



The JP RWEE pathway to women's empowerment



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What is the Joint Programme RWEE?

The Joint Programme on “Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women” (JP RWEE) is a global initiative with the overarching goal to secure rural women’s livelihoods and rights in order to achieve sustainable development.

Jointly implemented by FAO, IFAD, WFP and UN Women in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger, and Rwanda, JP RWEE builds on best practices and comparative strengths to improve the status of women in rural areas.

Women are agents of change

Gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls is a pre-condition for the eradication of poverty and essential to achieve progress across all goals and targets set by the Sustainable Development Agenda. The JP RWEE facilitates transformation through rural women’s leadership, making gender equality and women’s empowerment a reality. Support to women’s economic empowerment allows for increased influence, education and information for women to decide the use of their income, savings and loans, and the ability to make decisions about their life.

Joining forces for higher impact

The JP RWEE is a multi-agency programme, the first between the three Rome-based agencies and UN Women. It builds on each Agency’s comparative advantage to improve the status of women in rural areas:

- **FAO** as specialist in developing technical knowledge and in providing expertise on gender equality issues in agriculture and rural development; as well as key player for global policy support on agriculture and food security;
- **IFAD** with an expertise in supporting governments on the implementation of rural investment programmes; in designing innovative approaches with comprehensive focus on targeting the poor, gender equality and women’s empowerment; and as leading agency innovating with household methodologies;
- **WFP** with gender-sensitive food assistance innovations for food-insecure populations such as “Purchase for Progress” or “Food for Assets” programmes and strong presence in rural areas;
- **UN Women** with its global mandate on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls; expertise on gender equality and rural women; strong links with gender equality advocates and women’s rights organizations; and presence around the world with convening power for both government and civil society institutions.

By joining forces, the four agencies - in collaboration with key implementing partners on the ground - managed to achieve better, stronger and more sustainable results in less than three years.

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Guatemala: Angelina Chu proud of her nursery production of different local vegetables



RWEE works to secure rural women's livelihoods and rights within the context of sustainable development

Key results

- **30,400** women empowered in 7 countries with a multi sectoral, multidimensional approach
- **10,500** men directly supported with capacity development and access to services and equipment
- Over **214,000** household members reached
- **26,500** women trained on innovative agricultural techniques
- **9,000** women received nutritional advice
- **13,000** women participated in leadership trainings
- **11,600** women accessed financial services
- **7,129** household members are now using the Gender Action Learning System for improved livelihood planning and equitable relations within the household
- Over **13,000** women received business development support for income generation
- More than **22,000** people participated in sensitization campaign on women's rights.

Investing in rural women: what does it mean?

Achieving gender equality and empowering women is a complex undertaking. In an effort to address the structural barriers that are preventing women from fully enjoying their rights, RWEE is investing in activities, innovative tools and approaches that bring about positive change. These include:

- Building women's leadership and fostering women's participation in farmer and producers' organizations;
- Reinforcing rural women's self-confidence, knowledge and skills - including technical and business-related capacity building - through training and learning;
- Transforming unequal power relations between men and women, promoting equitable sharing of resources, income and workload;
- Improving rural women's access to technologies that save time and labour to reduce their workloads and free up time for other activities;
- Enabling women's access to finance and financial services, helping them to transform their lives;
- Supporting gender-sensitive policies, programmes and regulatory frameworks for rural employment, addressing the different needs and constraints of women and men, to ensure access to equal opportunities.

The value of partnerships

Since its inception, the JP RWEE has developed solid partnerships with different stakeholders, from national governments and civil society organizations, to other UN Agencies and the private sector. This has increased the impact of the programme well beyond the targeted participants:

- In Ethiopia, the partnership created with the Land Administration to Nurture Development (LAND) project, funded by USAID, was instrumental to establish the regional *Taskforce on Women's Land Rights*;
- In Guatemala, a strategic alliance with the *Sustainable Rural Development Programme for the Northern Region* (PRODENORTE), implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and funded by IFAD, strengthened the joint efforts for the economic development of rural women in the Polochic Valley;
- In Liberia, the partnership with the *National Rural Women Structure and the Association of Women in Cross-Border Trade* gave voice to rural women in all government initiatives - including the constitutional reform process - and contributed to the scaling up of RWEE's approach for women's empowerment across the country;
- In Niger, the JP RWEE collaborates closely with the government's *3N Initiative* ("Les Nigériens nourrissent les Nigériens") to increase the resilience of vulnerable populations. The JP RWEE adopted its "communes de convergence" (coming together) approach, ensuring coordination among development actors to maximize the impact of their interventions;
- In Rwanda, thanks to the partnership established with the *Chamber of Women Entrepreneurs*, over 110 women used their newly acquired skills to provide business development services to other women.

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Nepal: Chandra Kala Thapa with her husband. They have increased their income by selling their surplus production in the market.



Engaging men for women's empowerment

The JP RWEE goes beyond pure gender mainstreaming and works to address the root causes of gender inequalities, changing attitudes and behaviors that prevent women from achieving their full potential.

As part of this strategy, the JP RWEE successfully engaged men to become powerful gender advocates that are able to drive transformative changes against stereotypes that perpetuate discrimination and inequality. Some of the successful approaches used to engage men include:

- Household Methodologies, specifically the *Gender Action Learning System* (GALS), to promote more equitable gender relations in Rwanda and Kyrgyzstan;
- *Awareness-raising* and *advocacy campaigns* (including “HeforShe” and community conversations) to address harmful social norms in Ethiopia, Nepal, Liberia and Guatemala;
- *Dimitra clubs* to promote collective action, social cohesion and more dialogue among women and men.

The advantages of a holistic approach

Technological progress, globalization and rural transformation generate opportunities for economic growth, poverty reduction, food security and nutrition. However, the same trends deepen inequalities in access to assets and services such as land, water, technology, innovation and credit, banking and financial services, and aggravate the conditions of rural women. In this context, gender equality and women's empowerment require joint efforts and holistic interventions able to invest in the multi-faceted dimensions of sustainable development. The JP RWEE answers to these challenges and works to establish the broader conditions needed for women's advancement. This includes access to productive assets, technologies, education, information and services, employment and market opportunities, and leadership skills. This multidimensional, integrated approach coupled with policy support at the national and local levels, has led to encouraging results:

- In Ethiopia, a *National Network for Gender Equality in Agriculture* has been created thanks to the collaboration between the JP RWEE, the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs;
- In Guatemala, JP RWEE supported the development of the *Policy for Gender Equality and Strategic Framework* (2014–2023) of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food;
- In Nepal, the importance of ensuring rural women farmers' access and control over agricultural resources and services is now included in the draft *Gender Equality and Social Inclusion* (GESI) strategy of the Agriculture Development Strategy (2015-2035), developed with key support from the JP RWEE;
- In Liberia, the National Rural Women Structure, a key partner of the JP RWEE, is advocating for the approval of the *Land Rights Bill* that has clear provisions on women's rights to own and inherit land.



Kyrgyzstan: an example of Programme sustainability

At the individual level, sustainability is strengthened through upscaling of Household Methodologies that help household members discuss how to improve and plan their livelihoods, enduring positive results of JP interventions.

At the community level, revolving funds provide access to affordable financial capital for agricultural and non-agricultural business activities. Self-help groups offer social insurance schemes in cases of emergencies, as well as affordable small loan for business needs of group members, while women's cooperatives and associations established by the Programme help rural women to gain higher negotiating power along the value chains, and better access to markets.

At the national level, trainings delivered through Training of Trainers (ToT) modality helped build a new group of local government officials who are now able to support the communities and transfer knowledge beyond the Programme lifecycle.



Lessons Learned

Below is a summary of the key lessons learned during the implementation of the JP RWEE:

- *Providing a multi-sectoral development package* to each beneficiary (including provision of productive assets, tools and technologies and design of needs-based capacity development interventions maximizes the impact and sustainability of interventions;
- *Accompanying the creation, consolidation and formalization of women's groups* facilitates access to goods and services (e.g. credit and financial services, market information), promotes economic competitiveness of rural women and ensures support beyond project completion date;
- *Identifying the right partners*, avoiding duplication of efforts and building on each other comparative advantages enhances programme performance and results;
- *Choosing adequate governance and programme implementation mechanisms* reduces operational costs and ensures programme-wide coherence beyond national boundaries. In addition, ownership of partners for the JP RWEE, especially local partners, guarantees sustainability and scalability in the long term;
- *Gaining new skills, competences and organizational capacities* helps women participate in socio-economic activities, enhances their decision-making roles and to earn increased respect within and outside their households;
- *Engaging men and promoting equitable intra-household relationships* ensures joint efforts for improved livelihoods as well as a real transformation of barriers that prevent women from achieving their full potential;
- *Promoting South-South cooperation* through knowledge exchange, peer support, and pooling of capacities accelerates programme results and contributes to the adoption and adaptation of the most relevant and effective solutions amongst stakeholders;
- *Supporting a more gender-responsive policy environment* at the national and local levels fosters empowerment of rural women in line with their socio-economic needs.

What's next?

The generous contributions of Norway and Sweden have allowed the JP RWEE to allocate more than USD 15.5 million to RWEE activities, which are changing individual and collective realities in the seven countries of implementation.

Through its demand-driven, holistic and multidimensional development approach, RWEE brings impactful changes in the livelihoods of more than 40,000 people and is now ready to reach additional 50,000 rural women and their families.

To reach this target, new partnerships and resources are needed to *consolidate, replicate and expand* the impacts achieved so far, enabling RWEE to address structural and systemic barriers that require long-term commitment and deeper integrated efforts:

- *Land* remains challenging in many of the JP RWEE countries. It is defying the profitability of agriculture as a commercial activity, and limiting the potential for agricultural land use in achieving food security and nutrition. Although the countries have guiding national land policies and laws, they are at different levels for the promotion of gender equality in access and security of tenure for women. JP RWEE is addressing these challenges through advocacy work, awareness-raising campaigns and training for rural women and their communities.
- *Climate change* is posing a threat to the productivity of women farmers and is limiting their capabilities as commercial actors in the agriculture sector. The greenhouse approach is proving to be a good adaptation method given the drought situations in many of the participating but the scale is very limited. One of the major reasons is the issue of land, which is unaffordable for many groups of women farmers and requires policy solutions.
- Adequate and appropriate *value chain development* and *market linkages* have been identified as an important element in shaping the impact on rural women's economic empowerment. It is important to ensure that policy frameworks for market linkages adopt innovations that rely on simple and adaptable technologies that facilitate exchange. These technologies can be instrumental in conveying climate information that is crucial for maximization of women farmers' on-farm productivity.

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Ethiopia: Kedija Wako takes care of her livestock in Adami Tulu, Oromia Region

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Liberia: a woman smiling after her small business grew thanks to the loan provided by the JP RWEE

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The JP RWEE invests in rural women, empowering them to reduce poverty, increase food security, improve nutrition and strengthen their leadership, capacities and decision-making roles.

Implemented since October 2014, JP RWEE has provided about US\$ 15.5 million to projects in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda that are reaching some 40,600 people directly and benefitting over 200,000 household members.

The JP RWEE is thus providing a substantial contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 1 on poverty eradication, SDG 2 on food security and nutrition, SDG 5 on Gender equality, and SDG 17 on a global partnership for sustainable development.

The JP RWEE is jointly implemented by FAO, IFAD, WFP and UN Women thanks to the generous financial support of the Governments of Norway and Sweden.

The purpose of this factsheet is to document in brief the achievements and lessons emerging from the RWEE Programme and make them easily accessible to implementing partners, development practitioners, donors, and others. It was developed following a Learning Workshop held in Rome on 22-24 February 2017 and presents some of the results that RWEE was able to achieve thanks to its multidimensional, integrated approach to gender equality and women's empowerment, with a look into its future. For further information, **contact:**

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