

JOINT PROGRAMME:  
**Accelerating Progress towards  
Rural Women's Economic Empowerment**



## ADVANCING RURAL WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT THROUGH **CLIMATE-RESILIENT AGRICULTURE**

Experiences and Ways Forward from the Joint Programme  
on Rural Women's Economic Empowerment

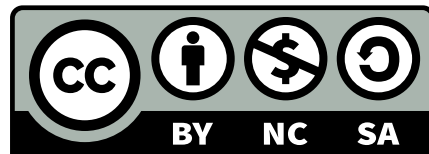
Required citation:

FAO, IFAD, UN Women, and WFP, 2022. Rural Women's Economic Empowerment through Climate-Resilient Agriculture: Experiences and Ways Forward from the Joint Programme on Rural Women's Economic Empowerment, New York.

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this information product do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), and the World Food Programme (WFP), concerning the legal or development status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Dashed lines on maps represent approximate border lines for which there may not yet be full agreement. The mention of specific companies or products of manufacturers, whether or not these have been patented, does not imply that these have been endorsed or recommended by FAO, IFAD, UN Women nor WFP in preference to others of a similar nature that are not mentioned.

The views expressed in this information product are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the United Nations, including FAO, IFAD, UN Women, WFP, and the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office.

© UN Women, FAO, IFAD, WFP, 2022



Some rights reserved. This work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 IGO licence (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO; <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/igo/legalcode>).

Under the terms of this licence, this work may be copied, redistributed and adapted for non-commercial purposes, provided that the work is appropriately cited. In any use of this work, there should be no suggestion that FAO, IFAD, UN Women, or WFP endorse any specific organization, products or services. The use of the FAO, IFAD, UN Women, and WFP logos is not permitted. If the work is adapted, then it must be licensed under the same or equivalent Creative Commons licence. If a translation of this work is created, it must include the following disclaimer along with the required citation: "This translation was not created by the FAO, IFAD, UN Women, or WFP. FAO, IFAD, UN Women, and WFP are not responsible for the content or accuracy of this translation. The original [Language] edition shall be the authoritative edition."

Disputes arising under the licence that cannot be settled amicably will be resolved by mediation and arbitration as described in Article 8 of the licence except as otherwise provided herein. The applicable mediation rules will be the mediation rules of the World Intellectual Property Organization <http://www.wipo.int/amc/en/mediation/rules> and any arbitration will be conducted in accordance with the Arbitration Rules of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL).

Third-party materials. Users wishing to reuse material from this work that is attributed to a third party, such as tables, figures or images, are responsible for determining whether permission is needed for that reuse and for obtaining permission from the copyright holder. The risk of claims resulting from infringement of any third-party-owned component in the work rests solely with the user.

This policy brief was prepared by Linda Mayoux (Independent Consultant) and Carla Kraft (UN Women), edited by Andy Quan and designed by Oliver Gantner, under the overall supervision of Seemin Qayum (UN Women). UN Women gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the Technical Advisory Committee members from FAO, IFAD and WFP as well as the reviews by Venge Nyirongo and Jocelyn Chu of UN Women.

Cover Photo: UN Women Ethiopia/2018

# ADVANCING RURAL WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT THROUGH **CLIMATE-RESILIENT AGRICULTURE**

## Experiences and Ways Forward from the Joint Programme on Rural Women's Economic Empowerment

This policy brief is part of a series to present evidence from the strategies and praxis of the UN Joint Programme on Rural Women's Economic Empowerment (JP RWEE). Based on case studies, experiences and evaluations from the JP RWEE, it draws conclusions and makes recommendations for expanding sustainable development and climate change policies and programmes, particularly for climate-resilient agriculture, that simultaneously advance rural women's economic empowerment and protect the planet. It aims to enable international, national and local stakeholders to formulate evidence-based policies and practices that build on JP RWEE achievements to date, and also to address challenges and gaps towards the effective promotion of gender equality in a rapidly changing climate.

The UN Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (JP RWEE) is a global initiative that aims to secure livelihoods and rights for rural women. The programme is jointly implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in seven countries: Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda (2014–2021). A second phase of the JP RWEE programme (2022–2027) will initially focus on Nepal, Niger, the Pacific Islands, Tanzania and Tunisia.



# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>The gendered impacts of climate change in rural areas</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Climate-resilient agriculture for rural women’s economic empowerment: JP RWEE innovations and experiences</b>	<b>5</b>
	An enabling policy environment	6
	Promoting local, ancestral and indigenous knowledge and practices	8
	Access to climate-resilient agricultural inputs and services	8
	Promoting rural women’s land rights and tenure security	9
	Saving water and energy—and rural women’s time	10
	Access to capacity-building, training and information	11
	Ensuring rural women’s and girls’ voice, agency, participation and organization	12
<b>3</b>	<b>Lessons learned and recommendations</b>	<b>15</b>



**The gendered impacts  
of climate change  
in rural areas**

**1**

Climate change has led to the accelerating degradation of rural environments and diminishing natural resources on which billions of people depend for sustaining their livelihoods. Climate change, biodiversity loss, desertification, and pollution, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic and conflicts, have intensified into widespread and interlinked crises that have distinct and disproportionate impacts on rural women and girls and threaten the realization of a full range of their human rights.<sup>1</sup> Land degradation, mainly caused by rapid expansion and the unsustainable management of industrial agriculture, grazing and forestry, affects 3.2 billion people, especially rural communities and smallholder farmers, many of whom are women.<sup>2</sup>

Environmental degradation and disasters induced by climate change intensify conflicts over resources and exacerbate rural women's already limited access to and control over resources such as land, water, forests, finance, technologies and information. Consequently, rural women tend to be less resilient to crises and shocks, which compound their already disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work. The gendered impacts of climate change are also compounded through its acceleration of rural to urban migration as rural ecosystems become degraded. Building climate resilience in rural areas and safeguarding the rights and livelihoods of rural women and girls is thus a critical part of climate action.

As food systems are responsible for one third of global greenhouse gas emissions,<sup>3</sup> the need to adopt sustainable, gender-responsive and climate-resilient approaches is urgent.

The climate and environmental impacts of unsustainable agricultural and food systems and the consequences for women, girls and communities are widespread.<sup>4</sup> Industrial agriculture is highly dependent on monocultures, genetically modified seeds and massive inputs of costly fossil fuel-dependent chemical pesticides, fertilizers and machinery. These are all destructive to the environment and have impacts on incomes, food security and nutrition, as well as on a range of their human rights. As the UN Secretary-General has highlighted in *Our Common Agenda*, shifting from economies that are dependent on fossil fuels to ones that are low emission and climate resilient is an imperative for the survival of humans and the planet.<sup>5</sup>

Women and girls must be a central focus of these sustainable, climate-resilient strategies and practices. Rural women play key roles in food security and nutrition, rural livelihoods and agricultural production, as well as in biodiversity conservation and natural resource management. Yet persistent structural barriers and discriminatory social norms continue to constrain rural women's access to land and productive resources, markets and technologies, and undermine their decision-making power and the exercise of their voice and agency.<sup>6</sup>

1. UN ECOSOC. 2022. *Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes*. Report of the Secretary-General. [E/CN.6/2022/3](#).
2. L. Olsson, H. Barbosa, S. Bhadwal et al. 2019. "Land Degradation." In: *Climate Change and Land: an IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems*. P.R. Shukla, J. Skea, E. Calvo Buendia, V. Masson-Delmotte, H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, P. Zhai et al. (Eds.).
3. M. Crippa, E. Solazzo, D. Guizzardi et al. [Food systems are responsible for a third of global anthropogenic GHG emissions](#). *Nature Food* (2021).
4. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) 2020. [Emissions due to agriculture. Global, regional and country trends 2000–2018](#); UNEP. 2016. [Global gender and environment outlook](#).
5. United Nations. 2021. *Our Common Agenda* – Report of the Secretary-General. [E/21/1/8](#).
6. United Nations General Assembly. 2021. *Improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas*. Report of the Secretary-General. [A/76/241](#).



Globally, a quarter of employed women work in agriculture, forestry and fishing,<sup>7</sup> and agriculture remains the most important employment sector for women in low-income and lower-middle-income countries.<sup>8</sup> Still, less than 13 per cent of agricultural landholders globally are women, although there is variation among regions.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, women worldwide and including in rural areas play a critical role in developing and implementing responses to climate change, in part from their local knowledge of environmentally sustainable practices at household and community levels. This is key to building resilience and making climate action more effective at all levels; yet rural women's voices, agency and participation continue to be under-supported, under-resourced, undervalued and under-recognized.

One promising practice to leverage the co-benefits of gender equality and climate action<sup>10</sup> is through 'climate-smart' or 'climate-resilient agriculture', an approach that promotes green and climate-resilient practices to transform food systems through three main interconnected aims: increasing sustainable agricultural productivity and

incomes; building resilience to climate change; and progressively eliminating greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>11</sup> Building climate resilience means building the ability of individuals, households, communities, institutions, systems and societies to prevent, resist, absorb, adapt, respond and recover from the impacts from climate change, environmental degradation and disasters without compromising long-term prospects for sustainable development, peace and security, human rights and well-being for all.<sup>12</sup>

Advancing gender equality and women's empowerment strategies through climate-resilient agriculture is fundamental, not only for the equal distribution of benefits from climate-resilience policies and practices but also to increase the effectiveness of those policies as part of a more sustainable solution for over half the world's rural poor population. As such, the diversity of rural women and girls and their particular needs and priorities require tailored policy and programmatic responses to redress gender inequalities and enhance their livelihoods, well-being, rights and resilience to current and future crises.

---

7. World Bank Data. [Employment in agriculture, female \(% of female employment\) \(modeled ILO estimate\)](#). Accessed 29 January 2022.

8. International Labour Organization (ILO). 2016. *Women at Work – Trends 2016*. Geneva: ILO.

9. FAO. Undated. [Gender and Land Rights Database](#).

10. UN Women. 2016. [Leveraging Co-Benefits Between Gender Equality and Climate Action for Sustainable Development](#).

11. FAO. Undated. [Climate-Smart Agriculture](#).

12. FAO et al. 2018. [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018: Building Climate Resilience for Food Security and Nutrition](#), Rome: FAO.





**Climate-resilient  
agriculture for rural  
women's economic  
empowerment: JP RWEE  
innovations and experiences**

**2**



The Joint Programme on “Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (JP RWEE) is a global initiative with an overarching goal to secure rural women’s livelihoods and rights in the context of sustainable development, jointly implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UN Women and the World Food Programme (WFP) in its first phase in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda (2014 to June 2021). The JP RWEE adopted a holistic approach to women’s economic empowerment, working towards four interrelated outcomes: i. improved food and nutrition security, ii. increased income to sustain livelihoods, iii. enhanced participation in decision-making, and iv. a more gender-responsive policy environment for rural women in agriculture. This brief draws on the evidence and praxis developed through the JP RWEE and, based on these experiences and internal and external evaluations, draws conclusions and makes recommendations for expanding climate change policies and programmes, particularly for sustainable development and climate-resilient agriculture, that simultaneously advance gender equality, rural women’s economic empowerment and protect the planet.

While the interventions of the JP RWEE were not initially designed to build climate resilience, taking place in contexts at high risk of the impacts of climate change, disasters and droughts, the agricultural interventions by necessity took into consideration environmental sustainability. The JP RWEE did this through mutually reinforcing means that can be replicated and scaled up globally including (a) fostering an enabling policy environment for rural women’s economic empowerment; (b) promoting local, ancestral

and indigenous knowledge and practices; (c) enhancing rural women’s agricultural productivity through increased access to climate-resilient inputs and services; (d) promoting rural women’s land rights and tenure security; (e) saving water and energy through access to time- and labour-saving technologies that reduce rural women’s disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work; (f) expanding access to capacity-building, training and information including on climate-resilient agriculture practices, markets and weather; and (g) ensuring rural women’s and girls’ voice, agency, participation and mobilization. Climate resilience figures more centrally in the JP RWEE second phase (2022–2027). A summary of JP RWEE strategies can be found in Box 1.

## An enabling policy environment

A number of international and regional human rights and policy instruments promote gender equality and women’s rights and climate action, some with linkages to agriculture. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development constitutes an overarching and transformative framework for rural development and rural women’s empowerment. It calls for investments in developing rural areas through sustainable agriculture and fisheries and supporting women farmers, herders and fishers in developing countries, in particular the least developed countries.<sup>13</sup> Of particular relevance, among other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), are Goal 1 to end poverty, Goal 2 to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, Goal 5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, Goal 13 to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts and Goal 15 to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems.

---

13. United Nations General Assembly. 2021. *Improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas*. Report of the Secretary-General. [A/76/241](#).

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action<sup>14</sup> highlights the importance of addressing rural women's disproportionate poverty, share of unpaid care and domestic work, and vulnerabilities to environmental degradation and climate change.<sup>15</sup>

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), specifically in Article 14, calls on States Parties to eliminate discrimination against rural women,<sup>16</sup> while General Recommendation No. 34 (2016) underscores that rural development policies ignore the priorities and rights of women, including those of women farmers and migrant women workers employed in agriculture.<sup>17</sup> CEDAW's General Recommendation No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change notes the direct impacts of climate change and disasters on rural and indigenous women as food producers and agricultural workers. It underscores that their climate resilience is reduced by their unequal land rights and tenure security, and the outmigration of men.<sup>18</sup>

On climate action, the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) recognizes the centrality of gender equality, women's empowerment, intergenerational equity and human rights, including the rights to health and development and the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities

and people in vulnerable situations.<sup>19</sup>

The Climate Pact of Glasgow recognizes both the importance of agriculture, sustainable land use and biodiversity in the fight against climate change while emphasizing gender equality, the empowerment of women and women's full, meaningful and equal participation in climate action.<sup>20</sup>

Combined, these instruments create a comprehensive blueprint for advancing rural women's economic empowerment and addressing climate change at global, national and local levels. To improve the national gender-responsive public policy environment for rural women's economic empowerment and climate-resilient livelihoods, the JP RWEE strengthened the capacity of civil servants, public officials, policymakers and parliamentarians to mainstream gender equality considerations into land, food, agriculture, nutrition and rural employment policies, laws and budgets, aligned with relevant international policy frameworks.

For example, through its collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food in Guatemala, the JP RWEE worked on the development and implementation of gender-responsive agricultural policies including the first Institutional Policy for Gender Equality and its Strategy (2014–2023). In Niger, local and national public officials were trained in gender analysis of agricultural

---

14. United Nations. 1996. *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995. [A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1](#). See chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

15. UN ECOSOC. 2020. *Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly*. Report of the Secretary-General. [E/CN.6/2020/3](#).

16. United Nations. 1979. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. UN Treaty Series vol. 1249, no. 20378, p. 13. Adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 1979.

17. United Nations. 2016. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. General recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women. [CEDAW/C/GC/34](#).

18. United Nations. 2018. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. General recommendation No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change. [CEDAW/C/GC/37](#).

19. UNFCCC. 2016. Report of the Conference of the Parties on its twenty-first session, held in Paris from 30 November to 13 December 2015. [FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1](#).

20. UNFCCC. 2021. Organization of work, including for the sessions of the subsidiary bodies. [FCCC/PA/CMA/2021/L.16](#).



policies and agricultural statistical managers were trained in gender-sensitive data collection, gender analysis of data and the production of gender-sensitive reports in the framework of national agricultural surveys. This capacity-building helps to overcome the lack of gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data that are important for formulating and strengthening evidence-based policies and programmes and tracking progress on rural women's rights and livelihoods in the context of climate-resilient agriculture.

## Promoting local, ancestral and indigenous knowledge and practices

Women farmers, producers and cooperatives have increasingly adopted sustainable agricultural approaches, such as agroecology, organic and regenerative agriculture, based on synergies with natural ecosystems. This supports climate-resilient livelihoods and food security and nutrition rooted in ancestral knowledge, practices and techniques for sustaining the diversity and quality of farming systems, crops, seeds, water and soil, ecological pest and weed management, and food and nutrition provision for diversified and balanced diets.<sup>21</sup> In many countries, rural women play important roles in the conservation of natural resources and biodiversity, growing a variety of species, including plants that enhance soil nutrients, adapt to local climatic conditions, and are resistant to pest and diseases. As seed managers, they have also preserved highly adaptive local seeds based on the ancestral knowledge of seed selection, processing and preservation that is passed down from mother to daughter, generation after generation.<sup>22</sup>

The JP RWEE has incorporated these approaches and used a holistic methodology that builds on rural women's knowledge and skills and helps women to organize in culturally attuned ways, which has enabled women's participation, decision-making and leadership.

The JP RWEE has promoted ancestral and indigenous knowledge and emphasized the production of climate-resilient native crops and livestock. For example, in Guatemala a key focus has been on working with Quechua communities to learn from and disseminate indigenous knowledge to increase climate resilience while improving food security and nutrition and rural women's incomes. Native herbs and plants, such as Mesoamerican species of blackberry, chipilín (a perennial legume) and amaranth, and other vegetables, such as tomato, chard, chili pepper, celery and cabbage, were cultivated to increase crop diversification. A 'Compendium of Native Plants and Recipes' was produced for distribution to local rural communities to increase knowledge of indigenous and climate-resilient practices.

## Access to climate-resilient agricultural inputs and services

Rural women tend to have less access to agricultural inputs and services than men due to discriminatory social norms, limited access to assets in their names and lower incomes. JP RWEE interventions responded by providing increased access to a variety of improved and high-yielding seeds for saleable staple crops, including wheat, maize, rice and vegetables, as well as to agricultural machinery and irrigation equipment (e.g. electric motor pump sets for shallow tube wells, drip irrigation), techniques

21. FAO. Undated. [Agroecology Knowledge Hub](#); M. Altieri and C. Nicholls. 2004. [Biodiversity and pest management in agroecosystems](#). CRC Press; S.R. Gliessman. 2015. [Agroecology. The ecology of sustainable food systems](#). CRC Press.

22. B.P. Resurrección, B.A. Bee, I. Dankelman, C.M. Young Park, M. Haldar and C.P. McMullen. 2019. [Gender-Transformative Climate Change Adaptation: Advancing Social Equity](#). Background Paper. Stockholm Environment Institute.

(e.g. seed-bed preparation, plastic tunnels for off-season vegetable production) and extension services.

For example, in Nepal the development of an irrigation system using shallow tube wells changed the cropping pattern from low-yielding to high-yielding, high-value and saleable staple crops, and resulted in a 43 per cent increase in the yield of wheat, 20 per cent in maize and 50 per cent in rice.

To increase yields and reduce post-harvest losses, the JP RWEE worked with rural women's cooperatives and farmers groups to produce vegetables using climate-smart technologies and production-enhancing agricultural techniques. In Rwanda, for example, to create food reserves at household levels, hermetic storage bags and tarpaulins were distributed, thereby supporting household nutrition and freeing up space and time to focus on cash crops.

Gender-responsive agricultural extension services have the potential to facilitate a shift to higher-value crops while at the same time promoting the use of more climate-friendly farm technologies. However, agriculture extension services are usually provided by men and often only target men, which makes women participants dependent on their husbands or neighbours for receiving key information and capacity-building resources. In Ethiopia, the JP RWEE contributed to the implementation of sustainable agricultural practices, effective land management, and income generation by increasing women's access to agricultural extension and advisory services. In Guatemala, the JP RWEE worked with the government to pilot the Gender and Rural Advisory Services Assessment Tool,

which analyses rural advisory services from a gender perspective and helps ensure that extension and agricultural services reach rural women.

## Promoting rural women's land rights and tenure security

Women's land rights and secure access to land and resources are essential for their economic autonomy, improving their livelihoods. Yet, prevailing gender inequalities, combined with the amplified effect of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, undermine women's exercise of their rights to land and other productive resources. Further, global trends—such as commodification and financialization of land, climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation and urbanization—are exacerbating pressure on land and the natural resources critical for climate-resilient agriculture.<sup>23</sup> While normative and policy frameworks to protect and promote women's rights to land have been developed at the national, regional and global levels, including the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, rural women's access to, control over and ownership of land remains unequal.

Women consistently own less land than men and in many cases the gender gaps are quite large.<sup>24</sup> Globally, almost one third of employed women work in agriculture, including forestry and fishing, with agriculture the most important employment sector for women in low-income and lower-middle-income countries. Yet, less than 13 per cent of agricultural landholders are women, although this varies widely among regions.<sup>25</sup>

23. UN Women and OHCHR. 2020. [Realizing women's rights to land and other productive resources: Second edition](#).

24. C. Doss et al. 2013. "[Gender Inequalities in Ownership and Control of Land in Africa. Myth versus Reality](#)." Washington, D.C.: IFPRI Discussion Paper 01308. International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI); UN Women and OHCHR. 2020.

25. FAO. Undated. [Gender and Land Rights Database](#); UN Women and OHCHR. 2020.



Even where women own or have access to small amounts of land, it is often of inferior quality and more prone to climate-related flooding, drought and biodiversity loss.<sup>26</sup>

The JP RWEE has promoted more equitable decision-making and participation in relation to women's land rights and tenure security as an integral part of climate-resilient and sustainable livelihood strategies. In Liberia, the programme publicized legal frameworks for rural women's land access, subsequent to the passing of the 2018 Land Rights Act, which advances rural women's rights to land. Further, in partnership with local civil society networks, social mobilization, advocacy and awareness-raising contributed to securing support from local leaders and communities for rural women's land rights, including granting of individual and titles to land and land distribution programmes. In Ethiopia, the JP RWEE supported women's rights in the newly drafted regulation on land compensation. In Rwanda, the JP RWEE facilitated policy dialogues on agriculture, gender, rural development and land management. The JP RWEE worked closely together with the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources on the development of the five-year Agriculture Gender Strategy which addresses women's land rights. Both the strategy and the initiatives enhanced rural women's knowledge and increased their participation and involvement in land use and land management.

## **Saving water and energy —and rural women's time**

Climate-resilient strategies to save water, energy and other resources go hand in hand with women's economic empowerment. Rural women's time poverty and disproportionate

responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work—for example, water and fuel collection and cooking—constrain their livelihoods and income-earning potential. In rural areas, limited or weaker public services and lack of basic infrastructure increase both the time burdens and drudgery associated with unpaid care and domestic work tasks, which are exacerbated during crises and the impacts of climate change. Outmigration of men, boys and younger women due to interlinked factors of climate change and conflicts over scarce resources have significantly increased the responsibilities and workload for women left behind. Labour-saving technologies such as energy-efficient and environmentally friendly improved cooking stoves and rainwater harvesting have the potential to reduce women's unpaid care and domestic work, saving time, facilitating increased crop production and avoiding environmental degradation.

JP RWEE strategies combine the aims of climate resilience for women and their communities with the introduction of time- and labour-saving technologies, including improvements in the supply of water for drinking, irrigation and cooking. Improving water harvesting systems has benefits for agricultural production and improving sustainability, including for household kitchen gardens that are key for food security and nutrition, and reducing women's and girls' share of unpaid care and domestic work, in particular the time, effort and risk involved in fetching water for families.

For example, in Ethiopia, women participants employed time- and labour-saving technologies, such as milk processing machines, maize shellers and beehives, enhancing productivity and income. Previously, when using traditional milk

---

26. See J. Beddington et al. 2012. *Achieving Food Security in the Face of Climate Change: Final Report from the Commission on Sustainable Agriculture and Climate Change*. Copenhagen, Denmark: CGIAR (Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research) Research Program on CCAFS (Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security); FAO. 2011. *Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development: The State of Food and Agriculture*. Rome; FAO. 2019. *Empowering Rural Women, Powering Agriculture*. Rome.

processing techniques, it took women 6 hours to produce 1 to 2 kilograms of quality cheese and butter; now, it takes them less than 30 minutes. There was also a focus on access to water pumps. In Kyrgyzstan, water-saving technologies and drip irrigation systems were applied for growing vegetables, increasing yields by three times the national average. In Liberia, borehole wells, operated by women, were constructed in kitchen gardens for access to water.

In Nepal, the JP RWEE technical and financial support for the installation of shallow tube wells gave easy access to water to rural women's households, including for bathing and washing clothes. This led to a significant reduction of their unpaid care and domestic work and more time for economic activities. In Niger, the Dimitra Clubs<sup>27</sup> mobilized funds for automatic pumping of a community borehole, which has increased access to drinking water, diminished conflict over water, and reduced women's and girl's workloads, thereby improving girls' school attendance. And in Rwanda, rainwater harvesting training was complemented by provision of water harvesting infrastructure, farming techniques such as drip irrigation, and water tanks for coping with droughts. Women participants can now store water for farming and household uses, reducing the physical and time burdens associated with water collection, and ensuring equitable access to and control over water resources.

## Access to capacity-building, training and information

Unequal access to knowledge and information has perpetuated rural women's agricultural productivity gap and hindered their income-generation potential. Through the JP RWEE's various capacity-building activities and

trainings, rural women gained valuable skills in agricultural production, small business development, leadership, nutrition and more. Rural women received training on the diversification of crops and the cultivation of new types of vegetables, which helped raise awareness of the importance of dietary diversity.

While not an expressed aim of the programme, the trainings and capacity-building contributed to the resilience of households in managing social, economic and environmental shocks, while promoting the protection of the planet. For example, trainings on regenerative agricultural practices, including establishing home gardens, medicinal gardens and native plant gardens; pruning and establishing fruit trees; composting, sewage channeling and recycling resources for gardens; and using organic fertilizers, fungicides and pesticides helped build resilience and improve local ecosystems, and foster income sustainability and food security and nutrition. In Ethiopia, rural women gained knowledge and skills on the effective use of natural fertilizers and composting; the preparation of nutritious food for families; and mixing crops (teff with beans) to promote agrobiodiversity. In Kyrgyzstan, tailored trainings and practical skill development on poultry farming enabled rural farmers to grow various breeds of chicken, focusing on producing more eggs or meat. At the same time, using the same plot of land and available feed reduced the need to buy additional inputs. This was a shift from the previous practice of raising chickens only for household consumption and not considering it an economic activity.

Digital technologies have been used to improve access to weather and market information, thereby supporting climate-resilient production and greater access to

---

27. Dimitra Clubs are groups of women, men and young people in both mixed- and single-gender groups who regularly come together to discuss challenges and bring about change in their communities. They act as a coordination mechanism at the village level and as a driver for women and girls to develop their leadership skills.



market for products. For example, in Nepal farmers identified the need for reliable forecasts to predict monsoons, locust swarms and other weather and environmental events. The JP RWEE connected farmers with digital technology and provided trainings on new varieties of climate-resilient crops. In Rwanda, interactive radio programmes were used to promote sharing agroclimatic information, which helped to break down barriers to rural women's access to such information.

## Ensuring rural women's and girls' voice, agency, participation and organization

Promoting rural women's full, equal and meaningful participation and advancing their leadership and decision-making roles are key to both women's economic empowerment and more effective resource management and sustainable agricultural and food systems. Addressing barriers to women's equal participation and advancing their right to organize has contributed to the successes of the JP RWEE, including in the adoption of climate-resilient agricultural practices. For example, in Liberia, more than one thousand rural women are now active members of land committees to advocate for women's land rights and tenure security and more producer organizations are led by women. Similar to the other participating countries, these women reported having greater voice in their households and communities, improved self-confidence, greater skills and more opportunities to participate and equally contribute.

Community groups in all seven countries are increasingly significant for building collective power and breaking down barriers to rural women's participation, especially community-based and women-led farmers groups,

cooperatives, associations and Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs). These organizations plan and deliver climate-resilience support for women, and also engage men to varying degrees and in various ways. Women farmers leverage such social networks to share information they value, including on climate change, impacts on food security and strategies to mitigate them.

The JP RWEE has offered critical support to formalize and legally register these groups, such as cooperatives, and improve rural women's capacity to effectively operate and manage them, which has enabled participants to build linkages to new markets and access services offered by governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In Guatemala, strengthening community groups created positive forward momentum for indigenous rural women's economic development. Community group activities led to significant results, including higher crop yields, more marketable products, and increased access to loans. In Nepal, many rural women joined cooperatives, thereby benefiting from cooperative services and training on cooperative management, account keeping and business plan preparation, enhancing their knowledge and skills and increasing their participation and uptake of leadership positions.

Moreover, the organization of rural women's and women's producer groups has increased their access to finance, for example, through group financing or revolving fund programmes, allowing rural women to avoid taking loans from local money lenders and financial institutions, which generally charge high interest rates, require complex documentation processes, and impose rules that are difficult for rural women to follow.

Instead, rural women have increased their access to and control over pre-production, production and post-production resources, assets and services, which are critical for their food and nutrition security. In Kyrgyzstan, cooperatives helped rural women access revolving funds to run Joint Economic Initiatives which enabled the employment of over 1,300 rural women. The cooperatives

have been collaborating with the Union of Cooperatives of Kyrgyzstan, a national institution promoting the development of cooperatives through legal frameworks, institutional capacity-building, and investment and marketing opportunities, thereby increasing their access to the business community, investors, funds and marketing opportunities.

### **BOX 1. What's worked: JP RWEE select strategies**

#### **Fostering an enabling policy environment**

- Strengthening the capacity of civil servants, public officials at local and national levels, policymakers and parliamentarians to mainstream gender into land, food, agriculture, nutrition and rural employment policies, laws and budgets.

#### **Promoting local, ancestral and indigenous knowledge and practices**

- Promoting and sharing indigenous knowledge and upgrading production of native crops and livestock that are climate resilient.
- Scaling up the adoption of sustainable agricultural approaches, such as agroecology, organic and regenerative agriculture, based on synergies with natural ecosystems.

#### **Improving climate-resilient production**

- Promoting new high-yield varieties, particularly of staple crops, through the distribution of improved climate-resilient seeds, inputs, technologies and techniques and accompanied by training on organic methods for fertilization and pest control.
- Improving livestock and poultry breeds and rearing technologies for more profitable livestock businesses.
- Including women in capacity-building, including Farmer Field Schools, through adapting locations and timings for both women and men and employing women as well as men as trainers.
- Increasing women farmers' access to climate-smart information by strengthening the capacity of agricultural extension workers and ensuring that digital and other climate information services are accessible, timely and user-friendly for women farmers.

#### **Increasing access to time- and labour-saving technologies**

- Promoting resource-saving technology including water-related technology, more efficient cooking stoves and solar technology that also reduce the time and drudgery of women's unpaid work.



- Improving post-harvest practices that save resources and increase food security and women's incomes.
- Training on rainwater harvesting and the provision of water harvesting infrastructure, farming techniques such as drip irrigation, and water tanks to cope with droughts.

### Promoting land rights and tenure security for climate-resilient agriculture

- Promoting gender equality at the household level to tackle discriminatory social norms on property rights, division of labour, decision-making, freedom of movement and association, and freedom from all types of violence.
- Raising awareness and fostering local leaders' support for rural women's land rights and tenure security

### Enhancing capacity-building, training and information

- Training on regenerative agricultural practices, including establishing home gardens, medicinal gardens and native plant gardens; pruning and establishing fruit trees; composting; and using organic fertilizers, sewage channeling, recycled resources for gardens and organic fungicides and pesticides to help build resilience and improve local ecosystems and sustainability, while increasing incomes and food security and improving nutrition.
- Providing technical support to beneficiaries and increasing rural women's access to agricultural extension and advisory services.
- Improving access to weather and market information through digital technologies, including radio, to support climate-resilient production and greater access to market for products.

### Supporting women's leadership, participation and organization

- Facilitating self-help groups, producer organizations and cooperatives to deliver information on climate-resilient agriculture to rural women.
- Enabling women at the community level through producer organizations and cooperatives to raise funds for climate-resilient inputs and services.
- Promoting the legalization, formalization and strengthening of producer organizations and cooperatives for improved services addressing rural women's particular needs and for increased rural women's participation, decision-making and leadership.
- Training on cooperative management and strengthening including on cooperative account keeping and business plan preparation to enhance rural women's knowledge and skills and increase their participation and uptake of leadership positions.

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a red and green patterned garment, washing her hands under a running faucet. Water is splashing around her hands. The background is a blurred green outdoor setting.

## Lessons learned and recommendations

3

The urgency and scale of the global climate crisis coupled with the global shock of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought into focus the need to build climate resilience at all levels, particularly with regards to food systems and agricultural production. Addressing entrenched gender inequalities means calling for integrated, gender-responsive rural and agricultural development approaches that weave together rural women's rights, livelihoods, well-being and resilience to create a better chance of lasting results for people and the planet.<sup>28</sup>

Building on the lessons learned and good practices, the second phase of the JP RWEE programme (2022–2027) aims to integrate the following recommendations. Governments, development actors and other relevant stakeholders should also consider the following actions to strengthen rural women's economic empowerment through climate-resilient agriculture:

- Accelerate implementation of existing commitments to gender equality, rural women's human rights and climate action, in particular the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Paris Agreement and the Glasgow Climate Pact.
- Develop and implement gender-responsive, intersectional and integrated agricultural and rural development policies and programmes that respond to the needs and priorities of rural women and girls who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.
- Transition away from fossil fuel-based agricultural practices including chemical fertilizers, by promoting organic, regenerative, agroecological, climate-resilient agriculture.
- Build the resilience and adaptive capacities of rural women, smallholder farmers and agricultural workers to climate change and environmental degradation.
- Promote and implement ancestral, indigenous knowledge and techniques to improve agricultural practices, conserve biodiversity and protect the planet.
- Promote rural women's capacities, skills, knowledge and their access to finance, information and markets to engage in climate-resilient agricultural production, agroecology and sustainable natural resource management.
- Increase women farmers' access to climate-smart information by strengthening the capacity of agricultural extension workers and ensuring that digital and other climate information services are accessible, timely and user-friendly for women farmers.

---

28. See for example: United Nations General Assembly. 2021. *Improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas*. Report of the Secretary-General. [A/76/241](#).



- Ensure rural women's full and equal land rights and tenure security and access to natural and productive resources, including water and sustainable energy.
- Invest in and make easily accessible affordable time- and labour-saving technologies to reduce rural women's and girls' disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work.
- Ensure rural women's full participation and decision-making at all levels in agricultural and rural development and environmental, climate and natural resource governance.
- Promote rural women and producer organizations by increasing their capacity, skills and services and build linkages to new markets and existing services offered by governments or NGOs.
- Integrate a lens of climate resilience in all rural programmatic interventions.
- Tackle discriminatory social norms, including through engaging men and boys in measures and programmes for rural women and gender equality.
- Expand the collection, analysis, dissemination and use of gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data fundamental to develop gender-responsive agricultural policies, programmes and strategies and to better understand rural women's and girls' contributions to climate action and food security and nutrition.



**JOINT PROGRAMME:  
Accelerating Progress towards  
Rural Women's Economic Empowerment**



The UN Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (JP RWEE) is a global initiative that aims to secure livelihoods and rights for rural women. The programme is jointly implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in seven countries: Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda (2014–2021). A second phase of the JP RWEE programme (2022–2027) will initially focus on Nepal, Niger, the Pacific Islands, Tanzania and Tunisia.

FAO, IFAD, UN Women and WFP thank the Governments of Norway and Sweden for their generous contributions and support to the JP RWEE.

For additional information, please visit:  
<https://www.ifad.org/nl/jprwee>



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



Investing in rural people



World Food  
Programme