

# Mentoring Program Armenia

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**Women Entrepreneurship Support Sector Development Program**

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## **I. BACKGROUND**

The Government of Armenia has requested ADB's support in promoting women entrepreneurship in the country, and a Sector Development Program (SDP). The program comprises an integrated approach to enable women entrepreneurs and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in Armenia to play a greater role in economic development. The program is supported by capacity development technical assistance (TA) to improve the entrepreneurial capacity of women and to increase the capacity of the Small and Medium Entrepreneurship Development National Center (SME DNC), the project management unit of the German–Armenian Fund (PMU GAF), and PFIs to provide support for women's entrepreneurship.

In February 2013 a Consultant Services Contract between ADB and PEM, Germany has been signed. The commencement date of the consulting services was the 1 March 2013 and the services will be completed by 31 December 2015. On 1 March 2013 the consultant's team commenced the work at SME DNC in Yerevan.

One of the important aspects of the TA is the elaboration of a mentorship mechanism which aims to strengthen women entrepreneurs' competitiveness through mutual support and sharing of experiences. An international expert Helene Zieschang was involved and has been working with program coordinator Gohar Ghabuzyan on elaboration of the stages of mentorship program which are described below. From 3<sup>rd</sup> of May till 17<sup>th</sup> of May the set up of mentorship mechanism was elaborated including:

- Description of mentorship mechanism
- Training module (for 5 days) for mentors and mentees
- Handouts and didactic material
- Practical tools for administration and facilitation of the mentorship program (monitoring, evaluation forms etc.)
- Road map for mentoring (for mentors and mentees)

The next step will be the screening procedure to identify potential mentors and mentees which is planned for the end of May-beginning of June. The training will be conducted after final recruitment of mentors/mentees – by mid of June.

## **II. STAGES OF MENTORSHIP PROGRAM IN ARMENIA**

Before elaboration of the mentorship program, there were many discussions with women entrepreneurs from different regions as well as other stakeholders to explore the best way of implementing the program in Armenia. Based on the finding, the following sequence was developed:

- Screening / selection of mentors and mentees
- Training for mentors and mentees
- Matching mentors and mentees
- First steps for mentoring process
- Mentoring / monitoring
- Closing or continuing cycle
- Evaluation

## **A. SCREENING / SELECTION of mentors and mentees**

Mentors will be selected from the winners of „Best Women Entrepreneurs” Award 2012-2014. Since 2012, 3 awards were organized and about 30 women entrepreneurs were selected as winners. This pool of successful women entrepreneurs provides a chance for mentorship program to succeed in Armenia.

The list of winners will be screened by program staff and potential mentors will be selected considering the following criteria:

1. Successful experience of entrepreneurship
2. Knowledge of specific business aspects
3. 3 years of business experience
4. Readiness to support and share
5. Self-motivation and ability to create motivation
6. Communication skills: ability to use specific and objective language
7. Ability to give the big picture and develop specific goals
8. Ability to inspire and create a positive and productive atmosphere
9. Treating people with respect
10. Being trustworthy and responsible

The mentors will be selected either if they have the above-mentioned qualities or we see the potential in them to develop those.

Selected mentors will be invited to participate in the mentorship program and will be included upon their confirmation.

Mentees will be selected mainly from previous start-up programs implemented by SME DNC. Those are women entrepreneurs who have just started a business and need further support and advice for development of their businesses.

## **B. TRAINING module for mentors and mentees**

The training will have two objectives – to develop necessary skills and attitude among mentors and mentees and to increase participants’ ability to lead the mentorship process. It will consist of the following aspects:

- About mentorship - clarifying what mentorship is, what are its benefits, pros and cons
- Trust building – acceptance from both sides and clarifying expectations, confidentiality
- Skills development – active listening, assertiveness, honest and correct feedback etc.
- Matching mentors and mentees – based on personal preferences and SWOT analysis
- First steps of mentoring – goal setting, planning, discuss working preferences etc.

Full module of the training is attached as *Annex I*.

## **C. MATCHING mentor with mentee**

Matching mentors and mentees will be organized during the training and will take 1 training day. It will be based on 2 aspects – personal match and the strength-weakness match.

Personal match will be taken from the characteristics of the participants found during one of the exercises and matched to the preferred characteristics of the mentees.

SWOT analysis will be used as a tool to identify strengths and weaknesses of participants and to reveal the matching parts.

Mentees will select their preferred mentors and vice versa. The facilitators will give his/her recommendations of matching pairs. And the final decision will be made together with the participants.

#### **D. FIRST STEPS of mentorship relationship**

The first steps will be taken by the formed pairs after the matching process. The pairs will define specific goals for the mentoring period and will elaborate concrete indicator to measure the implementation success. Gantt chart will be used to plan mentoring activities, set checking points and to indicate the closing date.

The pairs will also elaborate mentoring rules and boundaries, e.g. when to call, which topics are not to be touched, confidentiality etc.

The facilitator will also discuss with the pairs how to keep the program staff informed, decide on how the monitoring process will be performed as well as discuss the documentation procedures.

#### **E. MENTORING / MONITORING process**

For this pilot project, each mentoring process will be planned for about 3 months to ensure a reasonable success result. During this time the monitoring process will be quite intensive to detect all needed improvements and to facilitate the process. As the idea of mentorship is still far away from people's mind-set in Armenia, there is a need for intensive facilitation of the process during the pilot phase of the program. Special monitoring questions will be used to follow up of the mentoring relationships which are presented in [Annex 2](#).

The process starts with the mentor-mentee relationship which was created during the training. Goal-setting is another important part of mentoring which was also facilitated during the training. It is important that the pairs strictly follow the set goals and the decided timeframes. As facilitators, we will encourage to mentees to be proactive and take on the initiative for the mentoring process.

The pairs are free to decide the ways of communication – individual meetings, Skype calls, e-mails etc. The process will be monitored by the program staff in reasonable intervals. A monitoring plan will be developed for each pair based on defined goals and decided timeframe so that in case of critical situations there will be enough time to refresh the mentoring relations. The pairs will be encouraged to use “problem solving process” given to them during the training.

## **F. CLOSING OR CONTINUING CYCLE**

By the end of the mentoring period (3 months) pairs will state the results and lessons learnt. The closing date must be fixed in the beginning of mentoring process. The closing part will be organized by program staff as a separate workshop and will be used also for evaluation of the program results. This will give a basis for developing a standard for implementation of future mentorship processes.

During the closing workshop, the pairs will finish the mentoring cycle and decide whether to enter into new mentoring relations with setting other goals.

## **G. EVALUATION of mentoring process**

An evaluation mechanism should be established at the beginning of the mentoring process. We will seek informal feedback at all stages of the program so that any sudden unplanned changes or problems can be addressed in time.

The evaluation will include the results of the mentoring process and the quality of the relation between each pair of mentor and mentee. The evaluation of each mentoring results will be done based on the set goals and measurements that were decided at the beginning of the process. Whilst the quality of mentoring relationship will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Usefulness and effect of the mentoring process
- Intensiveness of relations
- Readiness to continue relations in the future

Questionnaires will be used to survey both mentors and mentees to check the quality of the mentoring relations. The evaluation questionnaires are attached as [Annex 3+4](#).

## **III. Recommendations and comments**

Given the fact that the mentorship program is a first pilot in Armenia and we found out that it's not a natural work relation among entrepreneurs, we come up with the following recommendations:

1. As the mentorship program is quite new for Armenia, it is recommended to pilot it for a limited number of entrepreneurs, particularly women entrepreneurs from "Best woman entrepreneur" Award winners as mentors and start-up program participants as mentees.
2. Being involved in mentorship is not usual for Armenian entrepreneurs and therefore the program should be set in a way that both sides see their benefits from their involvement, like set of instruments for their personal success development, free training on skills development, networking benefit among participants etc.
3. Prior to the mentoring process, it's worth to conduct a training for mentors and mentees so that they take ownership for the mentoring process as well as develop skills and attitude necessary for successful results. It is suggested to conduct a 5-day training including

capacity building of participants; matching mentors and mentees as well as set up of the mentoring process.

4. It is recommended to conduct the training out of Yerevan to assure that participants are fully concentrated and have an opportunity to create the necessary mutual trust and good relations. It is also cost-effective as most of participants are foreseen to be from different regions of Armenia and accommodation in Yerevan is much more expensive.
5. We recommend to pilot the first phase in a 3-month period, choosing only short term goals, to detect those points which need correction from the start. Therefore, it is important to intensively monitor this phase.
6. Short term goals will also motivate the participants if they see first results in a reasonable time frame and will be interested in continuing mentoring if it turns out successful and helpful.
7. It will help to deepen the performance of the participants if an experienced trainer, who knows not only the topic but also is familiar with the culture, could be involved in the execution of the training part.
8. If the pilot phase is successful, the mentorship mechanism could be expanded to other program of SME DNC (youth entrepreneurship, rural areas etc.).