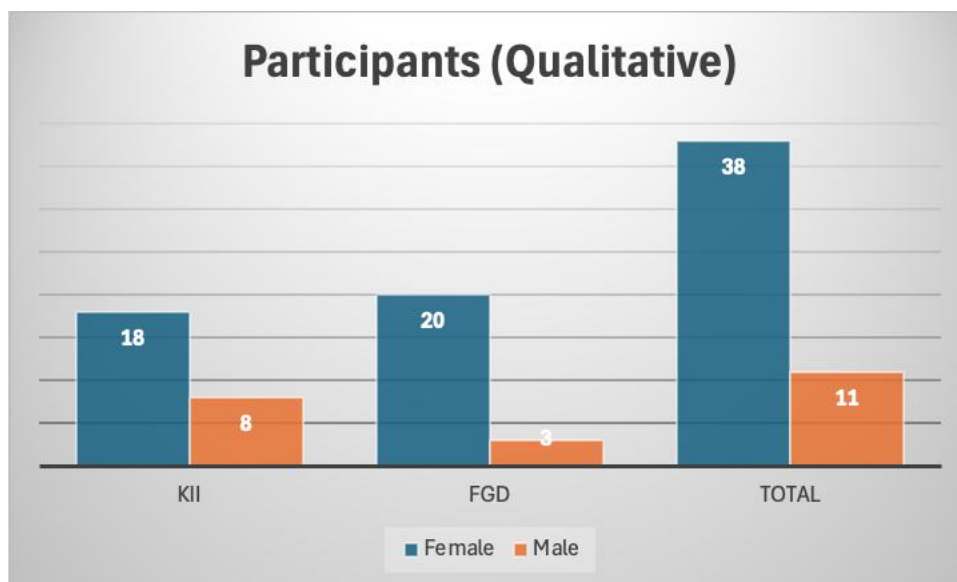


Chart 1: Participants

Across all categories, the sampling ensured representation from different cooperatives, geographic areas, age groups, and socio-economic backgrounds. Special attention was given to including young women and vulnerable households who are often underrepresented. This comprehensive approach produced a balanced dataset capable of reflecting the complexity of the project environment and supporting credible, inclusive evaluation findings.

2.6 Triangulation and Validation Methods

The evaluation applied multiple layers of triangulation to enhance credibility, accuracy, and depth. Method triangulation combined key informant interviews, focus group discussions, participatory observation, and quantitative surveys collected by ISF and YOVENCO. This mix captured both measurable results and the experiences behind them.

Source triangulation compared perspectives across diverse stakeholder groups. Insights from women cooperative members were examined alongside views of community leaders, youth, private sector actors, TVET instructors, local authorities, and YOVENCO staff. Analyzing convergences and divergences across these groups provided a balanced understanding of how project interventions were implemented and perceived.

Data triangulation cross-checked qualitative findings with quantitative datasets and monitoring records. For example, feedback on income changes, skills application, or cooperative governance was verified against production volumes, savings balances, and survey responses on empowerment and gender attitudes. This strengthened reliability by ensuring no finding relied on a single data source.

Evaluator triangulation involved structured interpretation sessions with ISF and YOVENCO to discuss preliminary themes, clarify context-specific issues, and correct potential misinterpretations.

A stakeholder validation workshop further ensured accuracy and relevance. Representatives from cooperatives, community groups, implementing partners, and institutional actors reviewed preliminary findings, validated interpretations, and added nuance.

These triangulation and validation processes collectively ensured that findings were credible, comprehensive, and aligned with the realities of the project environment, reflecting both quantitative evidence and the lived experiences of beneficiaries and stakeholders.

2.7 Data Analysis Approach

The evaluation applied a structured and rigorous approach that integrated qualitative and quantitative evidence to provide a comprehensive understanding of project performance.

Qualitative Analysis

All qualitative data from key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory observations were recorded, transcribed, and systematically organized. The consultant used thematic coding guided by a predefined framework aligned with the evaluation questions, Theory of Change, and results matrix. This helped identify recurring patterns, explanatory mechanisms, and relationships across stakeholder groups.

Framework analysis was also applied to map findings against OECD DAC criteria and project outcomes. Narrative synthesis techniques were used to construct coherent stories of change, illustrating how women applied new skills, how community norms evolved, and how institutions engaged with the project. Special attention was given to the experiences of women, youth, marginalized groups, and individuals with limited literacy or mobility to ensure inclusion dimensions were fully represented.

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative datasets from ISF and YOVENCO were cleaned, verified, and analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize trends in key indicators such as income, fish volumes sold, savings balances, employment outcomes, and skills application. Comparative analysis examined variations across cooperatives and cross tabulations explored relationships between gender attitudes and economic participation.

Integrated Analysis

Findings from both qualitative and quantitative streams were merged through triangulation matrices, joint interpretation sessions, and in synthesis manner. Quantitative data provided evidence of change, while qualitative insights explained the

underlying reasons, motivations, and contextual factors. This integrated approach produced conclusions that were both evidence-based and contextually grounded, enhancing the validity, depth, and practical relevance of the evaluation findings.

2.8 Ethical Considerations and Consent Procedures

The evaluation adhered to strong ethical standards to ensure that all participants were treated with dignity, respect, and fairness throughout the data collection process. Ethical considerations were integrated into every stage of the evaluation, beginning with participant recruitment and extending through data handling, analysis, and reporting. To maintain ethical procedures, the following were implemented.

- Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to decline or withdraw at any time.
- Verbal consent was obtained before starting interviews or discussions.
- No names or identifying details appear in any report, dataset, or transcript.
- Qualitative data was securely stored and accessed only by the consultant.
- Gender sensitivity was maintained, ensuring respectful engagement with women participants and ensuring privacy during discussions.

2.9 Gender, Equity, and Inclusion Approach

Gender, equity, and inclusion were central to the evaluation design and analysis. The evaluation went beyond sampling women to examine differences in outcomes. Where possible, the experiences of marginalized individuals, including people with disabilities or limited mobility, were considered.

Qualitative tools were designed to create safe spaces for women to speak freely about barriers such as workplace safety, household negotiations, and exposure to harassment. Analysis explored gender power dynamics, roles within cooperatives, and community perceptions of women's economic participation.

This approach enabled the evaluation to assess equity outcomes, highlight structural factors affecting women's empowerment, and capture diverse perspectives. It also strengthened the understanding of how interventions influenced social norms, decision-making power, and resilience across different groups. By centering inclusion, the evaluation ensured that the voices of those often underrepresented were incorporated into findings and recommendations.

2.10 Risk Management

A risk management plan guided the evaluation to safeguard data quality, continuity, and adaptability. Key risks included data quality issues, contextual disruptions, and potential shocks such as localized insecurity or health restrictions. To address these, datasets

from ISF and YOVENCO were verified, inconsistencies cross-checked, and indicator definitions confirmed before analysis. Qualitative tools were field-tested for clarity and cultural appropriateness.

Contextual risks such as community events, political tensions, or restricted access were mitigated through coordination with YOVENCO field teams and local authorities. Flexible scheduling allowed the consultant to adjust data collection without compromising representation. Contingency measures were in place to respond to unexpected disruptions, including shifting to telephone interviews, reducing group sizes, relocating sessions to open-air venues, or spreading interviews over multiple time slots. This approach ensured that the evaluation remained methodologically rigorous while adapting to unforeseen circumstances, protecting both the quality and integrity of the data collected.

2.11 Quality Assurance Measures

Quality assurance was built into all stages of the evaluation. Tools were pre-tested and piloted to ensure clarity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness. Data cleaning involved cross-checking entries, resolving inconsistencies, and confirming alignment with indicator definitions. These measures ensured that both qualitative and quantitative datasets were reliable and valid. Regular review and feedback loops strengthened adherence to the evaluation plan, maintaining the credibility and robustness of findings.

2.12 Limitations and Mitigation Measures

While the evaluation was designed and implemented with methodological rigor, several limitations influenced the process and were carefully managed to uphold the quality and credibility of the findings.

One of the primary limitations was the division of data collection responsibilities, with ISF and YOVENCO responsible for all quantitative data while the consultant focused solely on qualitative methods. Although this arrangement ensured efficient fieldwork, it limited the consultant's ability to directly control survey administration and data quality assurance. To mitigate this, the consultant worked closely with ISF and YOVENCO to review sampling plans, clarify indicator definitions, and verify the consistency of datasets before integrating them into the analysis.

A second limitation involved time constraints for qualitative fieldwork, which required focused scheduling across cooperatives, communities, and institutional stakeholders. To address this, qualitative sampling was carefully prioritized to ensure that all key voices were represented within the available timeframe. Close coordination with local authorities, cooperative leaders, and YOVENCO field staff helped facilitate timely access to participants and minimize delays.

There was also a potential risk of social desirability bias, especially among women beneficiaries and institutional leaders who may have wished to present the project in a positive light. This was mitigated by conducting FGDs and KIIs in neutral and private settings, reassuring participants of confidentiality, and using probing techniques to encourage honest reflection. Triangulation of responses across groups further reduced the risk of bias.

Another limitation was the sensitivity of topics related to gender roles, household decision making, and gender based violence. Participants sometimes expressed caution when discussing these issues, particularly in group settings. To mitigate this, the use of gender sensitive questioning, allowed flexible pacing of discussions, The evaluation also used individual interviews in cases where participants felt more comfortable speaking privately, creating a safer and more supportive environment for sharing sensitive information.

Finally, logistical challenges such as limited availability of some institutional stakeholders and competing commitments within cooperatives sometimes affected scheduling. This was managed through early engagement, flexible planning, and follow up communication to secure participation.

Despite these limitations, the evaluation applied consistent mitigation measures and rigorous triangulation techniques to ensure that findings remained credible, balanced, and reflective of the project's outcomes and context.

3 Project Overview

3.1 Project Goal, Objectives, and Expected Results

The project “**Promoting Inclusive Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Fisheries Sector in Berbera, Somaliland**” was implemented by the Youth Volunteers for Community Development (YOVENCO) with technical and financial support from the International Solidarity Foundation (ISF). The project aimed to strengthen women’s livelihoods and enhance their economic resilience by enabling their active and meaningful participation in the fisheries value chain, a sector that had long been dominated by men and characterized by limited female involvement beyond low-value activities such as fish cleaning and retailing. Recognizing that women faced multiple barriers, including restricted access to productive assets, inadequate technical skills, social norms limiting their mobility, and exclusion from decision-making, the project sought to address both economic and social dimensions of empowerment.

By equipping women with relevant vocational, entrepreneurial, and organizational skills, the project aspired to create pathways for them to improve productivity, access better markets, and increase income stability. The intervention also aimed to shift underlying gender dynamics by promoting women’s visibility, participation, and leadership within cooperatives and community structures. This integrated approach positioned women not just as beneficiaries but as active economic actors contributing to household welfare and community development.

The overall goal of the project was therefore to ensure that women’s livelihood resilience is strengthened through improved access to skills, income, and decision-making opportunities. Achieving this goal meant enabling women to participate confidently in the fisheries sector, exercise greater control over resources and earnings, and make informed decisions that enhance both individual and collective well-being. In doing so, the project aimed to build a foundation for sustained economic independence and social empowerment, contributing to gender equality and poverty reduction in Berbera. The project’s specific objectives were to;

- Strengthen women’s capacity to engage effectively in fisheries-related enterprises and cooperatives.
- Increase women’s access to productive assets, markets, and financial services.
- Foster community and institutional support for women’s economic participation and gender equality, including prevention of gender-based violence.
- Enhance YOVENCO’s institutional capacity to implement strategic programming aligned with ISF’s women’s economic empowerment objectives.

Expected Results of the Project

The project was designed to achieve several interrelated results that collectively contributed to women's economic empowerment and institutional strengthening.

- Women entrepreneurs and cooperative members are equipped with essential technical and business skills. Through structured training in fish processing, food hygiene, business management, record keeping, and entrepreneurship, women to gain practical capabilities that would enable them to operate more efficiently, maintain product quality, and engage competitively in the fisheries market.
- Income generation and savings among targeted women is increased. Through improved skills and access to tools, equipment and market opportunities, women's capability and productivity is enhanced, have diversified income sources, and have strengthened their household economic position. Cooperative savings and internal lending mechanisms also established with the aim to promote financial stability and self-reliance.
- Market linkages between cooperatives, private sector actors, and buyers are strengthened. Partnerships with entities such as Fish processors and local traders create reliable channels for women to sell their products, negotiate better prices, and access consistent demand. These linkages were to promote compliance with quality and hygiene standards required by buyers.
- Community and institutional support for women's rights and participation improved. Through community dialogues, advocacy campaigns, and engagement with local authorities and religious leaders, the project aimed to foster positive shifts in attitudes toward women's work and leadership in the fisheries sector. These efforts were planned to contribute to reducing stigma, improving social acceptance, and promoting collective responsibility for addressing gender-based violence.
- YOVENCO's organizational performance and strategic direction enhanced. The project additionally planned to support the development of YOVENCO's strategic plan and improve its internal systems for project management, monitoring, and learning. This institutional strengthening meant to position YOVENCO to continue implementing gender-responsive and community-driven initiatives beyond the project's lifespan.

Together, these expected results were designed to contribute to a broader transformation in both women's economic participation and community perceptions, laying the groundwork for sustainable empowerment and institutional capacity in the fisheries sector of Berbera.

3.2 Theory of Change and Logical Framework

The project's Theory of Change is grounded in the understanding that economic empowerment serves as a foundation for social empowerment. When women gain access to productive skills, financial resources, and market opportunities, they are better positioned to increase their income, achieve economic independence, and exercise greater control over their livelihoods. As women's economic positions strengthen, their confidence, decision-making power within households, and influence in community structures naturally expand, contributing to broader gender equality and social transformation.

At its core, the project assumes that empowering women economically not only improves individual welfare but also generates ripple effects across families, cooperatives, and communities. By enabling women to participate actively and visibly in the fisheries sector, a domain historically dominated by men, the project challenges traditional gender roles and contributes to a gradual shift in social norms.

To reinforce these behavioral and institutional shifts, the project integrates training, awareness raising, and policy engagement. It works with cooperatives, private sector actors, and local authorities to build inclusive systems that recognize and value women's economic contributions. These partnerships are considered critical to ensuring ownership, scaling up successful practices, and sustaining results beyond the project's implementation period. This change pathway is operationalized through three interconnected outcomes as detailed below.

1. Improved Economic Returns

Women beneficiaries apply newly acquired vocational and business skills to generate income through fisheries-related enterprises and cooperative activities.

2. Community and Institutional Support for Gender Equality

Duty bearers, employers, and community members adopt more supportive attitudes toward women's economic participation and take active roles in preventing gender-based violence.

3. Enhanced Institutional Capacity

YOVENCO continues to strengthen its organizational systems, strategic management, and program delivery to ensure consistent, gender-responsive, and sustainable results. Through this framework, the project links individual empowerment with institutional change and social transformation, ensuring that women's economic advancement contributes to lasting community development.

3.3 Implementation Strategy

The project is implemented in two distinct phases designed to ensure both strong groundwork and effective execution of interventions.

Planning Phase (September to December 2023)

During this initial phase, the project team focused on laying the foundation for implementation. Key preparatory activities included stakeholder consultations, mapping of women's cooperatives, and a detailed fisheries value chain assessment to identify opportunities and constraints within the sector. The phase also covered needs assessment, the development of the final project proposal, formulation of implementation tools, and validation of the project's Theory of Change. In addition, YOVENCO recruited essential project staff, formalized partnerships with TVET institutions, and initiated baseline data collection to establish benchmarks for later measurement. This planning phase ensured that the implementation period would be grounded in evidence, partnership consensus, and contextual understanding.

Implementation Phase (January 2024 to December 2025)

The second phase of the project focuses on the **full operationalization of activities**, translating the planning phase groundwork into tangible results. A central component of implementation was **capacity building**, through which women receive hands-on training in fish processing, hygiene, business management, and record-keeping. These trainings were designed to enhance technical competence, improve production standards, and promote professionalism among women entrepreneurs, enabling them to manage their cooperatives and enterprises more effectively.

Another key intervention involves the creation and strengthening of **market linkages**. The project planned to facilitate direct partnerships between women's cooperatives and private sector actors, most notably the **Somtuna Fish Factory**, to secure reliable markets for women's products and ensure consistent quality standards. These linkages not only improve women's access to buyers but also enhance their understanding of market requirements, value addition, and customer expectations.

The project also prioritized **access to appropriate technology** by supporting women in acquiring and effectively utilizing fish processing tools and technologies. This intervention aimed to increase production efficiency, reduce post-harvest losses, and improve product quality, allowing women to compete more effectively in both local and regional markets.

Equally important components are the social change and awareness components, which address cultural and attitudinal barriers to women's participation in economic life. Through community dialogues, advocacy campaigns, and collaboration with male champions and local leaders, the project envisioned to promote gender equality, reduce tolerance for gender-based violence, and foster community acceptance of women's economic roles in the fisheries sector.

At the institutional level, the project invested in **strengthening YOVENCO's capacity** by enhancing its internal systems, strategic planning, and program delivery mechanisms. These efforts intended to ensure organizational sustainability, improve management efficiency, and enable replication of successful approaches in future programming.

Throughout implementation, the project followed a **participatory and partnership-based approach** that emphasized collaboration with local authorities, community structures, private sector actors, and training institutions. This inclusive strategy meant to ensure strong local ownership, alignment with community priorities, and long-term sustainability of outcomes. Furthermore, regular feedback loops and joint review sessions were integrated into project management to facilitate adaptive learning, enabling continuous improvement and responsiveness to emerging challenges and opportunities.

3.4 Target Groups and Coverage

The project primarily targeted women engaged in the fisheries sector in Berbera District, Somaliland, where women's participation in the value chain has historically been limited to low-income and informal roles. The beneficiaries included both young and adult women involved in fish processing, trading, and other small-scale enterprises related to fisheries. By focusing on this group, the project sought to enhance women's technical capacity, economic opportunities, and leadership within their cooperatives, while promoting inclusive growth across the local fisheries sector.

The project's direct beneficiaries comprise approximately 850 women who were to receive trainings, equipment, tools, and continuous technical and organizational support. These women are the primary agents of change, applying new vocational, business, and hygiene skills to improve productivity, increase their income, and strengthen cooperative performance.

The indirect beneficiaries encompass an estimated 4,095 community members, including the families of cooperative members, male counterparts, and other local actors who benefit from improved household incomes, greater gender awareness, and broader community engagement in women's economic activities. Shifts in attitudes and behaviors within this wider community are essential for sustaining the social and economic gains to be achieved through the project.

In addition, several institutional stakeholders were to play a critical role in supporting project implementation and sustainability. These include local government authorities who provide oversight and policy alignment, TVET institutions that deliver vocational and business skills training, private sector partners such as Somtuna Fish Factory, which were to create market linkages and to ensure product quality standards; and traditional and religious leaders, who are to promote community acceptance of women's participation and advocate against gender-based discrimination and violence.

Through this multi-tiered targeting approach, the project built a comprehensive ecosystem of change that integrates individual empowerment, cooperative development, and institutional collaboration, aimed to lay the groundwork for long-term economic resilience and social transformation in Berbera's fisheries sector.

3.5 Institutional Arrangements and Partnerships

The project was implemented through a collaborative framework between ISF and YOVENCO, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities:

- ISF acted as the funding and technical partner, providing strategic oversight, quality assurance, and alignment with programmatic objectives.
- YOVENCO served as the implementing partner, managing field operations, stakeholder engagement, training delivery, and local monitoring.
- Local Authorities provided policy guidance, community mobilization, and support for cooperative operations.
- Private Sector Partners, particularly Somtuna Fish Factory, facilitated market access, provided quality control insights, and offered opportunities for practical engagement.
- TVET Institutions delivered technical and vocational training to enhance women's employability and business management skills.
- Community and Religious Leaders were engaged to promote social acceptance, advocate against gender-based violence, and foster behavioral change.

This multi-stakeholder approach ensured coherence between economic empowerment interventions and broader community-level gender transformation.

3.6 Budget and Resource Allocation Summary

The total approved budget for the project was \$305,422 covering the planning phase (September - December 2023) and the implementation phase (January 2024 - December 2025). The main budget categories included personnel, investments and procurements, operational and maintenance costs, and project activities, with smaller allocations for planning and monitoring. Roughly, funds were distributed with approximately 30% allocated to personnel, 58% to project activities, 7% to operations, and 3% to investments and procurement, and 2% for planning, monitoring and evaluations.

The project utilized a combination of human, technical, and material resources. Key personnel included an a Program Manager, Project Officer, Finance Officer and a driver. The project was also supported by the senior management of YOVENCO without pay including the executive Director and board members who supported with both technical and managerial inputs. Technical and material resources included training

facilities at the YOVENCO TVET center, tools and equipment for fish processing and value addition, vehicles to support market access, and digital tools for marketing and financial linkages. Project activities were supported by workshops, field assessments, cooperative formation exercises, and community engagement events. Responsibilities were shared across the project team, local partners, and community stakeholders.

The allocation of budget and human resources was intended to ensure balanced support across the planning, capacity building, cooperative development, and gender-based violence awareness phases, facilitating effective delivery of project objectives without prioritizing one area over another.

The project was implemented in two main phases which are a planning phase from September to December 2023, and an implementation phase from January 2024 to December 2025. The planning phase, supported by a total budget of \$42,020, focused on assessments, analyses, and preparatory activities to guide subsequent interventions. Funds were primarily allocated across personnel, operational and maintenance costs, investments, and preparatory project activities. Key human resources included an Executive Director (25% allocation), a Fundraising Technical Advisor (50%), a Project Manager (100%), and a Finance Officer (50%), who together supported baseline studies, market and value-chain assessments, problem and objective mapping with beneficiaries, and induction of new partners.

During the first year of implementation in 2024, the project focused on strengthening women's technical capacities, market access, and leadership skills, while promoting gender-based violence awareness and safe workplaces. The 2024 budget of \$135,152 covered personnel, operational and maintenance costs, procurement of tools and equipment, and direct project activities. Human resources continued to support training, business development, community engagement, and advocacy efforts, with dedicated resources for field facilitation, monitoring, and workshops. Investments in technical equipment and materials supported the delivery of skills development and economic empowerment activities across targeted locations.

In 2025, the project built on prior achievements to consolidate skills, promote employment and entrepreneurship, form women cooperative, conduct TVET skills training, and further strengthen GBV prevention and cooperative governance. The allocated budget of \$128,250 supported personnel, operations, activities, and monitoring efforts. Human and technical resources were deployed to provide advanced training, digital marketing support, financial linkages, and policy guidance for cooperatives, while community-level interventions reinforced safe and enabling environments for women. Across both implementation years, the allocation of budget and human resources was structured to ensure balanced support for technical, economic, and social objectives, maintaining alignment between planned activities and resource deployment.

4. Evaluation Findings and Analysis

4.1 Findings by OECD-DAC Criteria

Relevance

The project demonstrates a high degree of relevance when assessed against national development priorities, organisational strategies, and the lived experiences of the targeted women. According to KIIs, Somaliland's economic agenda identifies the fisheries sector as a priority area for job creation and local economic growth, particularly in coastal regions such as Berbera. This alignment was confirmed during government interviews, where officials emphasised that strengthening women's roles in fisheries directly contributes to national goals on employment and local value addition.

The project is also strongly aligned with ISF's organisational strategy, which places emphasis on women's economic empowerment, violence reduction, and access to dignified and safe livelihoods. ISF staff highlighted that the project's integrated approach, combining market infrastructure, capacity-building, and social norm change, was designed to reflect a practical pathway toward empowerment within the local context. The project is also aligned with Somaliland's Gender Policy, which encourages increased participation of women in economic life, and with the national fisheries development frameworks that prioritise improved processing capacity, safer market systems, and strengthened value chains. It is also consistent with ISF's strategic objectives of advancing gender equality, promoting livelihoods, and supporting community led development.

Under the global frameworks, The intervention directly contributes to global development agendas such as SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, particularly through its focus on women's access to skills, income, and safe working environments.

The project also demonstrates strong relevance to global development frameworks, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By expanding women's access to dignified livelihoods, strengthening their economic participation, and improving workplace safety, the project contributes directly to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Its work on reducing violence and improving reporting pathways also aligns with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). In addition, the focus on improved infrastructure, energy use, and food safety links to SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) through better local value addition in the fisheries sector. These contributions reflect broader commitments under global frameworks such as the UN Women's Empowerment Principles and the FAO's Blue Transformation agenda, which emphasise inclusive economic growth and

sustainable fisheries. Overall, the project's design and outcomes align well with international priorities promoting gender equality, economic resilience, and safe, sustainable livelihoods.

Relevance is further demonstrated by the degree to which the project responds to the actual needs expressed by women themselves. Several of the women were already engaged in small scale and informal fish trading before the project began, often selling from their homes or in unregulated roadside spaces. The project helped formalise and upscale their work by providing an organised market, proper equipment, safer working conditions, and structured support that significantly strengthened their position in the fisheries value chain.

Across FGDs, participants described limited employment opportunities, lack of tools, and restricted mobility as the main obstacles to earning a stable income. One woman said *“before this support, we were only surviving; we had no stable way to earn and no skills to depend on”*. Another noted that the absence of proper equipment and workspaces made daily work unpredictable and financially insecure.

Safety concerns and exposure to violence were also central to the lived experiences of the beneficiaries. Participants frequently stated that violence and intimidation shaped their daily lives. One woman explained and told *“violence was part of our lives, we had no place to report and no one listened”*. These perspectives underline the relevance of linking economic empowerment with VAWG prevention and improved reporting pathways.

The project's design addressed these priority needs through operationalising fish market, providing modern processing equipment, offering vocational and business skills training, and supporting the establishment of a functional cooperative. Women repeatedly acknowledged the usefulness of these interventions. A vendor explained that after the training, *“we now know hygiene, how to process fish properly, and how to handle customers, this has changed everything for us”*. TVET graduates echoed this sentiment, with one stating *“the skills I gained opened doors that were closed before”*.

However, relevance was partially limited by design gaps that did not fully account for structural constraints within the fisheries value chain. Women highlighted limitations in upstream supply chains dominated by male boat owners, especially during low season. One cooperative member stated *“we cannot control the supply; if men do not bring the fish, we cannot work”*. Another important factor affecting women's access to fish is the behaviour of male suppliers during periods when supply becomes tight. While fish availability is influenced by migration patterns and seasonal fluctuations, women explained that competition intensifies during low season and that male boat owners often prefer to sell to male vendors whom they already know or have established trust with. This preference is not always framed as exclusion but reflects a long standing business tradition among men that disadvantages new entrants, especially women. As a result, limited supply is not only a natural phenomenon but also a socially driven

constraint that restricts women's ability to compete fairly in the upstream part of the value chain.

Energy limitations and insufficient cold storage capacity also emerged as major barriers, with several participants mentioning that lack of access to central cold storages has limited their capacity to bulk purchase and store fish when it is abundant.

Participants further noted that unclear fisheries regulations and lack of policy awareness expose women to inconsistent pricing and unpredictable market conditions. These systemic issues were not fully anticipated in the project design but now represent significant threats to long term sustainability.

Effectiveness

The project demonstrated strong effectiveness across several domains, with clear progress toward the planned outputs and outcomes. Evidence from FGDs, KIIs, quantitative insights, and field observations consistently revealed that women experienced marked improvements in income generation, confidence, skill application, and participation in household and cooperative decision making. Many women described their transformation in powerful terms, with one participant noting *“before joining the market, I had no place to work and no way to support my children, but now I feel like I am standing on my own”*.

Quantitative data showed excellent uptake of processing and hygiene skills among market women, confirming that the technical trainings were both relevant and well delivered. As one vendor explained *“the training helped us understand how to handle fish properly; customers trust us more now because we follow the right processes”*. TVET graduates also reported strong application of their vocational skills in real work settings. Those who secured jobs in fisheries companies described the training as a doorway that changed our lives. However, effectiveness was more mixed among graduates who remained unemployed, largely due to limited job openings and structural constraints in the sector. Two graduates found work in unrelated fields, illustrating both adaptability and labour market limitations.

Economic practices also improved, although with notable caveats. The implementing partner reported that 83% of the women kept business records, but triangulation showed that these records were almost exclusively loan notes rather than comprehensive financial tracking. In FGDs and KIIs, women admitted that they only write down the loans, nothing else, highlighting a divergence between reported and actual behaviour. Observations confirmed that no systematic recording of income, expenses, stock, or profits was taking place.

Processing tools proved to be useful for women's work in the fish market and became very high relevant among market women. All 64 active vendors regularly used the

provided assets, including knives, scales, sealing machines, and coolers. Women emphasised that without these tools, the market would not function. One stated that the equipment made our work clean and fast; customers now prefer buying from us. However, this indicator is less consistent for TVET graduates since only 20 out of 35 found jobs in fisheries companies where such technologies could be used. The rest remain without access.

The project benefited significantly from the improved fish market infrastructure, strong community engagement, and high motivation among the women. Women repeatedly mentioned that the supportive environment created by hygiene services, constant water supply, security, and designated market spaces enabled them to work safely and with dignity. One woman shared and said *“the market is now our second home because it is clean, safe, and organised”*.

Despite these gains, several factors limited full effectiveness. Supply chains remain male dominated, creating unequal access to fish, especially during low season. A participant explained *“men control the boats, we cannot get fish unless they agree to sell to us”*. Energy shortages also affected the reliability of cold storage, causing occasional spoilage. Additionally, policy and regulatory gaps left women vulnerable to inconsistent pricing and unclear rules.

Efficiency

Project implementation progressed in a generally timely and organised manner, and the resources committed to the intervention were used in ways that maximised benefits for the targeted women. Key activities such as the operationalisation of the Berbera fish market, distribution of tools and equipment, and delivery of skills and TVET training were completed within the expected timeframes. Women consistently explained that timely access to knives, coolers, sealing machines, and workspaces allowed them to resume income activities without delay. As one woman said *“once the market opened we started working right away, nothing held us back because everything was ready for us”*.

The project was designed as a two year intervention but its activities were planned sequentially each year due to annualised funding arrangements of about 135,000 USD per year. This required careful phasing of activities. The TVET training component was therefore delivered in the second year, which left graduates with limited time to secure employment before the endline assessment. Several women expressed that if the training had started earlier they would have had more months to look for job opportunities in the fisheries sector. Despite this, 20 out of the 35 graduates have already secured employment in fisheries sector.

Financial and material resources were used in a manner that demonstrated strong value for money. The operationalised market now supports 64 women vendors out of the 65

targeted, reflecting a strong return on the infrastructure investment. The equipment provided increased workflow efficiency, reduced labour time, and supported better hygiene. Some of the women who were involved in fish business noted that before receiving these tools they often borrowed equipment or improvised with low quality alternatives. One vendor explained *“in our previous settings, we used to waste time running around looking for things to work with, but now every woman has what she needs to do her job properly”*.

The distribution of spending across the project period reflects a reasonable balance between personnel, activity delivery, operations, investment and procurement, and monitoring. Across the planning and implementation phases, total budget reached 305,422 USD. Activities represented the largest share at over 175,000 USD, followed by personnel costs at approximately 90,550 USD. Operational and maintenance costs amounted to 22,520 USD and were essential for running the project. This pattern indicates a strong focus on direct service delivery and beneficiary support, which is appropriate for a livelihood and market centred intervention.

Human resource coordination contributed to implementation efficiency. Trainers, cooperative leaders, YOVENCO staff, and district council departments worked in alignment with clear responsibilities. The district council played an important role by covering the costs of water, security, hygiene services, a dedicated market technician, and even the salary of a driver for the refrigerated vehicle. This level of government involvement reduced operational costs for women and contributed to smooth daily functioning.

Despite these strengths, there few inefficiencies identified by the evaluation. Monitoring weaknesses created inaccuracies in reported data on business record keeping and employment outcomes for TVET graduates. A number of indicators relied on self reported data from the implementing partner, which was not consistently verified. While quantitative records suggested improvements in business management, field observations, KIIs and FGDs confirmed that women only recorded loans and no other business information. This gap represents an efficiency concern because inaccurate data affects decision making, adaptive management, and resource allocation.

Infrastructure challenges also constrained operational efficiency. Unreliable solar power affected cold storage, resulting in spoilage. Refrigeration capacity was also limited at the sales counters. The small fridges supplied by the project were designed as temporary holding units rather than long term storage, based on the assumption that the larger market freezer would remain functional. When energy reliability declined, both systems became insufficient. These operational shortcomings reduced the overall efficiency of the market and limited the income potential of the vendors.

Value for Money

The budget structure reflects a generally strong value for money profile, with most resources channelled toward activities that directly benefit women in the fisheries

sector. Across the full project period, approximately 58% of total spending went to activities, indicating that the design prioritised frontline delivery rather than administration. This aligns well with the project’s intention to operationalise a market, train women, and support livelihood creation. The distribution of funds also reflects a healthy balance between implementation and support functions. Personnel costs amounted to around 30% of the total budget, which is reasonable given the technical nature of the intervention and the level of coordination required between trainers, cooperative leaders, district officials, and project staff.

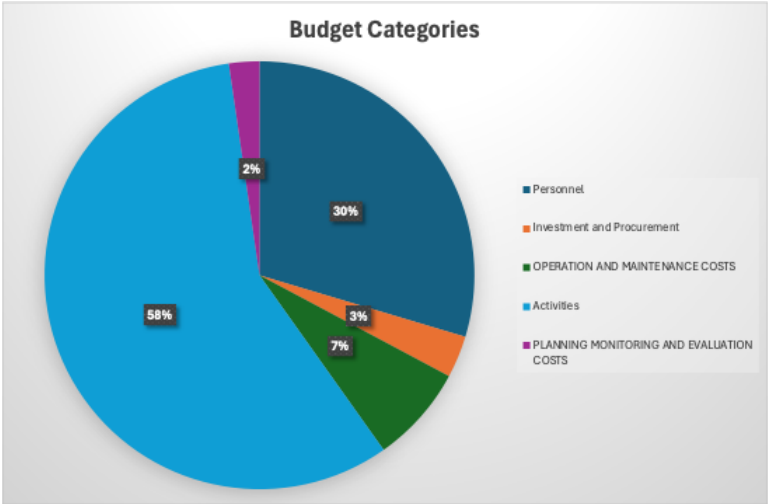


Chart 2: Budget Categories

Operation and maintenance costs represent about 7% of total budget, a modest proportion considering the nature of the project and its implementation. The relatively low spending on investment and procurement, which stands at roughly 3%, this is so because procurements were only made in the first year of the project.

Monitoring and evaluation costs remained low at 2%, which is typical for projects of this nature. However, the evaluation revealed gaps in data accuracy and follow up mechanisms, suggesting that slightly higher investment in monitoring tools, staff capacity, and verification processes could improve the credibility of reporting and inform better decision making.

The planning phase, although only four months long, used 22% of its small allocation on personnel and 58% on preparatory activities. This indicates that early groundwork was intensive but necessary to establish partnerships, prepare the market, and mobilise women.

Overall, the project demonstrates solid value for money. Spending was concentrated in areas that generated visible impact, overheads were kept low, and the financial structure supported the rapid operationalisation of services. The main opportunities for strengthening value for money in future cycles lie in improving monitoring quality and directing slightly more investment toward market infrastructure resilience.

Coherence

The project demonstrated a high level of internal coherence. Each component of the intervention reinforced the others in a way that created a unified and mutually supportive system of change. Operationalising the market, provision of fish storages and processing equipment, skills training, cooperative leadership development, and awareness work on violence against women and girls were not implemented as isolated activities. Instead, they interacted in a way that enhanced women's ability to utilise the market effectively and participate more meaningfully in economic life. The project operated within a supply chain structure shaped by boat owners, wholesalers, and cold storage providers, all of whom play a decisive role in access to fish. Wholesalers, who often also own cold storage units, typically provide pre investment funds to boat owners or fishermen to cover fuel and trip expenses. This arrangement obliges boat owners to deliver their catch to those wholesalers as repayment, creating a closed loop that limits women's ability to purchase fish directly at landing sites. Since these actors are predominantly men, the system reinforces gender based barriers and restricts women's access to upstream supply.

Women frequently emphasised that training alone would not have helped them without the physical improvements in the market, while the new equipment would have been difficult to use without the skills taught. As one market vendor explained "*the tools helped us work faster but the training is what taught us how to use them properly and keep our area clean and that is why customers come to us now*". This reflects strong internal alignment between material support and capacity building.

The consolidation of these interventions also contributed to increased confidence and participation among women. Cooperative strengthening, through elected leadership and regular meetings, complemented skill acquisition by giving women a platform to make decisions, organise operations, and address market level challenges collectively. A cooperative leader described this connection "*once we had the structure and we understood our roles it became easier to use everything the project provided because we could manage the market together*". This demonstrates how governance support amplified the effects of economic and technical interventions.

External coherence was also visible throughout the project. The collaboration with the Berbera local government was particularly important. The provision of daily hygiene services, water supply, security, maintenance personnel, and licensing support contributed directly to the functioning and safety of the market. Women consistently highlighted the value of this support, noting that the government being present every day made the market a safe place to work and increased customer trust. This alignment with government services represents an important aspect of external coherence and helped reduce operational risks for beneficiaries.

The project also complemented broader efforts by development partners working on women's economic empowerment, skills development, and violence prevention. Coordination with these actors helped ensure that activities were complementary and prevented duplication, as project staff engaged with partners to understand ongoing initiatives and align messaging and training content accordingly. The integrated VAWG messaging helped reinforce community level shifts already underway in other initiatives and contributed to positive changes in social norms. However, coherence with the fisheries sector at a policy and regulatory level was more limited. Participants repeatedly expressed uncertainty about fisheries rules and market regulations.

In addition, supply chain actors were engaged in the project, but challenges remain, particularly in ensuring that women receive a fair share of the fish at the landing site, especially during low seasons. While private boat owners and wholesalers participated to some extent, gaps in upstream coordination persisted, limiting the overall alignment between project activities and the broader fisheries value chain. As one beneficiary explained, *"We are working well in the market, but we do not fully understand the rules of the fishing sector, and sometimes the men who control the boats make decisions that affect all of us."*

Strengthening coherence with national fisheries policy, private sector operators in logistics and cold chain, and regulatory bodies would help ensure that women are integrated not only in market level activities but also in the broader system that shapes pricing, supply access, and long term sustainability. The project laid a strong foundation through its internal coherence and collaboration with local authorities. Expanding these linkages into sector wide coordination would further enhance resilience and secure women's position within the fisheries economy. While collaboration with district authorities was strong, coordination with private sector suppliers was limited, largely because women lacked bargaining power within the existing pre investment model. There is an opportunity to build structured partnerships with boat associations, cold storage owners, and wholesalers through facilitated dialogues, negotiated access agreements, and incentive based collaboration. Strengthening these relationships could open more stable supply channels for women and reduce the structural vulnerabilities identified during the evaluation.

Impact

The project generated clear and meaningful changes in the lives of women participating in the fisheries sector, with evidence showing improvements in economic wellbeing, social standing, confidence, and institutional capacity. The combination of market access, skills development, cooperative organisation, and community engagement produced multidimensional results that extended beyond income and into areas of personal dignity, agency, and community perception.

A notable impact is the significant increase in women's confidence and sense of self worth. Many participants described feeling more respected and more capable of providing for their families. One woman explained that she used to depend on her relatives for everything but now she supports her children herself and feels confident every day. These narratives reflect a shift from vulnerability to agency, driven by the ability to earn and manage income.

Women also reported stronger influence within their households. Qualitative data shows that women are participating more in decision making about expenses, education, and food purchases. Leadership is another major area of change. Women now hold visible positions in the cooperative and the Berbera market, which signals a move from economic participation to recognised social roles. One cooperative leader said that she never imagined she would be someone the community listens to, but now people come to her for guidance.

The project's influence on violence reduction is significant. While VAWG remains a major concern including verbal abuse, emotional intimidation, and restrictive behaviours, most of which take place in the home. Women consistently reported that the market is no longer a site where they feel unsafe, and incidents of harassment within the work environment have declined. The decline from 68% to roughly one third of employed women reporting violence in the past year shows a meaningful shift. Women described feeling more aware of their rights and more confident in seeking help. Community members and duty bearers also reported increased understanding of women's experiences. A beneficiary shared that she no longer feels intimidated when men try to discourage her from working at the landing site because the training taught her how to respond and defend her dignity.

At the institutional level, the project strengthened YOVENCO's capacity through the development of a clear strategic plan and improved staff understanding of roles and goals. Staff noted that they now operate with a shared vision, which improves coordination and long term planning. While the project has not yet resulted in formal policy changes, it has contributed to shifting community norms and increasing local authorities' awareness of women's roles in fisheries, laying the groundwork for potential future policy influence.

Attribution analysis indicates that these outcomes are closely linked to the project's integrated interventions. While other initiatives in the area may also support women's economic empowerment, the combination of market access, skills training, cooperative governance, and VAWG awareness specifically contributed to the observed changes in confidence, household influence, and leadership roles.

The project also had some unintended effects, both positive and challenging. Some women explained that their increased income has raised expectations within their households. Families now rely more heavily on women's earnings, which places additional pressure on them. Another unintended result is that stronger market activity has not yet resulted in improved control over the supply chain. Women continue to

depend on male boat owners and wholesalers, which limits their ability to secure consistent fish supply during low season and restricts their bargaining power.

Despite these challenges, the overall impact of the project is substantial. Women have become more resilient economically and socially. They navigate the market with greater confidence, contribute to household wellbeing, assume leadership roles, and exercise more control over their personal and economic lives. These changes are meaningful for the women themselves and also for the broader community, where perceptions of women's roles are slowly but visibly shifting.

Sustainability

The long term sustainability of the project shows promise, although several structural and operational risks must be addressed for women's gains to be fully preserved. Social sustainability appears to be one of the strongest areas. Women have developed confidence, solidarity, and mutual support mechanisms that extend beyond project activities. Many women described the cooperative as a source of strength. One participant stated that she now feels she belongs to a community that stands together, especially when challenges arise in the market. This sense of shared identity helps reinforce their continued participation in income activities and strengthens their resilience in the face of external shocks.

Community acceptance of women's economic roles has also increased, which contributes positively to sustainability. Local authorities, employers, and community leaders now view the presence of women in the market as normal and productive. The local government's ongoing provision of hygiene, security, transport, and water services shows a form of institutional commitment that supports the longevity of the market space. Duty bearers repeatedly expressed that women's participation has improved the overall functioning of the fish market, making them more inclined to invest in its continuity.

Economic sustainability is emerging but remains fragile. Women have improved skills in processing, hygiene, customer engagement, and in some cases digital marketing. They have also begun to accumulate savings, which marks an important shift toward financial resilience. However, most women still save only small amounts and rely on unstable supply chains. Women consistently highlighted the difficulty of accessing fish during low season and their dependence on male boat owners. One vendor explained that even when she has customers waiting, she cannot guarantee supply because she does not control the source. These challenges limit the growth potential of their businesses and restrict long term profitability.

Institutional sustainability is progressing. The cooperative has an elected management structure, regular meetings, and a clear role in coordinating market activities. YOVENCO also has an approved strategy, a stronger staff team, and clearer internal systems. These improvements form an important foundation for future programming and support continuity after the project ends.

However, operational risks remain. Financial literacy is still low and women do not yet keep comprehensive business records. As one participant admitted, the only thing women record is their loans because they are yet skilled on how to track sales or expenses. This lack of documentation reduces their ability to plan, scale their business, or qualify for financial products from banks or microfinance institutions.

Infrastructure weaknesses also present a major sustainability barrier. The limited cold storage capacity, unreliable power supply, and insufficient solar backup systems affect product quality and reduce sales during peak heat hours. Some of the women told that they lost fish stock when the cold storage failed to operate. This kind of loss threaten the long term viability of their livelihoods. Additionally, power sustainability considerations such as energy efficiency of cold storage systems, remain areas that need attention to ensure the project achievements does not undermine long-term outcomes.

To achieve sustainability beyond the project period, several measures will be essential. Strengthening women's financial management skills, securing partnerships for reliable energy and cold chain solutions, and improving upstream supply chain control will be vital. Expanding cooperation with private sector actors and aligning with fisheries policy reforms can provide long term structural support. Finally, fostering deeper community ownership and ensuring that local institutions integrate women's market roles into formal systems will help safeguard progress once external support ends.

Exit Plan

The project has planned several activities aimed at supporting a transition to local ownership, including engaging Berbera Municipality, the Regional Ministry of Fisheries Development, the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, YOVENCO, and the Tacab Cooperative. The exit plan outlines a participatory approach, the handover of assets, linkages to financial service providers, and ongoing mentorship arrangements, all of which reflect important foundations for sustainability.

However, while these efforts demonstrate intention and direction, the mechanisms described are not yet sufficiently developed to ensure an effective exit. Critical elements such as a detailed mapping of roles and responsibilities, costed financial commitments, and a clear post-project management structure are missing or only partially articulated.

Key risks have not been fully assessed, with the risk analysis postponed and not integrated into the current exit framework. Additionally, no formal agreements (e.g., MoUs) have been finalized to confirm institutional responsibilities for maintaining market infrastructure, supporting cooperative governance, or sustaining VAWG response mechanisms. As a result, although the project has created the groundwork for handover, the current exit and transition arrangements remain incomplete. Additional work is required to formalize responsibilities, secure financial flows, conduct a

structured risk assessment, and establish binding institutional commitments to ensure long-term sustainability of project results.

4.2 Thematic Analysis

Gender equality and social inclusion

The project contributed to a significant shift in how women engage in the fisheries sector, both economically and socially. Women who were previously positioned at the periphery of the value chain have now gained visibility, recognition, and a more established presence in a sector traditionally dominated by men. This shift was repeatedly highlighted across interviews and group discussions. Women described feeling a sense of legitimacy that they had not experienced before. As one beneficiary explained, she no longer feels ignored or dismissed when standing among male traders and customers in the market. She noted that people now approach her directly for fish because they trust the quality and consistency of her work.

Another participant explained that this recognition extends beyond Berbera. She described customers in Burco and Hargeisa who buy from her regularly through phone communication and social media. She emphasised that many of these customers have never met her in person but continue to purchase from her because they value and trust her professionalism. This illustrates not only economic agency but also the social credibility women are building through the use of technology and digital platforms.

The project's inclusiveness is also reflected in the diversity of the women who benefitted. Participants came from varied backgrounds, including single mothers, widows, young women, and older women who had previously relied on informal work or daily labour. Many of the women interviewed shared that before joining the project, they depended on relatives for basic needs. This dependence often carried emotional weight. One woman explained that asking relatives for money made her feel embarrassed and diminished. She described her current situation as a complete transformation, saying that she now provides for her children fully and feels a renewed sense of dignity in her role as a provider.

These narratives show that the project's contribution to social inclusion goes far beyond income generation. It touches on deeper issues of self worth, social standing, and the ability to contribute to household welfare. The restoration of dignity and reduction of social shame were recurring themes in the discussions, demonstrating that empowerment is not merely economic but also emotional and relational.

Despite these positive developments, gender inequalities remain deeply rooted in the broader fisheries value chain. Women continue to face exclusion from upstream supply chains, especially during periods of low harvest when competition for fish is intense. Several women described difficulties sourcing fish because male fishermen often

prioritised male traders or wholesalers. Some women also mentioned being subjected to discouraging comments or being pushed aside at landing sites. One participant explained that although she feels confident now, she must still prepare herself mentally every day to face possible hostility from men who believe that the fisheries sector is not a place for women.

These experiences illustrate that while progress has been made at the market and cooperative levels, structural inequalities and gendered power dynamics persist. Male dominance in supply chains, cultural beliefs about women's roles, and resistance from fishermen and certain private companies continue to limit women's full integration in the value chain.

Overall, the project has strengthened gender equality within the parts of the sector where it had direct influence, particularly at the market and cooperative levels. Women now have stronger voices, more visible roles, and greater confidence. However, the broader value chain still reflects entrenched gender barriers. Continued engagement with male actors, religious and traditional leaders, supply chain actors, and private companies will be essential to deepen and sustain progress in gender equality beyond the immediate project environment.

Capacity building and local institutional strengthening

The project delivered extensive capacity building for both women and institutions. Women now apply skills in processing, hygiene, customer service, and in some cases digital marketing. Many participants shared that training was the turning point that helped them operate professionally and meet hygiene standards. The transformation and the adoption of skills shows a strong willingness among women to learn and improve.

At the institutional level, YOVENCO strengthened its internal systems and developed a strategy that guides its programming. Staff reported greater clarity in their roles, and improved coordination with the local government enhanced service delivery at the fish market. The cooperative also grew stronger, with elected leadership, routine meetings, and structured decision making. Women appreciated having a governance body that listens to their concerns and mediates conflicts.

Despite these gains, further strengthening is needed in financial management, business planning, and record keeping. Women currently record only loans, and there is little understanding of profit margins, expenses, or pricing strategies. As one cooperative member explained, she never learned how to calculate daily profit and relies only on memory. This gap may affect long term growth and the ability to engage financial institutions.

Market linkages and private sector engagement

The project significantly improved women's integration into the local fish market. Access to equipment, refurbished space, and refrigerated transport enabled more consistent and higher quality production. Women also began using digital platforms to market their products, attracting customers from cities such as Burco and Hargeisa. One beneficiary shared an account of a customer who started buying six kilograms a week and later increased to sixty, demonstrating real market expansion driven by trust and quality.

Private sector engagement was somewhat successful but still uneven. Companies like Somtuna collaborated with TVET graduates, and some women secured employment as a result. However, access to supply chains remained limited. Women expressed that fishermen and boat owners often prioritised male traders or wholesalers. Some also described discriminatory remarks from men who questioned their claim in the sector. These experiences show that while market linkages have improved, systemic gender barriers continue to restrict deeper integration with private sector networks.

Environmental and social considerations

Limited refrigeration, insufficient solar power, and cooling failure led to fish spoilage, especially in summer and hot climate months and affected women's operational efficiency. The lack of reliable cold storage undermines both income stability and food safety. Women highlighted the emotional and financial frustration of seeing fish spoil because power cuts interrupted cooling. This constraint limits the potential for scaling up operations and ensuring consistent product quality.

In terms of environmental considerations, the market demonstrates commendable hygiene standards and is well maintained, reflecting strong attention to sanitation and food-handling practices. However, there are currently no formal plans or systems in place for broader environmental safeguarding, particularly regarding waste management and disposal. This gap presents potential risks, as unmanaged waste can contribute to environmental pollution and undermine the overall sustainability of the market. Additionally, the absence of contingency measures for cold storage facilities increases the likelihood of spoilage, which not only results in financial loss for vendors but also contributes to unnecessary organic waste. Strengthening environmental management practices such as developing waste-handling protocols, introducing recycling or composting options, and ensuring proper maintenance and backup systems for cold storage would enhance the market's overall resilience and sustainability.

Socially, the reduction in violence against women created safer environments at home and work. Women feel more empowered to report abuse, and community members increasingly support their rights. However, traditional norms continue to influence behaviour. Religious and traditional leaders showed the slowest progress in adopting messages about gender equality, reflecting the deep rooted nature of social norms.

Cross cutting issues

Innovation emerged naturally as women adopted new technologies, used digital marketing, and explored fish drying as an alternative to refrigeration. These innovations demonstrate adaptability and resilience, particularly in a sector marked by supply fluctuations and environmental challenges.

Partnerships with local government strengthened market services, while collaboration with TVET institutions supported skills development. These relationships provided stability and continuity, although more robust engagement with private companies is still needed for long term success.

Women also displayed strong resilience throughout the project. Despite supply shortages, male resistance, and infrastructure limitations, they continued to operate their businesses and support their families. The sense of dignity and empowerment expressed in their testimonies shows that the project fostered resilience not only economically but emotionally and socially as well.

Support of the District Administration

The role of the Berbera District Council emerged as one of the strongest enabling factors in the project's success. The district authorities provided consistent, practical and unwavering support that significantly contributed to women's participation and productivity in the fish market. Their involvement addressed structural barriers that women would not have been able to overcome alone, especially those related to market operations, safety, service provision and regulatory facilitation.

Women repeatedly emphasised that the local government treated them with respect and solidarity, and many described this support as a foundation for their success. One woman stated "*the government sees us as part of the city's future now*", which illustrates the symbolic importance of this partnership beyond the service delivery functions.

The district council ensured that the fish market operated in a clean, safe and functional manner. They provided daily hygiene and sanitation services which included waste collection, market cleaning and the availability of water. This greatly reduced the burden on women and improved compliance with food safety expectations. Women explained that they would struggle to maintain hygiene if they were required to manage it alone because the costs and labour requirements would be too high.

Security services were also provided at no cost to the women. The district council ensured that the market had round the clock security personnel, giving women the confidence to start work early and remain in the market until late in the day. Several beneficiaries shared that they used to avoid staying late in other markets due to safety concerns, but the current arrangement allows them to work more productively and expand their customer base.

The district administration covered the costs of electricity required to run the market infrastructure. Although energy shortages remain a challenge due to the limitations of the solar system, the district council continued to shoulder power related expenses, easing the financial strain on the cooperative. Women reported that maintaining cold storage and lighting would be nearly impossible without this support.

A significant contribution from the district administration was the management and maintenance of the refrigerated truck procured for the women. The council assigned and paid the salary of a full time driver to support the women with transportation of fish. This decision ensured that the truck remained functional and safe to operate, and it allowed women to transport the fish from the landing site to the market fresh and in a safe manner.

Unlike other markets in Berbera, the district council decided not to impose taxes or fees on the women using the fish market. Women do not pay for market entrances, licensing, cleaning or space rental. The council covers all these costs, including administrative and operational expenses. This policy decision eased financial pressure on women entrepreneurs and made the fish market one of the most accessible and inclusive income generating spaces in the district.

The council also created additional job opportunities within the market, most of which were filled by women. These positions included cleaning, sanitation monitoring and support services which helped make the market more gender friendly and operationally efficient.

Throughout KIIs and FGDs, women expressed deep appreciation for the council's support. Many stated that they felt valued and protected, which is a significant shift in a sector where women often face marginalisation and disrespect from male dominated networks. Cooperative leaders also noted that the district administration remained responsive to their concerns, often intervening to resolve operational problems.

Overall, the support of the Berbera District Council played a decisive role in enabling women's entry, retention and growth in the fisheries sector. The council's investment in hygiene, security, logistics, energy, and fee waivers removed major barriers that could have undermined the project's intended impact. Without this level of commitment from the district administration, many of the gains in women's economic empowerment, market functionality and community acceptance would not have been possible.

4.3 Quantitative and Qualitative Results

Summary of Quantitative Findings

The quantitative dataset provided by ISF and YOVENCO shows strong improvements across most indicators related to women’s economic empowerment, skill application, income generation, attitudes toward violence, and institutional capacity. The clearest advancements appear in skills use, access to assets, savings behaviour, community attitudes, and the reduction of violence experienced by employed women.

A comparison of the baseline and endline data shows a clear upward shift in the volume of fish sold by women, indicating improved productivity and stronger market performance over time. At baseline, the largest proportion of women (22 out of 50) were concentrated in the mid-level category of 5,000–13,000 kg, while only 10 women sold 25,000–35,000 kg and 7 sold 14,000–24,000 kg. By the endline, this pattern had changed significantly, with more women moving into higher-volume sales categories. The number of women selling 25,000–35,000 kg increased from 10 to 12, and those selling 14,000–24,000 kg rose sharply from 7 to 13, nearly doubling. Meanwhile, the mid-range category of 5,000–13,000 kg declined from 22 to 13, suggesting substantial upward mobility as women transitioned into higher sales brackets. The lowest category (30–5,000 kg) remained relatively stable, shifting only slightly from 11 to 12 women. Overall, the comparison demonstrates a positive trend including fewer women are selling at lower volumes, and more are achieving higher sales levels, reflecting enhanced capacity, improved business performance, and potentially better access to resources and markets.

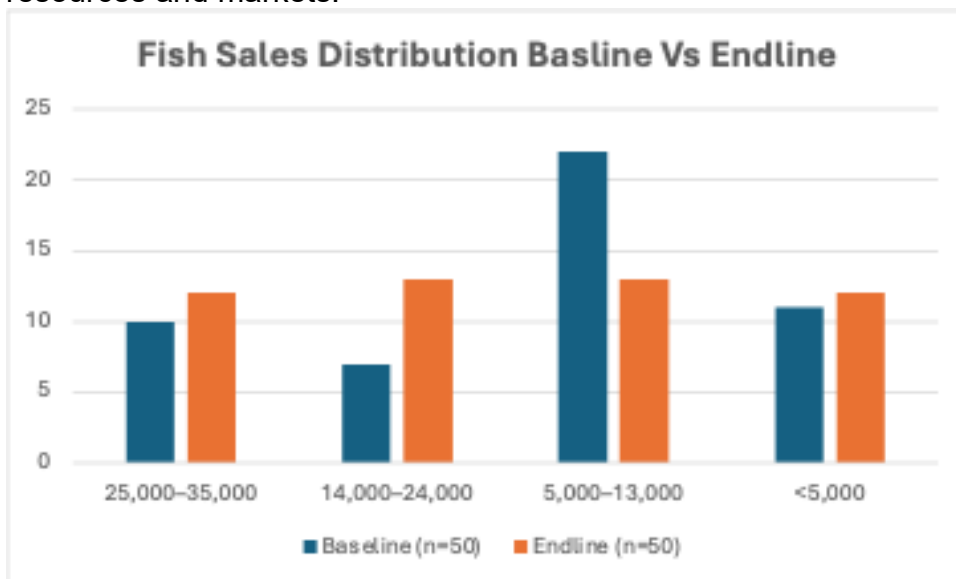


Chart 3: Fish Sales Distribution

Skill application indicators improved sharply from zero at baseline to 84% at endline. This includes business skills and fish processing skills that meet national hygiene standards. These high figures reflect the wide reach and high practicality of the trainings delivered.

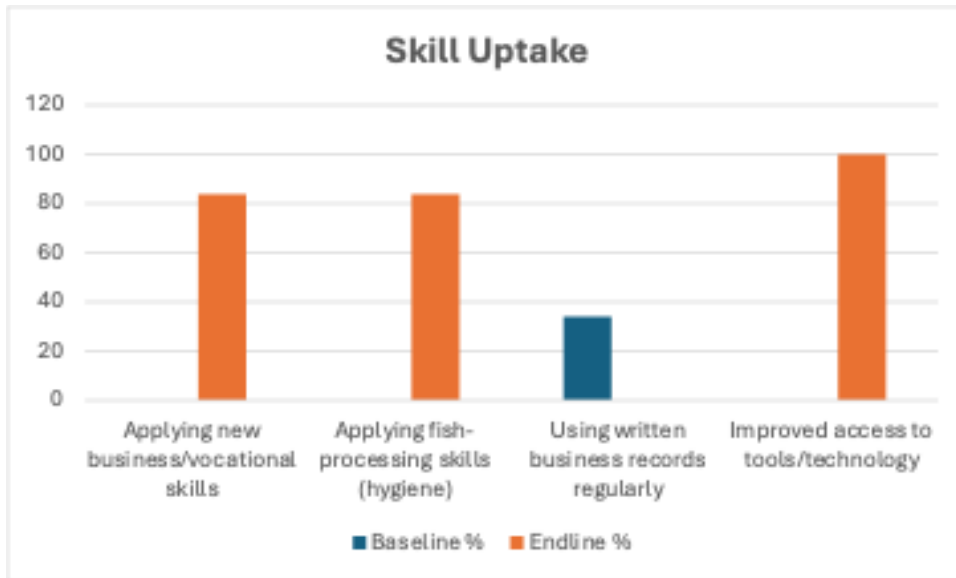


Chart 4: Skill Uptake

A comparison of baseline and endline savings data shows a major positive shift in women’s financial resilience and ability to accumulate savings. At baseline (n=50), the majority of women (32 out of 50) reported having no savings, while only a small number had accumulated even modest amounts. 8 women saved \$10-50, 5 women saved \$50-99, 2 women saved \$100-299, and 3 women saved \$300-500.

By contrast, the endline results (n=65) reflect a remarkable improvement. No women remained without savings, marking a complete elimination of the baseline’s largest and most vulnerable category. Instead, 50 women at endline reported savings in the \$10-50 range, this is more than six times the baseline figure, while 8 women saved \$50-99, showing growth from the baseline group of five. Higher savings categories remained relatively steady, with 3 women saving \$100-299 and 4 women saving \$300-500, both slightly higher than baseline counts when adjusted for the larger sample size. Overall, the comparison reveals a strong shift from financial insecurity to consistent savings behavior, with the most significant change being the movement of women from having no savings at all to accumulating at least some level of financial reserves.



Chart 5: Savings

Access to processing tools and technology improved for almost all market based women. 64 out of 65 women are now using the tools provided. Among TVET trainees, about half (20 out of 35) have secured employment in fisheries and apply their skills in real workplace settings. The remaining women who are unemployed are not yet utilising the skills or tools learned during trainings.

Attitudes toward abandoning violence improved across all stakeholder groups. District authorities, employers, youth, community committee members and women's group members all reported higher levels of knowledge and supportive attitudes. The biggest improvements were seen among organised community groups and committee members.

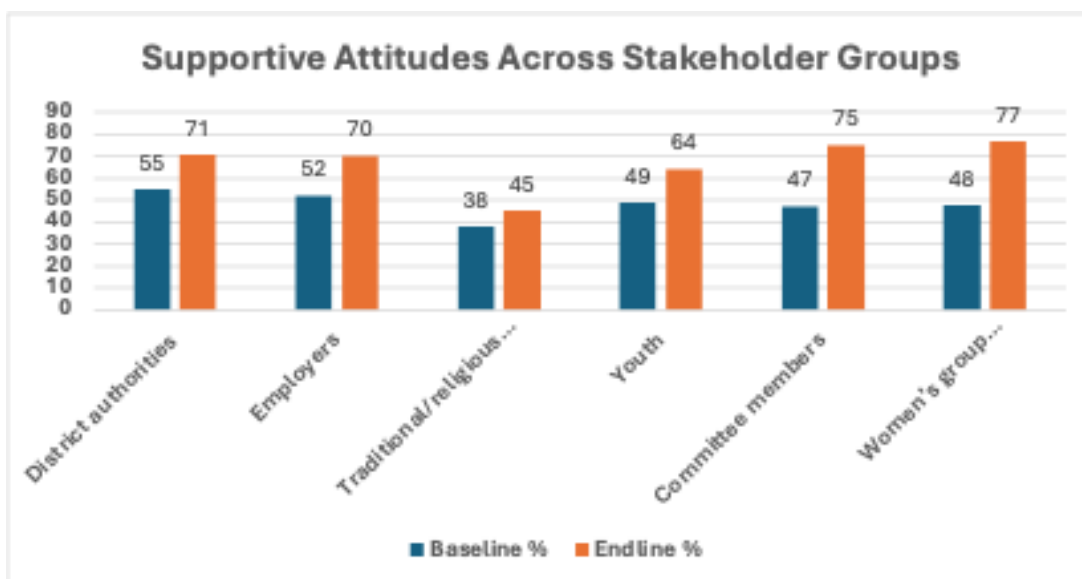


Chart 6: Supportive Attitudes Across Stakeholder Groups

The evidence indicates a substantial and meaningful reduction in violence experienced by employed women over the life of the project. At baseline, 68% of employed women reported experiencing violence. Endline data shows that roughly one third now report verbal abuse from their partners in the past twelve months. This decline represents a major shift in the local environment and reflects changes in both individual behaviour and community attitudes.

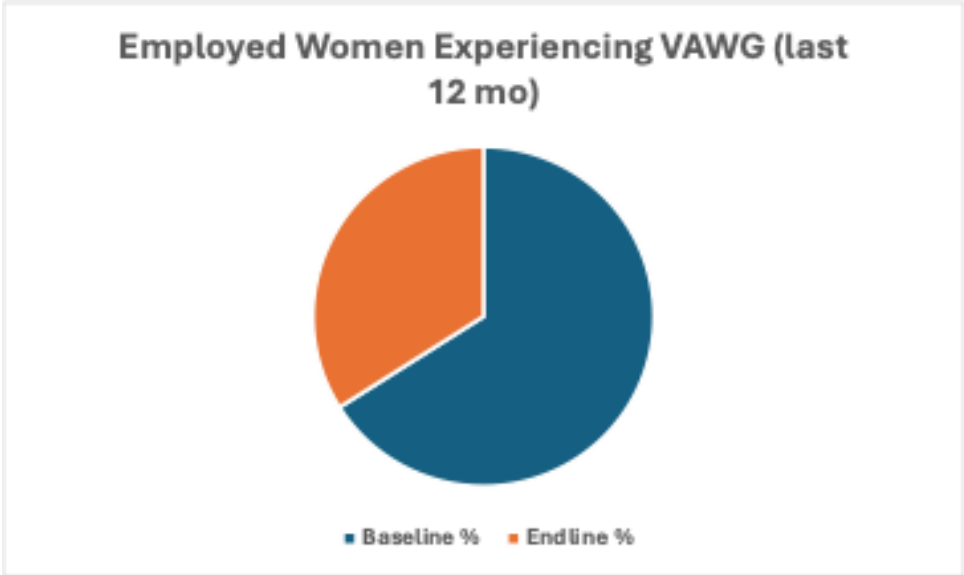


Chart 7: Employed Women Experiencing VAWG

The most common form of violence at endline is verbal abuse, affecting 30%-35% of employed women. While this is still a serious concern, it is considerably lower than the baseline prevalence of violence in general. Other types of violence appear at lower levels. Physical abuse is reported by 15%-20% of employed women. Restrictive behaviours, including control of movement or communication, are reported by about 10%-20%. Fear of a partner is reported within a similar range. These figures show that emotional and physical intimidation have not disappeared but are significantly reduced.

The shift is reinforced by qualitative findings in which women expressed feeling more confident to report abuse and more aware of where to seek support. One participant explained that she now feels she can speak up because she has her own income which allows her to use to fight for her rights. Others explained because of their increased confidence and understanding as well as that community members are more open to listening and helping when violence occurs.

Despite this progress, several risks persist. Homes remain the dominant setting where violence takes place. This pattern aligns with broader research on partner related violence, where harm is most likely to occur in spaces that are socially considered private and therefore less regulated. Women noted that although the market feels safe and empowering, the home is still where many forms of coercive control take place.

A notable gap exists between attitudes and behaviour. Many stakeholders express disapproval of wife beating, yet between one third and one half continue to justify it under conditions such as a woman neglecting household duties. This contradiction reflects a deep seated social norm that continues to normalise punishment and control within intimate relationships.

Service awareness is improving but remains uneven. Some women can identify support pathways and express confidence in reporting abuse, yet formal help seeking is still very low. Case reporting to police or legal aid services is rare. Many women explained that they are not fully sure what protection they are legally entitled to or fear backlash from partners, extended family and or even the associated shame.

Evidence also shows that traditional and religious leaders continue to adopt anti violence attitudes more slowly than other groups. Their influence in shaping local gender norms means that their hesitation limits the depth of community transformation. In contrast, women, district authorities, employers and women's groups show much stronger improvements in knowledge and supportive attitudes.

Taken together, these findings point to a mixed environment. The reduction in violence is substantial and is linked to increased empowerment, expanded income opportunities, stronger self confidence and more supportive community attitudes. Market based empowerment appears to have strengthened women's sense of agency, which in turn reduces vulnerability. However, ongoing normative barriers and structural inequalities still expose women to risk, particularly in the domestic sphere where most violence continues to occur.

The trend is positive but incomplete. Continued investment in awareness, behaviour change, youth engagement, and community leadership is required to consolidate progress and ensure that reductions in violence translate into lasting safety and dignity for all women engaged in the fisheries sector.

Summary of Qualitative Insights

The qualitative evidence gathered through focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and direct observations provided essential depth to the numerical trends. Women described profound personal and social transformations that go beyond income increases or skill acquisition. Many participants spoke about feeling respected, visible, and valued in ways they could not have imagined before joining the market. Several women explained that their families now look at them differently. One woman shared that her children proudly say their mother is a fisher women, something that was previously seen as unsuitable or even shameful for women. Others noted that they no longer feel dependent on relatives for basic needs, and this shift has restored a sense of dignity and self worth.

Across many discussions, women expressed strong pride in earning their own income and providing for their children. They spoke openly about the pride of “feeding the house with their own money” and about gaining recognition from husbands, siblings, and neighbours. The market environment played a key role in this transformation. One participant explained that she had always felt out of place in public economic spaces but now walks into the market with confidence because she has skills, customers, and a clear identity as a business operator.

Confidence emerged as a recurring theme. Women stated that they now understand their rights and no longer feel powerless when faced with harassment, particularly at fish landing sites. One woman said that before the training she would have stayed silent when men questioned her presence, but now she feels able to respond with clarity and confidence. Others shared similar stories of standing their ground in traditionally male dominated spaces, explaining that training and collective identity have helped reduce fear and intimidation.

At the same time, qualitative evidence highlighted persistent structural challenges that shape women’s daily experiences. Women described recurring difficulties in accessing fish, especially during the low season. The supply chain remains heavily controlled by male boat owners and male traders. Several women explained that when fish is scarce, boat owners prioritise their own businesses or partners over them. These experiences create income volatility and reinforce existing inequalities. They also highlight that economic empowerment is stronger inside the market than it is in the upstream parts of the fisheries value chain.

There have been efforts to address these barriers. Both the district administration and YOVENCO advocated for women to receive fair access to fish at the landing site. Stakeholders agreed on this arrangement, and some adhere to it consistently. However, women explained that compliance weakens during the low season when competition intensifies. Some fishermen find reasons to avoid distributing fish to women or claim operational constraints. This inconsistency demonstrates that agreements alone are not enough, and stronger enforcement and relationship building are required.

Despite these challenges, the qualitative data also revealed emerging opportunities. One striking trend is the expansion of customer networks using online platforms. Several women described communicating with and supplying fish to customers in Burao and Hargeisa whom they have never met face to face. They rely on mobile communication, mobile bank payments, digital price negotiation, and trusted transporters. This form of virtual market engagement has given women access to broader regional demand and strengthened their business potential.

Leadership roles within the cooperative and market management structures have further reinforced confidence and identity. Women spoke proudly about chairing committees, solving disputes, and organising daily operations. These roles have helped them feel like active contributors to the social and economic fabric of the market rather than passive participants.

Regarding violence and social norm change, women reported that community members are more aware and increasingly supportive. Some women described receiving encouragement from neighbours or relatives when facing harassment or conflict. However, they also highlighted that stigma, silence, and fear still surround discussions on violence. Traditional and religious leaders remain hesitant to take strong public positions, and their passive stance continues to slow deeper community transformation.

Cooperative leaders shared that coordination, communication, and collective problem solving have all improved. They noted that women are more willing to discuss issues openly and support one another. Yet they also acknowledged ongoing gaps in business record keeping, financial literacy, and planning capacity among members. These gaps limit the cooperative's ability to grow, attract investment, or manage larger business operations.

Overall, the qualitative evidence paints a rich and nuanced picture. It confirms significant empowerment, increased visibility, and expanding opportunities while also revealing where inequalities, resistance, and structural barriers continue to shape women's experiences in the fisheries sector.

Comparison of Baseline and Endline

Across the majority of outcome and output indicators, the endline measurements reflect strong and meaningful progress. The data shows a clear upward shift in women's economic participation, confidence, and access to productive resources. Skill application rose dramatically from a baseline of zero to 84% at endline, demonstrating a widespread uptake of training in both business practices and fish processing. This transformation is reinforced by women's own accounts of applying hygiene standards, managing customers, and expanding their sales networks. These changes show that training was not only relevant but also directly translated into behaviour.

Access to productive assets improved significantly among market women. Nearly all women operating inside the fish market now use processing tools and equipment regularly. The combination of a functional market, reliable infrastructure, and availability of equipment has made it possible for women to work efficiently and at higher quality standards. The introduction of fridges at the selling counters and refrigerated truck for transporting fish from the landing site to the fish market with a dedicated driver provided by the municipality, strengthened this progress even further.

Savings behaviour represents another major success. At baseline, nearly two thirds of women had no savings at all. Endline data shows that every woman now saves, with the majority holding balances between 10 to 50 US dollars. Women described this as a major step toward financial independence. They explained that saving even small amounts allowed them to cover emergencies, support their children's school expenses, and feel secure.

Attitudes toward gender based violence also shifted in a positive direction. All community groups showed improvement in rejecting violence and supporting women's rights. Duty bearers and employers have become more aware of SGBV issues, and youth and women's groups demonstrated strong growth in supportive attitudes. Importantly, violence experienced by employed women decreased from 68% to roughly one third. This represents a reduction of more than half and indicates that empowerment, awareness raising, and community engagement efforts have influenced behaviours and norms.

Although progress across most indicators is strong, several results reflect only partial achievement. Business record keeping is the most important example. While the quantitative monitoring data reports that a high proportion of women have adopted business record systems, the qualitative evidence does not support this. Interviews, FGDs, and direct observation confirm that women only record loans and do not maintain records of sales, profits or stock levels. The lack of accurate records also has practical implications because financial literacy and planning skills are essential for long term business growth.

Employment outcomes among TVET graduates show mixed results. About 57% secured jobs in the fisheries sector and are applying their skills. The remaining graduates are either unemployed or working in unrelated fields. This limits the achievement of the expected level of skills utilisation although TVET attendees have only graduated recently and towards the end of the project.

The results matrix does not include indicators on supply chain power or control over fish access. However, qualitative data consistently shows that limited access to boats and male controlled supply structures remain among the most important barriers affecting women's long term stability. Women explained that fishermen often prioritise men during the low season or find ways to avoid supplying them. This challenge is structural and has direct implications for income stability, growth, and sustainability.

Triangulated Analysis

Bringing together both the quantitative measures and qualitative narratives creates a more complete picture of the project's achievements and remaining challenges. Together, the two datasets show a consistent pattern of progress in women's economic empowerment, skill application, confidence, and community level acceptance.

The numerical data indicates clear improvements across most indicators, and women's own stories confirm these positive shifts. Women are earning more, saving regularly, and applying the skills they learned. They also report feeling more confident in their work and interactions with customers and community members. These outcomes are reinforced through direct observation in the fish market where women were seen using improved processing tools, maintaining hygiene standards, and managing customer interactions with increased professionalism. Because both the numbers and lived experiences point in the same direction.

However, a deeper triangulation of the findings also exposes areas where the quantitative results may appear stronger than the practical reality. The most noticeable example is the indicator on business record keeping. While quantitative monitoring reports suggest high adoption, qualitative evidence clearly shows that women only record loans and do not maintain any records of daily sales, profit levels, or stock movements. Women explained during FGDs that they did not feel confident managing written business records and that most of their transactions are done from memory. Observations in the market confirmed this further.

Another example emerges when examining access to processing tools and technology. The quantitative data shows near universal access and use among women working in the fish market. On the surface this suggests very strong achievement. However, when qualitative evidence is incorporated, a more nuanced picture appears. Only a portion of the TVET graduates are employed in the fisheries sector. Those who are not employed cannot apply the processing skills they learned nor access the technology provided in workplace settings. This means that the indicator is only fully achieved for one subgroup and partially achieved for another. The qualitative narratives provide the needed context to interpret the numerical indicator with accuracy.

The reduction in violence against employed women also gains strength through triangulation. Quantitative measurements show a decline from 68% to roughly one third. Qualitative insights deepen this finding. Women described feeling more confident to report abuse and said they now understand their rights better. They also mentioned that community members are more supportive than before. At the same time, they emphasised that risks remain, particularly within the household and at supply chain points where male dominated control continues. This demonstrates that the reduction in violence is real but not complete, and that the social environment is still evolving.

Finally, both datasets expose structural challenges that persist despite the project's successes. Women continue to face difficulties accessing fish during the low season. Energy shortages and limited cold storage undermine the quality of their products. The cooperative still lacks influence in upstream supply, and knowledge of fisheries regulations remains limited. These systemic issues were highlighted repeatedly in qualitative interviews and are also reflected indirectly in quantitative areas such as inconsistent production volumes and uneven employment outcomes.

Overall, the triangulated evidence paints a picture of a highly impactful and relevant project that achieved meaningful improvements in women's lives. At the same time, the combined analysis makes clear that several foundational barriers remain unresolved. These structural weaknesses will require focused attention during the next phase of programming if the gains observed at endline are to be sustained and deepened over time.

4.4 Integrated Synthesis and Interpretation

This synthesis brings together all strands of evidence to form a complete and coherent picture of the project's performance. It sits between the detailed findings and the conclusions, helping the reader see not just separate results but how they relate to each other. The section draws on the OECD DAC criteria, the thematic assessments, the quantitative indicators, and the qualitative insights from FGDs, KIIs, and observations. Bringing these evidence streams together strengthens the validity of the findings and allows for deeper interpretation. It helps clarify why certain changes occurred, where the project performed well, where gaps remain, and what these patterns mean for future programming.

The value of this integrated approach lies in its ability to bridge numbers and lived experiences. While quantitative data shows measurable shifts in income, skills, savings, employment, and attitudes, the qualitative narratives reveal what these changes mean to women, how they experience them in daily life, and the contextual forces that shape progress or resistance. This synthesis is therefore essential for drawing meaningful lessons and for informing more grounded recommendations.

4.4.1 Collective Evidence

When all data is examined together, a clear story emerges. The project generated substantial improvements in women's livelihoods, confidence, and social positioning. Women gained critical skills, applied them regularly, earned more income, and developed savings habits. These gains are paired with stronger community attitudes supportive of women's rights and a marked reduction in workplace and partner based violence among employed women.

The collective evidence also highlights that the project was highly relevant to the local context and responsive to women's priorities. Effectiveness was strong in most areas, especially in skill uptake, market participation, and attitude change. Sustainability is promising at the social level, although structural bottlenecks threaten long term continuity.

A few unexpected patterns appear when evidence is viewed collectively. The rise in women selling to distant customers online was not an original project objective but shows how empowerment can lead to self driven innovation. Another emergent pattern is the strength of the district council's support. Their active involvement created an enabling market space where women pay no fee and receive essential services such as security, hygiene, power, and truck transportation. This government backing played an important role in magnifying the project's effect.

Across stakeholders, a common message is that women are more respected, more visible, and more able to influence household and market decisions. At the same time,

women and leaders note persistent barriers in the supply chain, record keeping, and infrastructure, which limit the full realization of economic gains.

4.4.2 Cross Criterion Patterns Across OECD DAC Criteria

- **Alignment and Strategic Positioning**

Relevance and coherence strongly reinforce one another. The project aligns with national economic and gender priorities, matches ISF's strategic goals, and fits well within the local governance structures of Berbera. The synergy between market infrastructure, training, cooperative leadership, and community level awareness confirms that the project's internal logic was coherent and mutually reinforcing.

- **Delivery and Results**

Effectiveness and impact reflect a consistent upward trajectory. Women now earn more, apply new skills, feel confident, save money, and take leadership roles. Violence has reduced substantially among the employed women. The impacts extend beyond income and touch on dignity, recognition, and social belonging.

- **Resource Use and Implementation Efficiency**

Efficiency benefited from strong local partnerships and effective management of financial and material resources. The market was operationalised, equipped, and maintained in a cost conscious way. Resource gaps were mainly observed in infrastructure constraints such as unreliable energy supply and limited storage.

- **Prospects for Continuity**

Sustainability is partially achieved. Social sustainability is strong due to women's solidarity, growing acceptance, and supportive local authorities. Institutional sustainability is improving with the cooperative structure. Structural sustainability remains fragile due to limited control over supply chains, infrastructure weaknesses, and low financial literacy.

4.4.3 Interrelationships Among Thematic Areas

- **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion**

Empowerment has advanced through increased visibility, stronger confidence, leadership roles, and improved attitudes. Yet the broader value chain still limits women's control and exposes them to subtle forms of gendered exclusion.

- **Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening**

Training improved skills and employability while formation of cooperative has improved institutional strength and governance . However, gaps in business management and financial literacy reduce the effectiveness of these gains.

- **Market Linkages and Livelihoods Development**

Skills and equipment improved production quality, while functioning market improved sales conditions. Demand is growing, including from other cities. But access to supply is constrained by male controlled fishing operations, which hinders sustained income growth.

- **Environmental and Social Considerations**

Lack of waste management plan, Weak cold storage and unreliable energy continue to threaten product quality. Social considerations appear strongly in the reduction of violence and improved norms, although community stigma remains in some areas.

- **Cross Cutting Issues**

Innovation is emerging through digital selling and customer outreach. Partnerships with the district council and the cooperative strengthened delivery. Women show resilience in adapting to supply shortages and seasonal fluctuations.

4.4.4 Convergence, Divergence, and Tensions in the Evidence Base

- **Reinforcing Patterns**

Both data streams confirm improvements in skill use, confidence, income, savings, and social attitudes. They also align in showing strong market functionality and supportive local authorities.

- **Divergent Patterns**

The clearest divergence concerns business record keeping. Quantitative reporting suggests high uptake yet qualitative evidence shows that women only record loans. Employment outcomes for TVET graduates also appear lower than implied by the monitoring data.

- **Tensions Across Criteria**

High relevance and effectiveness contrast with weaker sustainability in structural areas. Another tension lies between improved market level gender equality and continued male dominance in upstream supply.

4.4.5 Implications for the Theory of Change

The evidence suggests that the pathways in the Theory of Change are valid but incomplete. Improved infrastructure, training, and cooperative support lead to increased income, confidence, and social influence. However, the assumption that skill development alone would secure employment for all TVET graduates did not hold. The assumption that women could easily access supply also proved too optimistic. Any future revision of the Theory of Change should integrate supply chain control, policy engagement, and energy infrastructure as critical preconditions for sustained empowerment.

4.4.6 Strength of Evidence and Level of Confidence

Confidence in the findings is high where both qualitative and quantitative sources converge, especially on skill use, savings, violence reduction, and market functionality. Confidence is lower on indicators affected by weak monitoring practices such as business record keeping and TVET employment status. The triangulation improves reliability and clarifies where additional verification is needed.

4.4.7 Overall Performance Picture

The integrated analysis shows that the project performed strongly and delivered meaningful change. Women are more confident, respected, skilled, and economically active. Violence has decreased and community attitudes are shifting. The market functions well and institutional capacity is improving.

At the same time, unresolved structural challenges limit full empowerment. These include supply chain control, infrastructure limitations, financial literacy gaps, and incomplete employment integration of trained youth. The project established a strong foundation for empowerment, yet sustained progress will depend on addressing these deeper systemic constraints in future interventions.

5. Key Lessons Learned

This chapter brings together the most important insights that emerged from the implementation and evaluation of the project. These lessons are based on the experience of women beneficiaries, YOVENCO staff, local authorities, private sector partners, and community members, along with the quantitative and qualitative evidence gathered during fieldwork. The lessons are intended to support future programming, guide strategic decisions, and strengthen the long term sustainability of similar interventions.

5.1 Operational lessons

A number of practical insights emerged from the way the project was implemented. These lessons relate to what worked well on the ground and where gaps or inefficiencies affected delivery.

One of the strongest operational findings is the importance of timely delivery of tools and market infrastructure. Women repeatedly explained that receiving equipment early made it possible for them to begin earning almost immediately once the market opened. Participants noted that the market felt ready for them and that customers developed trust quickly because the environment was clean, organised, and well equipped. This demonstrates that investments in infrastructure and tools are most effective when coordinated with service delivery and training schedules.

Another operational strength was the close coordination between the district administration, cooperative leaders, and YOVENCO staff. Roles were clear and day to day responsibilities were shared in a structured way. Many women explained that they felt supported because there was always someone to turn to when challenges appeared, whether technical, administrative, or security related.

However, the project also revealed operational weaknesses that require attention. Energy and cold storage problems caused financial losses for market women and at times undermined their confidence in the reliability of the facility. The small fridges were intended to hold products for only a few hours, but when the larger freezer and solar system did not perform, the women struggled to preserve their fish. This shows that even well designed systems can be weakened if supporting infrastructure is unreliable.

The sequencing of activities also shaped operational outcomes. Conducting TVET training in the second year limited the time graduates had to find jobs before the endline assessment. Several women felt they would have benefited more if the training had happened earlier, which suggests that timing matters greatly for employment results.

5.2 Strategic lessons for future programming

Beyond operational matters, several strategic lessons emerged that can inform future program design and planning.

The first strategic insight relates to the value of investing in both market infrastructure and women's capabilities. The combination of physical assets, training, and cooperative support created a strong foundation for empowerment. This suggests that interventions are most effective when they consider multiple dimensions of women's livelihoods rather than focusing on skills alone.

A second lesson is the need to address structural barriers in the fisheries value chain. Women made clear that they continue to be excluded from upstream decision making, especially where boat ownership and fish landing practices are concerned. Male dominated supply dynamics limit women's income potential and make them vulnerable during low season. Strategic future programming must engage male actors directly and aim to transform relationships within the supply chain. This may involve partnership agreements, male allyship training, incentives for inclusive procurement practices, or the introduction of women owned boats.

Another key lesson concerns the importance of policy engagement. While the project aligned well with local priorities, there is still limited understanding of fisheries regulations among women. This affects pricing, access to landing sites, and long term sustainability. Future strategies should incorporate work with government ministries to clarify policies, strengthen the enabling environment, and reduce informal barriers that disadvantage women.

A further strategic insight relates to the timing and packaging of capacity building. Women benefited from the skills they gained, but deeper business competencies such as financial management, stock planning, and bookkeeping were not fully developed. Long term programming should include advanced training cycles rather than short courses alone and should link these to practical exercises within the cooperative.

Finally, the evaluation shows that partnership with district administrations is a major strength. The level of commitment shown by Berbera District Council was exceptional, with the council covering market running costs, security, water, hygiene, and maintenance. Future programming should replicate this model of shared responsibility and embed it formally within agreements to ensure continuity even if project funding ends.

5.3 Gender and Community Engagement Insights

The project generated important lessons about how gender and community engagement influence the success of livelihood interventions.

One of the clearest lessons is that women's participation increases rapidly when social recognition and dignity are restored. Women often described how their families now see them differently, with more respect and trust. They spoke of feeling proud to earn income and support their children. These experiences show that economic empowerment is not only financial but also deeply emotional and relational.

Another lesson is the importance of building women's confidence in public and male dominated spaces. Many women stated that before the project they felt uncomfortable or even afraid when approaching fish landing sites or interacting with male traders. Training and cooperative organisation helped them gain the courage to stand their ground. As one participant shared "*after I learned my rights I do not feel shy or scared when a man tries to intimidate me*". This change in self perception is a critical foundation for long term empowerment.

Community attitudes also shifted. Youth, employers, and district staff showed more support for women, although resistance persists among traditional and religious leaders. This pattern shows that gender norm transformation is gradual and uneven. Sustained engagement with men, boys, and influential leaders is needed to reduce resistance and increase acceptance of women in non traditional roles.

On violence prevention, the decline in reported VAWG is an encouraging sign, but the persistence of verbal abuse and some forms of coercive control shows that deep rooted norms still influence behaviour. Awareness has increased, yet help seeking remains low and many survivors still avoid formal services. This tells us that community engagement must go beyond information campaigns and include trust building with service providers, families, and neighbourhood leaders.

Finally, the project demonstrated that social inclusion requires attention to both economic access and social protection. Single mothers, widows, and women with limited education made particularly strong gains because the market environment offered them a safe space, tools, and supportive networks. Future programming should continue to prioritise such vulnerable groups, ensuring that interventions remain inclusive and sensitive to different forms of disadvantage.

6 Conclusions

This chapter brings together the full body of evidence generated through the evaluation and provides a clear performance judgment on the project. It draws on quantitative indicators, qualitative narratives, thematic assessments, and OECD DAC criteria to summarise what the project achieved, what challenges remain, and what these results mean for future programming. The chapter also serves as a bridge to the recommendations by identifying opportunities for deeper impact and areas requiring strategic attention.

6.1 Summary of Major Findings by Evaluation Criteria

- The project demonstrated strong relevance. It responded to genuine needs faced by women in Berbera's fisheries sector and aligned well with national priorities on livelihoods, gender equality, and economic development. Women consistently stated that the project addressed long standing constraints related to access to tools, market space, fair working conditions and overall access to fishery sector.
- Coherence was judged to be solid across both internal and external dimensions. The initiative complemented previous work by local actors and aligned well with government priorities at district and municipal levels. Coordination with the Berbera District Council strengthened implementation and created an enabling environment that supported the women's operations.
- Effectiveness was high across most indicators. Skill application increased sharply, access to assets improved, and the volume of fish sold by women grew. The level of violence experienced by employed women declined significantly, supported by both quantitative and qualitative data. The refurbished market is functional and active, hosting 64 women who are now operating daily in a safe and structured space. However, the business record keeping indicator did not fully meet expectations due to limited financial literacy and inconsistent monitoring.
- Efficiency was generally strong. Financial and material resources were used wisely, and most activities were delivered within expected timelines. Human resources were coordinated effectively, and beneficiaries confirmed that tools and equipment were delivered at the right time. Nonetheless, delays in cold

storage performance, inconsistencies in monitoring systems, and late timing of TVET training affected overall efficiency.

- In terms of impact, the project contributed to meaningful economic and social gains. Women experienced improved income stability, greater confidence, increased mobility, and stronger roles within their households and communities. The project also helped shift attitudes among a range of stakeholders including youth, community members, employers, and district authorities. Some social norms remain resistant, but the overall trend points to positive structural change.
- Sustainability prospects are promising but not fully assured. The strong support of the Berbera District Council, the ongoing commitment of the cooperative, and the improved skill base of women all contribute to continuity. However, challenges related to energy reliability, supply chain power dynamics, and limited financial systems may hinder long term gains unless addressed.

6.2 Overall Performance and Contribution of the Project

The project demonstrated a strong and consistent performance across nearly all areas of implementation and contributed to meaningful improvements in the lives of the targeted women. It successfully transformed a previously non functional and underused fish market into a vibrant and organised economic space that now accommodates 64 active women vendors. This transformation created a physical and social environment where women could operate safely, confidently, and with dignity. The combined investments in infrastructure, tools, training, and market governance gave women the means to work more efficiently, present cleaner and high quality products, and serve a wider customer base that now includes buyers within and outside Berbera.

A major achievement of the project was the way practical skills translated directly into improved economic outcomes. Women consistently reported better income stability, stronger bargaining power, and the confidence to manage daily operations on their own. The structured training, especially in processing and hygiene, enabled the women to meet higher standards and attract more customers. The quick uptake of skills and the increased application rate of 84% illustrate the relevance and practicality of the training models used. Women also described personal changes such as feeling recognised and respected in spaces where they once felt invisible.

The project's contribution extended beyond its immediate outputs. It demonstrated in practice that when women receive fair access to market infrastructure, technology, and supportive institutional relationships, they can succeed in sectors historically controlled by men. The strong partnership between the cooperative, YOVENCO, and the Berbera District Council established a new model of inclusive market governance where

women's needs are integrated into public service delivery. The council's ongoing commitment to providing security, power, hygiene services, and staff support further reinforced the sustainability of the market.

In addition to economic gains, the project played a role in shifting harmful social norms. A significant reduction in the level of violence experienced by employed women was recorded, complemented by improved attitudes among youth, community groups, employers, and district authorities. These changes indicate that the project contributed not only to livelihoods but also to community level transformation in attitudes toward women's rights and dignity.

Despite these achievements, some gaps remain. Cold storage reliability continues to affect income stability, and TVET graduates received limited time to secure employment due to the late start of training. Even with these limitations, the overall contribution of the project was substantial, demonstrating both immediate impact and long term strategic value for women's economic empowerment in Berbera.

6.3 Assessment of Value Addition and Strategic Relevance

The project contributed considerable added value to Berbera's fisheries economy by filling a long standing gap in functioning and women friendly market infrastructure. Before the intervention, some of the women vendors operated in informal, unsafe, or poorly equipped spaces that offered little opportunity for growth. The project changed this reality by establishing a market that is fully operational, well serviced, and designed to meet the needs of women processors and sellers. This alone reshaped the local fish economy, as women now have a recognised and respected space where they can work openly, attract more customers, and improve the quality of their products through better hygiene and processing standards. Their presence in the value chain has become visible, legitimate, and increasingly influential.

Strategically, the project showed that livelihood support is most effective when it is delivered as a coherent package rather than isolated activities. The combination of infrastructure, tools, vocational training, cooperative strengthening, and continuous engagement with district authorities created a supportive ecosystem for women to succeed. This integrated model not only improved incomes and working conditions but also helped shift community perceptions about gender roles in the fisheries sector. Men, traders, and local leaders now interact with women in ways that reflect growing respect, and this marks an important step forward in a traditionally male dominated environment.

The strong coordination with the Berbera District Council added further strategic value. By ensuring that the council contributes security, hygiene management, power, and market staff, the project anchored the intervention within existing public structures. This partnership created shared ownership of the market, which increases the likelihood of long term sustainability. It also offers a practical example of how community groups, local government, and development partners can work together in Somaliland's urban settings to support women's economic inclusion.

The project also produced lessons that are valuable for shaping future programming. These include the need to place vocational training earlier in the project cycle, strengthen negotiation mechanisms for women's access to supply chains, improve monitoring verification, and plan more thoroughly for energy resilient cold storage. These insights highlight both the progress achieved and the systemic challenges that still influence women's livelihoods.

Taken together, the project's strategic relevance is clear. Its added value to the local economy, to public community collaboration, and to women's empowerment is significant. The changes it introduced are already improving the lives of women vendors and will continue to influence the fisheries sector in Berbera for years to come.

6.4 Key Drivers of Success

Several factors contributed to the strong results achieved by the project. Effective partnerships played a central role, especially the collaboration between the cooperative, YOVENCO, and the Berbera District Council. This cooperation ensured smooth market operations, timely support, and a shared sense of responsibility. Strong engagement from women beneficiaries also enabled rapid uptake of new skills, consistent participation in trainings, and active leadership in the market.

The project's design, which integrated infrastructure, tools, skills development, and community awareness, proved highly appropriate for the needs of the target group. Coordination with district authorities further strengthened implementation by ensuring that women had access to a safe, serviced, and tax free market environment. Practical tools and technical training equipped women with the confidence and ability to improve hygiene, processing quality, and customer relations, reinforcing the overall success of the intervention.

6.5 Persistent Gaps and Unresolved Challenges

Although progress was significant, several challenges remain unresolved. Deep rooted structural barriers in the fisheries supply chain continue to limit women's access to fish, particularly during low seasons when male boat owners prioritise male vendors. Social norms also continue to influence how some men view women's presence at landing sites, creating occasional resistance and discouragement. Technical constraints, especially unreliable energy supply and limited cold storage capacity, reduced operational efficiency and contributed to income loss at times.

Monitoring weaknesses created discrepancies between reported and actual practices, particularly in business record keeping and employment outcomes among TVET graduates. Some indicators therefore only achieved partial progress, revealing areas where more targeted support is needed. These gaps reflect broader systemic issues

that extend beyond the scope of a single project and will require sustained, multi stakeholder engagement to address fully.

6.6 Reflection on the Theory of Change

The project's theory of change largely held true. The assumption that improved skills, tools, and infrastructure would enable women to expand their income and influence household decisions was confirmed in both quantitative and qualitative evidence. The assumption that community sensitisation would contribute to better attitudes toward women's participation and reduced violence also proved valid, although progress varied across groups. Some assumptions were more optimistic than reality allowed. For example, the expectation that TVET graduates would find employment quickly did not fully materialise due to the late timing of the training and limited job availability. A new pathway also emerged, where local government ownership and support became a critical driver of change. This dimension was not fully anticipated in the original theory but proved essential for sustainability and institutionalisation.

6.7 Sustainability Outlook

The outlook for sustainability is generally positive but requires careful support in the years ahead. Social sustainability is strong, supported by growing confidence among women and increased acceptance from families and communities. Institutional sustainability is emerging, with the cooperative functioning well and the district administration taking on key responsibilities such as staffing, maintenance, and operational costs. Financial sustainability among women is improving, though still vulnerable to supply chain disruptions and seasonal variations. Environmental and operational sustainability depends largely on improving energy reliability and strengthening cold storage capacities. If these issues are addressed, the gains achieved by the project have a strong chance of enduring beyond the funding period.

6.8 Implications for Future Programming

The findings point to several considerations for future programming. Early sequencing of activities, especially vocational training, is essential for creating enough time for graduates to secure employment. Stronger negotiation mechanisms are needed to improve women's access to supply chains and reduce dependency on male intermediaries. Monitoring systems should be enhanced through clearer tools, more verification, and better documentation by beneficiaries. Future interventions should prioritise energy resilient infrastructure to address cold storage and spoilage risks. Continued engagement with men, traditional leaders, and private sector actors will be critical for deeper gender transformation and long term market integration. These insights provide a practical roadmap for strengthening future project design and implementation.

6.9 Final Concluding Statement

The project brought meaningful and lasting improvement to the lives of women in Berbera's fisheries sector. It opened doors that were previously closed, created opportunities for dignity and economic independence, and set a strong foundation for future progress. While challenges remain, the achievements are substantial and the pathways toward longer term empowerment are now firmly in motion. The project stands as a clear example of how thoughtful design, strong partnerships, and committed community participation can transform both individual journeys and local systems.

7 Recommendations

The recommendations presented below build directly on the evidence from the evaluation and are designed to strengthen future programming, improve sustainability, and address persistent structural barriers. They are organised into thematic areas to support practical planning and decision making.

7.1 Strengthen Economic Empowerment and Livelihoods

- **Prioritise earlier delivery of skills training**

Future interventions should schedule TVET and advanced technical courses in the first year. This will allow graduates enough time to secure employment, adapt to workplace expectations, and demonstrate the value of their skills.

- **Introduce advanced business management training**

Women need deeper skills in record keeping, pricing, digital marketing, procurement planning, and financial literacy. Strengthening these areas will help them scale their businesses and qualify for loans or cooperative based financing.

- **Establish a structured mentorship system**

Pair early achievers or experienced women vendors with newer entrants. Mentorship can improve consistency in hygiene, processing, and customer relations, and build a stronger support network within the cooperative.

7.2 Improve Supply Chain Access and Market Stability

- **Support negotiations with male boat owners and landing site authorities**

Women still face barriers in accessing fish, especially during the low season. Facilitated dialogues and agreements at the beginning of each fishing cycle could secure predictable and fair access for women vendors.

- **Develop alternative procurement channels**

Pilot procurement from multiple landing sites, explore partnerships with small scale fishers in neighbouring areas, and encourage pooled purchasing by the cooperative to reduce dependence on male intermediaries.

- **Strengthen digital market outreach**

Women who use online platforms to reach customers in Hargeisa and Burco are expanding their markets successfully. Training and cooperative led support for digital sales can help scale this opportunity.

7.3 Enhance Infrastructure and Energy Resilience

- **Upgrade energy systems for cold storage**

Unreliable solar power remains a major bottleneck. Future projects should prioritise hybrid systems that combine solar with grid backup or more efficient refrigeration units to prevent spoilage and income loss.

- **Expand cold storage capacity**

Women frequently highlighted limited space in the holding fridges. Additional units or a cooperative owned shared freezer would improve product safety and give women more flexibility during peak supply periods.

- **Introduce routine maintenance protocols**

Clear schedules, assigned responsibilities, and quick repair processes will reduce operational downtime and extend the lifespan of equipment provided.

7.4 Strengthen Monitoring, Reporting, and Learning

- **Improve accuracy of beneficiary level data**

Simplify monitoring tools, introduce periodic verification, and train both staff and women on accurate record keeping. This will minimise over reporting and ensure that management decisions are based on reliable evidence.

- **Track employment outcomes of TVET graduates more closely**

A structured follow up system should be introduced to document job search efforts, barriers to placement, and the level of skill application among employed graduates.

- **Integrate qualitative monitoring into routine practice**

Field observations, short interviews, and feedback groups can reveal gaps in implementation that numbers alone cannot capture. This will help maintain a more grounded understanding of progress.

7.5 Deepen Gender Equality and Social Norm Change

- **Expand engagement with men and community leaders**

Resistance at landing sites and lingering attitudes about women's roles indicate the need for continuous sensitisation. Structured dialogues, male champion initiatives, and joint action plans with traditional leaders can strengthen local support.

- **Provide tailored psychosocial support and referral pathways**

Although violence has decreased, survivors still face barriers in seeking help. Clear mapping of services, stronger referral networks, and periodic awareness campaigns can improve help seeking behaviour.

- **Support women's leadership development**

Leadership training for cooperative members and market representatives can deepen women's influence in decision making spaces and ensure their voice remains central to the market's governance.

7.6 Strengthen Institutional Partnerships and Local Ownership

- **Continue reinforcing the district council partnership**

The district administration is already covering operational costs and providing essential staff. This partnership should be formalised through a clear market management agreement that protects women's rights and defines shared responsibilities.

7.7 Prepare for the Next Programming Cycle

- **Develop a medium term vision for women's fisheries livelihoods**

This should include improved supply chain access, diversified income streams, stronger cooperative governance, and expanded processing or value addition opportunities.

- **Plan for scale and replication**

The Berbera model shows clear potential for replication in other coastal towns. Capturing the full model, documenting lessons, and producing a practical toolkit would support scale up.

Final Recommendation Message

The project created real change and opened new possibilities for women. Strengthening supply chain access, energy resilience, monitoring accuracy, and community level gender transformation will build on these achievements and ensure that the next phase delivers even deeper, more sustainable results.

8 Good Practices and Success Stories

This chapter highlights practical examples of what worked well during the project, illustrated through short case stories and direct testimonies from women and other stakeholders. These stories bring the quantitative and qualitative findings to life by showing how the project shaped real experiences, transformed daily routines, and expanded opportunities for women in Berbera's fisheries sector.

8.1 Good Practices

- **Creation of a fully functional women friendly market environment**

One of the strongest good practices was the establishment of a safe, clean, and well managed fish market environment that enabled women to work with dignity. The combination of infrastructure upgrades, organised governance, hygiene systems, and district council support created a space where women could operate with confidence. Women repeatedly emphasised that the new environment made them feel respected and protected, which encouraged them to adopt new skills and attract more customers.

- **Integrated approach linking skills, tools, and market access.**

The project's design combined multiple elements that supported one another. Women received practical training in processing and hygiene, alongside the tools and equipment needed to apply these skills. This integration meant that training translated directly into better quality products and higher sales. Women often remarked that it was the combination of knowledge and equipment that helped them improve their work.

- **Strong public community partnership with Berbera District Council**

The district council played a significant role in operationalising and maintaining the market. The provision of security, sanitation, water, a paid driver for the refrigerated truck, and maintenance services was a practical demonstration of local government ownership. This partnership is a strong example of how municipal support can enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of community based economic initiatives.

- **Cooperative leadership and peer solidarity**

The cooperative became an important platform for women to coordinate, solve issues, and advocate for their needs. Leadership positions held by women helped promote collective decision making and strengthened social bonds. Members explained that the cooperative made them feel united and gave them a voice in dealing with market challenges.

8.2 Success Stories

Success Story 1: A vendor who found confidence and recognition

One woman shared that before the project, she felt invisible in the eyes of male traders and even her own family. After joining the market, acquiring skills, and receiving equipment, she said that customers now trust her judgment and often seek her advice on fish quality. She added that people from Hargeisa and Burco buy from her through online communication even though they have never seen her in person. She explained that this recognition makes her proud and motivates her to continue improving.

- **Success Story 2: A mother who secured her family's livelihood**

A single mother explained that she used to rely heavily on relatives for support. With the income from the market, she now pays school fees for her children and manages her household independently. She described how this change restored her dignity and reduced the shame she used to feel when asking for help. Her story illustrates how livelihood interventions can strengthen both economic and emotional resilience.

- **Success Story 3: Use of digital platforms to expand their market reach**

Several women described how they started using social media platforms to promote their products. One woman explained that she began sharing videos and pictures of fresh fish on TikTok platform and now supplies regular weekly orders from clients outside Berbera such as Hargeisa and Buroa. This demonstrates how digital literacy and technology can open new opportunities even in traditional sectors such as fisheries.

- **Success Story 4: A TVET graduate entering the workforce**

One of the TVET graduates who secured employment with a fishery company shared that the training helped her feel competent and respected in a male dominated environment. She said that the skills she gained removed her fear of handling equipment and allowed her to work with confidence. Her story highlights the potential of vocational training to break gender barriers and support long term employability.

Together, these good practices and stories illustrate the real human impact behind the project's results. They show not only improved statistics but also transformations in confidence, agency, social recognition, and livelihood stability. These experiences offer valuable direction for future programming and reinforce the importance of integrated, dignity centred, and partnership driven development approaches.

9 Validation and Feedback Process

The validation and feedback process played a central role in strengthening the accuracy, credibility, and authenticity of the evaluation findings. A comprehensive validation and consultation workshop was held with a wide range of stakeholders, including women beneficiaries, cooperative leaders, representatives from the fishery association, district authorities, ISF staff, YOVENCO staff, and community group representatives. Bringing together these diverse voices created a shared space where participants could openly examine the preliminary findings, question interpretations, and ensure that the conclusions reflected their own real-world experiences. This collaborative approach made the evaluation more grounded and responsive to the context in which the project operated.

Women vendors participated actively in the discussions and were eager to share their experiences. They confirmed many of the evaluation's findings related to improved income opportunities, growing confidence, and better working conditions. They also highlighted persistent problems, such as difficulty accessing fish during certain seasons and the recurring energy shortages that affected cold storage. Their perspectives reinforced the need to address these structural challenges to sustain the positive outcomes of the project.

Cooperative leaders validated the observations about improved governance, coordination, and the active functioning of the market systems. At the same time, they emphasised the continued need for advanced training in business management, financial literacy, and cooperative leadership. Their reflections highlighted that while the foundational elements are in place, more investment is required to ensure long term institutional maturity.

One woman addressed the sensitive topic of women's limited access to fishing boats. She explained that, in her view, this restriction was not meant as discrimination but stemmed from concerns about women's safety and wellbeing. She noted that the current systems and environment at sea do not yet guarantee the protection required for women to participate safely in offshore fishing.

Storage limitations were also discussed, with women explaining that because of the unreliable cold chain, they began drying fish as an alternative way to preserve their products. This practice demonstrates both resilience and innovation but also points to gaps in the infrastructure that need to be addressed.

Several recommendations emerged from the participants. Advocacy for women's rights and increased involvement in the fisheries sector was strongly encouraged. A male participant involved in fish catching raised important points about access to finance. He explained that women need a better understanding of banking requirements, including the need for bank accounts, financial histories, cooperative membership, and

guarantors. His contribution underscored that financial empowerment requires more than training; it also requires navigating formal systems of trust and verification. The workshop also highlighted the importance of value addition, such as dried fish, packaged products, and improved branding. Participants suggested that increasing the visibility of the women's market in Berbera would attract more buyers, create new connections, and expand income opportunities.

District authorities contributed important reflections during the validation discussions. They reiterated their central role in keeping the market operational and agreed that without their continued support, many of the achievements seen today would not have been possible. Their inputs highlighted how services such as security, hygiene management, water provision, licensing support, and the allocation of a paid driver for the refrigerated truck were essential components of the market's success. This acknowledgment helped strengthen the evaluation's assessment of institutional partnerships and their contribution to sustainability.

YOVENCO staff took time to review the monitoring related findings and openly recognised several weaknesses in the data, particularly where the reported figures did not align with what women and cooperative leaders shared during the qualitative consultations. They acknowledged that during the data collection on business record keeping, the focus was on record keeping only and didn't further classify into different records such as sales, loans, expenses etc but confirmed that most women only recorded loan related information. Their openness helped refine the final interpretation of indicators and ensured the analysis remained honest and realistic.

ISF representatives confirmed the overall validity of the evaluation's findings and appreciated the level of detail brought by the triangulated evidence. They also raised concerns about the areas where the quantitative and qualitative data diverged. This included business record keeping, employment data, and some of the VAWG related indicators. ISF recommended an immediate follow up meeting between the consultant and YOVENCO to verify the conflicting areas and ensure that final reporting was consistent, cleared, and aligned with field realities. This feedback guided further checks and revisions before finalisation.

Throughout the workshop, participants helped clarify misunderstandings, correct incomplete interpretations, and provide additional examples that enriched the analysis. For instance, the employment outcomes section was adjusted to correctly reflect the number of graduates working outside the fishery sector. The narrative on business record keeping was strengthened after repeated confirmation that women do not track sales, stock, or profit.

These contributions were incorporated into the final report by revising indicator explanations, refining the storylines, and improving the triangulation between data types. The recommendations were also updated to reflect the practical suggestions made by beneficiaries, leaders, government actors, and project staff.

The result is a more balanced, accurate, and credible evaluation that respects the voices of those who participated in the validation process and ensures the findings truly reflect the lived experience and realities of the project.

Annexes

- Terms of Reference (ToR)
- Evaluation tools
- References and bibliography

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