

JOINT PROGRAMME ON:
Accelerating Progress towards the
Economic Empowerment of Rural Women



SUCCESS STORIES



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Food and Agriculture
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IFAD
Investing in rural people



**World Food
Programme**



This collection of success stories aims to showcase the impact of the Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (JPRWEE) among rural women in the seven participating countries: Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda. It seeks to demonstrate how an integrated, holistic approach to the economic empowerment of women has the potential to transform not only their lives, but also their families and communities at large, thereby contributing to poverty reduction more broadly and enhancing the reach and sustainability of the outcomes of development strategies.

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A woman washing her face at one of the water fountains built with support from JPRWEE in Nepal



INTRODUCTION



A woman participating in JPRWEE in her small vegetable garden in Dodola, Ethiopia

Rural women play a critical role in supporting food and nutrition security. The income they generate is vital to improving the livelihoods and overall wellbeing of a chain of people. They are key agents of change, central to the achievement of Agenda 2030 — the internationally agreed framework for sustainable development based on a vision of a fairer, more prosperous and peaceful world.

Although the roles they play are so critical, rural women and girls often face structural barriers — such as expectations that they perform unpaid care work, and a lack of access to services — that may limit their rights and opportunities to participate in the agricultural sector, which in turn lowers the sector's efficiency and limits capacity to build climate resilience.

It was in response to these multiple challenges facing rural women — and with a view to unlocking their potential as farmers, entrepreneurs and agents of change — that the Food and Agriculture Organization

of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP) and UN Women developed the Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (JPRWEE). The Joint Programme builds on evidence that joint efforts are required to achieve gender equality and women's economic empowerment, along with targeted interventions aiming to provide women support in a range of areas so as to achieve sustainable development. The JPRWEE therefore builds on its participating bodies' comparative advantages — bringing together FAO's specialist technical knowledge and policy assistance on food and agriculture, IFAD's expertise in co-financing rural investment programmes and focus on gender at the household level, WFP's innovations in food assistance, and UN Women's role as global champion of gender equality and its strong partnerships with women's organizations.



A woman showing the results of her increased yields in Sindhuli, Nepal

Launched in 2012, JPRWEE is the leading collaborative initiative uniting these four partners, working together in seven participating countries: Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda.

The Joint Programme supports rural women through targeted activities in four main areas. The overall objective of the first action area is to improve participants' food and nutrition security by increasing the potential of women smallholder farmers to produce food and generate income. This encompasses ensuring that women have access to and control over productive resources and services critical to food security and nutrition. JPRWEE activities under this objective include: distributing improved seeds, fertilizers and tools such as pumps, watering-cans and plastic silos; helping build grain reserves; and training on improved agricultural technologies and alternative farming methods, such as agricultural extension practices and integrated pest management. Initiatives to raise nutrition awareness, and promote and improve food processing and storage further enhance rural women's capacities to control and strengthen local food reserves.

The second JPRWEE action area aims to create income-generating opportunities for rural women and support sustainable livelihoods. Efforts focus on creating and strengthening enterprises led by rural women, promoting the role of women throughout value chains and enhancing linkages to high-value markets. JPRWEE supports women-led associations and small-scale businesses to overcome constraints on the supply side, thereby enabling greater access to market opportunities.

Activities implemented under this component include training on entrepreneurship, business skills, business-plan development, value chains and numeracy and literacy skills. Furthermore, in recognition of the importance of access to financial services, activities include support for opening bank accounts and establishing savings groups.

The third action area seeks to assist women in enhancing their decision-making power and leveraging their voices to influence policy processes. To this end, activities strengthen women's abilities to exercise their agency within producer organizations and local governance structures, working with a range of groups of men to ensure political and social recognition of the role of women in such processes throughout the entire community. Activities include bringing together representatives of local government institutions, women's groups and rural women activists to participate in workshops and training on leadership, organizational development and gender mainstreaming, which are incorporated into their local development plans. Trainings aim to develop the leadership skills and capacities of women to organize into and participate in cooperatives and producer organizations, as well as to build their knowledge of their rights, including women's rights, land rights and sexual and reproductive rights. Modules on how to prevent and respond to gender-based violence have also been developed and delivered.

To complement these activities, JPRWEE facilitates networking among rural women's organizations at the subnational and national levels. These efforts support the sharing of experiences and best practices through the participation of rural women's representatives in national conferences bringing together a range of stakeholders, including government, entrepreneurs, women leaders and the private sector. Such activities provided opportunities to advocate with government for the inclusion of the specific needs of rural women as national development priorities.

The fourth action area focuses on providing assistance to governments to develop or reform national policies and strategies that support the empowerment of rural women, in particular in the areas of access to land, decent wage employment and social protection. The four United Nations partner entities provide their expertise to support the mainstreaming of legislative and policy instruments linked to the advancement of rural women's social, economic and political interests. The JPRWEE governance mechanism along with close collaboration with and strong participation

by national governments at all stages of programme implementation has led to very good results under this outcome, which could be yet further enhanced by greater long-term engagement. The Ministries of Agriculture of Ethiopia, Guatemala and Nepal each developed, disseminated and implemented a gender equality strategy, with JPRWEE support. Such policy support is often combined with the provision of technical assistance to strengthen national coordination mechanisms and build capacity at the national and subnational levels to implement gender-transformative agricultural and development policies.

Under this same area, JPRWEE works to improve the availability of tools and data to track progress in the economic empowerment of rural women. To address the persistent evidence gap on specific agricultural development investments and their effects on empowering women, JPRWEE has used the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) in four of the seven participating countries.¹

¹ The WEAI is a survey-based index developed by IFPRI, designed to measure women's empowerment in five domains: i) decisions about agricultural production; ii) access to and decision-making power about productive resources; iii) control of use of income; iv) leadership in the community; and v) time allocation: <http://www.ifpri.org/publication/womens-empowerment-agriculture-index>.

Through these action areas and beyond, JPRWEE adopts a holistic approach to women's empowerment that has a catalytic effect, attaining outcomes that are far-reaching and sustainable. Partnerships are key to the success of JPRWEE implementation, including with other United Nations entities, the Governments of Sweden and Norway, a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector, as well as with civil society organizations and host governments within participating countries. The diversity of JPRWEE's robust partnerships and its holistic programme approach combine to ensure the sustainability of programme results beyond the implementation period.

Since implementation began in 2014, JPRWEE has supported transformations in the lives of 36,500 people — 27,000 women and 9,500 men, ultimately reaching 191,000 household members.

Inspired by the women JPRWEE works with hand in hand, this collection of success stories seeks to capture some of their diverse voices and to illustrate the changes in their lives.



One of the JPRWEE participants photographed on land she is cultivating with her group in Polochic, Guatemala



A woman at the annual harvest fair in Kyrgyzstan with the bread produced in the bakery opened with support from JPRWEE

LAUNCHED IN 2012, JPRWEE IS THE LEADING COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVE UNITING FAO, IFAD, WFP AND UN WOMEN, WORKING TOGETHER IN SEVEN PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES: ETHIOPIA, GUATEMALA, KYRGYZSTAN, LIBERIA, NEPAL, NIGER AND RWANDA.





One of the women who received credit from JPRWEE in Ethiopia showing her savings book



ETHIOPIA

BACKGROUND

Ethiopia has the second highest population in sub-Saharan Africa, at 100 million people, growing at 2.53 percent per year as of 2016. The proportion of the population living below the poverty line halved between 1995 and 2010, from 60.5 percent to 29.6 percent. Discrepancies in poverty among regions narrowed, reflecting more balanced national development. However, despite Ethiopia's strong economic growth, the Africa Progress Report 2015 recorded per capita income that remained among the lowest in the world and an elevated overall vulnerability to food-price shocks.

Ethiopia has enormous potential for agricultural development. At present, only 25 percent of its arable land is cultivated, dominated by subsistence rainfed agriculture, with scarce inputs and technology, resulting in low productivity and high vulnerability to food insecurity. The vast majority of farmers in Ethiopia are smallholders dependent on subsistence agriculture and vulnerable to external shocks. On average, rural women farmers perform up to 75 percent of farm labour but only hold 18.7 percent of agricultural land and head 20.1 percent of rural households. Despite the recent policy initiatives to address gender disparities, evidence suggests that rural women still face individual, community and institutional barriers to fully exercising their rights. Rural women lack access to key resources such as land, extension services, agricultural inputs, technology as well as business-development services and financing. These factors limit their engagement in the market and within value chains. The situation of many women is exacerbated further still by their limited decision-making power within their households or low levels of formal education.



TARGET POPULATION

The Joint Programme targets women and households in eight kebeles (villages) in two regions of Ethiopia — Oromia, the most populous in the country, and Afar. Since 2015, JPRWEE has reached 2,374 rural women, 26 government institutions, a number of farmers' and pastoral training centres, and contributed to the establishment of a National Network for Gender Equality in Agriculture.

ACTIVITIES

JPRWEE activities include the training in areas such as post-harvest control and management of local household food reserves, cropping, small-scale irrigation practices, good nutrition practices, including dietary diversity and complementary food preparation, as well as on leadership and management. The Joint Programme also introduced agricultural innovations to boost productivity and production, and provided time and labour-saving equipment and skills-development services.

1. Rural women empowered to challenge old practices

Safaya Kabato, a 45-year-old mother of nine, lives in the Oromia region of Ethiopia. Her family derives its income from a mixture of farming activities — planting grains on their hectare of land and keeping livestock. Milking cows has been part of Safaya's life since she was young. Growing up in a community where households produced

their own milk and milk products for consumption at home, it never occurred to Safaya to consider milk a source of income until, through JPRWEE, she participated in a training on income-generating activities and business skills and received a loan. It was a turning point, as Safaya describes:

“*When I received over 6,200 Birr (US\$ 310) as a loan in July 2016, I purchased a pregnant milking cow, ready to give birth, for 5,100 Birr (US\$ 255). I bought nutritious livestock feed (Fagulo) for it, together with the by-products of the wheat harvest from our farm. In less than a month, it gave birth to a female calf. Since it is a local breed, I started to get four litres of milk per day. In August of the same year, I began to supply three quarters of the milk produced to two households in the village. Each household has been paying me 180 Birr (US\$ 6). I have been using the remaining milk for my family's consumption. If it was not for this milk, I would have been spending more cash to purchase for the family's consumption.*”



Safaya with the donkey she uses to transport feed for her livestock

Safaya added that yet more households purchase milk from her for special occasions, such as weddings and funerals. Taking these sales into account, Safaya has earned over 2,500 Birr (US\$ 125), some of which she has saved, and some she has used to purchase clothing for her children.

“Before I never saved the income from the sale of milk. Now, I have opened a bankbook and saved 1,100 Birr (US\$ 55), which I will not use for other purposes than expanding the milk business. After saving enough, my plan is to purchase another milking cow to increase the supply.”

2. Empowered to diversify for a better life

Tadelech Bekelpe is a 38-year-old widowed mother of seven in the Oromia region of Ethiopia. Following her husband's sudden death, Tadelech, who had been financially dependent on him, had to work harder than ever before. She became involved in various small-scale income-generating activities but, despite being labour intensive, they awarded little cash. These included distilling and selling a traditional alcoholic drink known as *Araka*, hand weaving traditional baskets for sale, washing other people's clothes as well as rearing chicken.

Out of the different income activities, Tadelech finds making *Araka* the most tiring as well as the unhealthiest as it involves burning firewood for many hours every day without any protection from the flames. In addition, this activity is

very time consuming, as it requires her and her children to collect and carry firewood from remote places. *"The only reason I got involved in filtering Araka is because, compared to other small businesses, it does not require much capital."* Since being able to meet the basic needs of her family, Tadelech has begun saving some money. By saving, Tadelech is one step closer to realizing her aspiration to one day quit the *Araka* business and opening a retail shop in her village supplying basic consumer goods.

Through JPRWEE, Tadelech had access to training on income generation and received a 6,000 Birr (US\$ 272) loan. This enhanced her spirit of entrepreneurship and taught her how to invest where to gain the greatest benefit, as she recalled:

“ Six months ago, I received 6,000 Birr (US\$ 260) through JPRWEE. With this money, I bought six sheep (two rams and four ewes) and livestock feed (*Fursheca*). Currently, one of the males I purchased for 600 Birr (US\$ 27) is ready to be sold for 1,400 Birr (US\$ 65) for the coming Ethiopian Christmas holiday market. Two of the ewes are pregnant, expected to give birth after a month. ”

According to Tadelech she currently has 2,000 Birr (US\$ 91) saved in her bank account. This includes the income from previous sheep sales and an accumulation of small amounts saved from selling handwoven baskets and sale of *Araka*. *"When I earn the 1,400 Birr (US\$ 65) from the sale of the sheep for the Christmas market, I will purchase another sheep to fatten. Then I will save the remaining money for my long-term plan of opening the retail shop. This will enable me to continue producing handwoven baskets whenever I don't have customers to serve and to continue earning an income."*

Tadelech dropped out of school in fifth grade as a result of a forced marriage at the age of 14. Supporting her children's education is among her priorities. Her firstborn daughter was educated up to college level and, now working as an architect in a rural town, assists Tadelech financially to cover some of the family's living expenses. *"My youngest daughter is 11 years old and in third grade. I am determined that she and her older brothers will be educated up to university level,"* said Tadelech, who is sure unemployment will not be a challenge for her children after they complete their education. *"They will work with me when my sheep-rearing business expands and my dream of opening the consumer goods shop is realized."*



Tadelech with some of her goats



Tadelech weaves traditional baskets

3. Hearing the voices of men

Inherited social norms and practices — whether at the individual, community or institutional level — have been identified as among the major factors hampering rural women's empowerment in Ethiopia. Such norms and practices are the basis for deep-rooted discriminatory practices, including male dominance at the household and community levels. Such practices pose significant challenges to rural women's participation in decision-making and limit their control over and benefit from productive assets and services. Against this backdrop, JPRWEE began implementing community-mobilization and gender-awareness sensitization activities in Ethiopia in 2016, with the aim of addressing these social and cultural barriers in the target districts.

"Community Conversations" — awareness-raising campaigns targeting individuals and communities alike — reached 3,104 community members (2,779 women and 375 men)

with activities aiming to change their attitudes towards gender equality.

Tsehay Regassa and her husband Messay Tibebu are JPRWEE participants living in the Yayagulele District of Oromia Region. They have been married for over 20 years and have five children, two girls and three boys. Through JPRWEE, Tsehay was participated in training on basic business skills, leadership and household food-reserve management and nutrition, and accessed a loan in the amount of Birr 6,289 (US\$ 283.16) for her cattle-raising business.

Tsehay also participated in the gender-awareness sessions organized in her district, together with her spouse Messay. The awareness sessions ensured that Tsehay could freely communicate with her husband about the knowledge gained from the basic business skill training she attended. As she explained:

“After participating in the gender-awareness session, both my husband and myself became comfortable discussing issues that affect our lives. For instance, when I tell him about the way we will be managing the loan that I received based on the knowledge I gained from the basic business skills training, he is convinced. Now he trusts me more because he has started to understand that I too can contribute to bettering our family's livelihood.”

Messay, for his part, said:

“My wife and I have been married for over 20 years. I have been aware that she gets overloaded with household work and taking care of the family, including our five children. This is over and above her work at the farm. Before, I never considered that I could be a help by doing some of the housework, because I was brought up understanding housework as the domain of women and girls. After my wife and I attended the awareness sessions on gender relations and roles, my attitude has changed. Now, for example, when she bakes the traditional bread, Injera, I cook, the stew, Wat.”

Messay adds that he used to go to the market alone to purchase or to sell livestock. Now he goes with his wife, who advises him on how to get a good deal based on the basic business skills training she took through the JPRWEE.

Moreover, Messay served as the village chairperson, an influential role through which he promises to promote more equitable relations between men and women: "Change starts from our household, where my wife and I will make sure to bring up our boys and girls equally so that they will contribute to making the future community even better."



Tsehay and her husband Messay working in their farm



GUATEMALA

BACKGROUND

Guatemala faces major challenges in terms of poverty and extreme poverty, which go hand-in-hand with limited access to education and basic services, and high rates of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition and food insecurity. According to data from the 2012 National Survey of Employment and Earnings, the informal sector accounts for three quarters of employment nationally, while in rural areas eight out of ten workers are in the informal sector. Nationwide, only 41 percent of women are considered among the economically active population. According to information provided by the “Secretaría Presidencial de la Mujer” (SEPREM), 63 percent of poor women and 81 percent of women of extremely poor women live in rural areas.

In rural areas, women account for 77 percent participation in housework. Women farmers mainly grow maize and beans, which form the basis of their diet. Given the inequitable access to land, women’s plots are small and often located on slopes and degraded soils. Productivity levels are low and there is little crop diversity since they depend on irregular rainfall and limited access to quality inputs and seeds.

TARGET POPULATION

The target group of the programme covers 1,650 rural indigenous women and their families in the “Valle del Polochic”, which includes the municipalities of Tucuru, Santa Catalina La Tinta and Panzós, in the Department of Alta Verapaz. Social indicators place inhabitants of the target area within the group of poor and extremely poor people. The stunting rate in the region is 56 percent. The people of Panzós and La Tinta have poor access to education, with more than 50 percent of population having had no formal education. When it comes to health, the situation is alarming, with high prevalence of disease and low coverage of health services.

ACTIVITIES

The programme is working with women participants to strengthen their technical knowledge on agriculture and food security, to improve the quality and quantity of their agricultural production, and to enhance their access to markets. The support provided includes literacy and leadership courses and working with women to reinforce their entrepreneurial capacities in off-farm income-generating activities. To ensure sustainability, these activities are grounded in capacity-building and knowledge transfers with government representatives at the national and local levels.



A woman participant proud of her nursery production of local vegetables

4. Improving our family life

Herlinda Caal Tzi is a 48-year-old Q'eqchi' woman from Alta Verapaz department in rural Guatemala. She lives with her husband Tomás Cac, their three sons and two daughters-in-law.

Herlinda is one of many women who have made positive changes in their lives through JPRWEE. Telling her story,

Herlinda recalls how things were before the programme came to Panzós. Women were excluded from many of the decision-making processes of the community, and did not participate in training or other activities. In that climate, she remembers being unsure of her own capacities.

“*When I came to the women's group and committed to working and participating in the training programme, I felt very afraid and wondered whether I would be able to cope with this commitment.*”



Herlinda working in the maize field of her cooperative



Herlinda with the other women of her cooperative

Through the initiatives supported by JPRWEE, the women of Panzós have an increased level of participation, increased decision-making powers and a stronger voice in community activities. Herlinda herself is now confident

of the active role she plays as president of the Women's Committee, where she coordinates training and other activities supporting 25 women.

“*Now I know what rights we have, including the right to participate in the different committees established in our community. We must strive to lead of our organizations.*”

At home, the women have begun to apply the skills and techniques they have learned from the JPRWEE training sessions, focusing on improved food security and farming methods. For example, Herlinda now knows how to

better manage any surplus production in her corn crop, including through grain storage, reserves and planning for seasonal shortages and price increases.

“*In the beginning, my husband Tomás used to say, 'Herlinda, why did you commit yourself to this?' But now that he has realized that I am contributing money to our family by selling the product of my efforts, he says, 'You really had a good reason for wanting to be in this project.'*”

5. Indigenous women learning and leading

Zoila Esperanza Morán never learned how to read or write. As the eldest girl in a family of two sisters and a brother, she never had the chance to go to school and spent her childhood helping with chores at home, until the age of 15, when she was married off without her consent.

Today, Zoila is a 33-year-old mother of five and the leader of a successful women's group that works with JPRWEE to improve agricultural production and food and nutrition security throughout their community.

With the training and support they receive, the women have not only been able to increase their agricultural yields, but

also to market their surpluses and expand their activities. For example, by selling cooked corn, corn beverages, corn tamales, bean tamales and more, the group has managed to generate enough profit to start a tomato plantation.

Like all women in the group, Zoila recognizes the tangible benefits of her active participation in the programme. She has been trained in topics that have enabled her to increase and enhance her production and income, diversify her family's nutrition and improve their health and well-being. But she is particularly proud of her leadership role in the group and of the example the group has set for women's empowerment.

“

We have shown the community that women can succeed in activities beyond those of housewife.

”

Zoila notes that it was her oldest son, Juan Cahuec, 17, who originally encouraged her to participate in JPRWEE. Her husband, too, has been enthusiastic.

“

My husband has been a great support. We decided together that my role in the community was important. He supports me when I have to go out of town to acquire new knowledge.

”

As someone who never went to school, Zoila treasures the opportunity to learn through the programme and to pass on to others what she has learned. *“The nice thing about being part of the programme is that I am not the only one who learns, but my family and sister women learn too.”*

She notes that the benefits of the programme go far beyond the women participants: *“Other women and members of the community benefit because they ask us what we do to have orchards and other crops,”* adding, *“This makes me happy because now I teach and am able to help others, too”.*



Zoila with the portable drill machine received thanks to JPRWEE

6. The power of women to transform their own lives

“*When I joined this group of women and they put their trust in me and valued me as a woman, I committed to work and actively participate in the Joint Programme. Now I realize that I have not only increased my income, but also built my self-esteem.*”



Aurelia telling her story in the backyard of her house

Aurelia Chocoj, a 41-year-old indigenous woman from the municipality of Santa Catalina La Tinta, is married to Manuel Tun and together they have six children.

Aurelia recalls how, before the arrival of JPRWEE, women in the community attended meetings but felt excluded

because they had no voice or vote when it came to taking decisions at the community level.

Now she is the leader of a group of 14 women and explains the transformation following her initial apprehension:

“*At first I got frustrated and felt unable to lead a group — I constantly questioned if I was going to be able to get my group of female companions ahead. Today, with great confidence, I can say that everything has been worth it. I can see the opportunities for the group and for myself. We have changed our way of life thanks to better knowledge of our rights and duties. As a leader of our organization, I urge all my companions to put our knowledge into practice, always remembering we have the power to transform our own reality and to live a life free of violence. We can make more decisions within the household and we can be more independent without relying 100 percent on our husbands' income.*”

Aurelia has an average monthly income of 190 Quetzal (US\$ 26.00) from the sale of natural soap she manufactures. With the other women of her group, she is learning how to improve the quality of her products.

“Now that I have money, I feel secure because I can make use of it in a conscious way — mainly to purchase food and pay for the education of my three children. I am grateful to JPRWEE for allowing me to access new knowledge: now I know that as a citizen I can contribute to the development of my community and municipality, and above all I have the support of my family”.



KYRGYZSTAN

BACKGROUND

The Kyrgyz Republic is the second poorest country in Central Asia. With 65 percent of the population living in rural areas, agriculture drives the Kyrgyz economy, account for 18 percent of GDP. However, interethnic conflict coupled with political, climatic and economic instability in recent years has resulted in significant losses in agricultural production and negatively affected food security. As a result, the majority of those living poverty are concentrated in rural areas.

The country suffers from high, and rising, inequality and faces major regional disparities. Women are largely excluded from decision-making and violence against women is widespread, taking many forms, including domestic violence, “bride kidnapping”, human trafficking, early marriage and physical abuse. The negative reinterpretation of some cultural and social practices increasingly restricts women’s rights to control their own lives. There is a growing risk of radicalization. Unpaid care work makes it difficult for rural women in Kyrgyzstan to take advantage of different opportunities such as on- and off-farm employment and women and girls have restricted access to productive resources. The Gender Inequality Index indicates that Kyrgyzstan experiences a loss in potential human development equivalent to 35 percent due to gender disparities in terms of empowerment and economic status.

TARGET POPULATION

JPRWEE is working with targeted populations in approximately 75 villages across the Chui, Naryn, Osh, Jalalabad and Batken Provinces. Programme participants include 2,700 women and 31 men, but JPRWEE expects to reach an additional 4,725 rural women and men through the Gender Action Learning System (GALS), a community-led empowerment methodology that helps household members build their vision for the future and define strategies to achieve it. Programme participants include officials of 34 target municipalities and key national government ministries.



A woman showing the traditional way to prepare a meal



Women supported by JPRWEE displaying their handicrafts at a local fair

ACTIVITIES

JPRWEE in Kyrgyzstan has strengthened the management and organizational capacities of women’s self-help groups (SHGs), ensuring their institutional capacity to continue providing services to their members. Additionally, agricultural inputs and innovative technologies, such as seed drills and knapsack sprayers, have been provided. GALSs were rolled out as an effective delivery channel for scaling up the results of the pilot and providing training and workshops, integrating the methodology with programme interventions promoting women’s economic empowerment.

7. Flowers in Kyrgyzstan: a beautiful business

Mahabat Botasheva is the enthusiastic 50-year-old leader of a group of five women in the village of Blagoveshenka in Jalalabad Province. For many years, Mahabat had dreamed of starting a business in growing and selling potted flowers, but she lacked the initial capital and business skills. In August 2015, she joined a self-help group called “Dostuk” that had been established with support from JPRWEE. Through the group, Mahabat attended training sessions that transmitted knowledge on working in a group, managing savings and record-keeping.

All the women in the group faced similar challenges in their daily lives, especially when it came to feeding and supporting their families. Therefore, when Mahabat suggested that they put their newly acquired training to practical use by starting a joint venture in potted flowers, they were keen to support the idea and work towards what they now call their “beautiful business”.

Little by little, the group started saving up money. They bought a magazine called “The World of Flowers” and studied it carefully to learn about trends, popular varieties and the specifics of growing methods and technologies. In October and November of 2015, the group attended training sessions provided by JPRWEE, where they developed their business and financial plans as well as identified potential buyers and marketing channels.

Their business plan was selected as the most viable, profitable and beneficial for the economic empowerment of group members in their municipality, and they were granted a loan of 60,000 Kyrgyz soms (US\$ 800) as seed capital. The group invested another 8,000 Kyrgyz soms (US\$ 240) from their savings, purchased all the necessary inputs and launched their business.

“

In less than two months, income from sales had exceeded 93,000 Kyrgyz soms (US\$ 1,240). I am confident that the group will be able to return the starting capital loan to the revolving fund in time for the next group of women to start their business. We will reinvest the remaining income in working capital for the business and in expanding our selection of flowers.

”

For Mahabat, it is clear that JPRWEE was key in helping them get their business off the ground: *“The training enabled us to acquire the necessary skills for operating a small business, managing income and savings, and planning for growth and development”.*

She also credits the strong business and marketing plan they developed, and sense of discipline and responsibility among the women in her group. For example, roles and responsibilities are clearly distributed within the group: Mahabat and Dilbarhan are responsible for the service agreements with the greenhouse where they grow seedlings, for purchasing seeds at the market and overseeing other supplies, as well as for financial record-keeping and cash flow. Dilbarhan is the group’s treasurer, while Natalya and Ainura are in charge of marketing – visiting offices, schools and post offices in their village and in neighbouring areas and seeking out potential buyers. In addition, they help take care of the flowers. Katcha is the head gardener, maintaining the flowers and keeping records of their growth. She also manages the moving of seedlings, fertilizing and preparing flowers for sale. Hasiyat’s strengths lie in communicating with

buyers, so she operates a stall at the market, where she enjoys talking with customers and asking about their preferences.

In recognition of their hard work and success, the head of their municipal administration — who is a member of the local committee responsible for the selection and monitoring of economic initiatives — has offered support to build a greenhouse for growing flowers.



Mahabat showing her new successful business: flowers

8. The importance of self-help groups

Ainagul Abdrakhmanova, a 32-year-old mother of five, is a member of a self-help group supported by JPRWEE in a remote mountainous village of Baizak, in the Naryn region. For more than a year now, she has been growing tomatoes, cucumbers and carrots — crops that, it had been believed until then, would not to grow in the climatic conditions of her village.

Ainagul's village is growing. She recently built a house with her husband located at the very end of the village irrigation system on land provided by the local government for young families. Following recent dry spells in the region, irrigation water became very scarce, resulting in lower yields than Ainagul had expected.

When JPRWEE informed the village about a forthcoming demonstration of drip irrigation equipment on selected plots, Ainagul was very interested in trying it. The village was provided with two sets of equipment and received theoretical and practical training. The community discussed who should receive the equipment and, because of her young child and recent health problems of her husband, who could no longer work on the land, decided to give it to Ainagul.

Ainagul is keenly aware of the importance of her self-help group:

“*If it wasn't for the members of the group, I would not be able to cultivate my land. They helped me with the planting, and then in June to install drip irrigation.*”



Ainagul (left) with one of the women who helped with her harvest

Watering her crops now requires much less time and effort. She compares it with a washing machine: *“You need to put manure into the tank, open the tap and the water flows to every plant in the right quantity”*.

Already harvesting and selling cucumbers and tomatoes, which are growing fast, she expects to harvest at least three tons of vegetables and to earn at least three times more than the previous year.

9. Women changing the world

Zamira Davletbakova is a member of her local council in At-Bashy district, Naryn Region. She is 40 years old and mother to three children.

"I used to be a housewife, sitting at home, doing chores around the house, taking care of my children and husband. During my free time, I also produced local handcrafts to earn some money to support my family".

In 2014, JPRWEE started working with her and other women of the village to build their capacities, help them achieve economically empowerment, and raise awareness on women's rights. Through these initiatives, Zamira realized that she, too, could make a difference, contributing to a change for the better, not only within her own family, but also in her broader community and society in general.

“

What surprised us is that the programme touched issues that seemed to be very serious and almost unreachable for us, such as development strategies, equal rights and opportunities, the legal foundations of gender equality, and many other issues. What I appreciated most were the resource materials we received at the leadership school that allowed me to continue studying at home.

”

In May 2016, Zamira was invited to attend a high-level meeting with government officials organized by JPRWEE to discuss social insurance and pension law, along with a number of meetings with decision-makers. At the public hearings, she voiced her concerns on the recent changes to the law that increased the burden of social insurance fees on smallholder farmers, the majority of whom are women. Moreover, the changes in the law had resulted in women losing their land titles, as families had started to register all their pieces of land in the name of the head of the household, usually the father. These concerns were documented and handed over to the members of Parliament, who were urged to change the law and restore justice for women.

Upon returning to her village, Zamira organized a meeting to share with her community what had happened. The very warm reception and support she got from her neighbours motivated her to run in the local elections. Zamira was elected and now works to advance women's rights in her village.



Zamira in her village

“

My community motivated me because they believed I could lobby for their interests at the local level and help improve their lives. This experience helped me understand that we, rural women, if united, can change the world.

”



LIBERIA

BACKGROUND

Liberia's 14-year civil war devastated the country's entire physical and organizational infrastructure. Commercial and productive activities ceased, communities were uprooted and families separated. The social, political and traditional governance systems were destroyed, resulting in a complete collapse of the economy.

Liberia has made significant progress since 2005, when it elected Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Africa's first female president. However, the consequences of war remain particularly burdensome for women, who comprise 54 percent of the labour force in both the formal and informal sectors. When it comes to the agricultural sector, women constitute the majority of smallholder producers. They are estimated to produce approximately 60 percent of agricultural products, carry out more than 80 percent of trading activities in rural areas, and are heavily engaged in the fishing industry, in addition to performing daily household chores. Nonetheless, Liberian women remain highly disadvantaged, remaining disproportionately concentrated in the least productive sectors — with 90 percent employed in the informal sector or agriculture. This translates into low productivity, meagre earnings and exposure to exploitation.

Illiteracy rates among women aged 15-49 are particularly high, at 60 percent, compared to 30 percent among men. Approximately 40 percent of the population is highly vulnerable to food insecurity, with women disproportionately affected, with higher rates of malnutrition, due to their lack of sustainable livelihoods and employable skills. In addition, gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and HIV/AIDS are especially prevalent among young rural women and girls, further exacerbating their risk of food insecurity.

TARGET POPULATION

In Liberia, JPRWEE has reached over 5,180 women and men across six of the country's 15 counties — Grand Bassa, Margibi, Maryland, Montserrado, River Gee and Sinoe.

ACTIVITIES

JPRWEE is delivers a comprehensive, sequenced package of core interventions to support women's economic and social empowerment through a combination of direct implementation and on-the-ground coordination with other community-level programming actors. The package covers a range of areas, including changing social norms, agricultural development, literacy and numeracy training, business development and management skills, and access to credit.



Women and men at the official launch of JPRWEE in Liberia



Another moment from the launch of JPRWEE activities in Liberia

10. From grass to grace in business

Before participating in JPRWEE, Tina Tuonyon, a 28-year-old woman, would walk up to five miles three times per week to buy two bags of charcoal. She would resell the charcoal in small plastic bags at LD\$ 10.00 (US\$ 0.02) each in Greenville City, Sinoe County. In this way, she was able to support herself and send her son to school. However, life was very difficult.

Despite her low income and lack of literacy, Tina was determined to become a rural cross-border trader. She recalls her longstanding ambition, *"I wanted to travel to Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria to buy and sell goods"*. It was obvious that Tina had the will and potential to become a cross-border trader, but her determination was

hampered by her lack of literacy or clear understanding of how to manage her business effectively.

When the JPRWEE literacy and business programme was launched in Greenville in 2014, Tina was recruited to participate in literacy and business classes over a period of ten months. Over time, she successfully completed both programmes. At first, Tina was taught how to read, write and use a calculator. Later, she started to learn business skills, focusing on how to save money and how to keep her business and personal funds separate. She also gained knowledge on fronts ranging from keeping her place of business clean to attract more customers, to developing a business plan and budgeting.

“*When I completed the literacy classes and began attending business classes, I saw considerable improvements in my charcoal business, as I started bringing in 25 to 50 bags of charcoal in a pick-up truck instead of the 2 bags I used to bring for sale by transporting them on my head.*”



Tina with one of the books she received during a JPRWEE training on basic business skills

As her business expanded, Tina began to save her money, with the intention of travelling to Côte d'Ivoire to buy bags of dried pepper to sell in Greenville City. When she eventually achieved this objective, Tina's income grew immensely, from LD\$ 700 (US\$ 7.5) to LD\$ 1,500 (US\$ 16) per day.

But Tina didn't stop there. She went on to access training in the Savings and Loan Association (SLA)

Methodology, continued saving her money and began accessing credit from the local SLA she joined. With access to credit, Tina expanded her business and began travelling to other West African countries, including Sierra Leone, Togo, Benin, Nigeria and Guinea, to source goods. To this day, Tina remains an active member of the Greenville SLA and the association Rural Women in Cross-Border Trade.

11. How to organize and lead a group

Mari Kpadeh, a 36-year-old mother of four, is the leader of the Arbleejay farming group based in Worhn, Margibi County. She remembers the challenges she encountered in

leading the group and managing their farming activities — activities of crucial importance to the women's food security and for providing income to take care of their families.

“Members of the group often complained that we were not succeeding because I was not a good leader. This made me think that I was a failure and made me feel sad because I knew I could pave the way to success for my group. I struggled each day with the fear that other strong women within the group would dismiss me and find another person whom they thought had the right capacities. But for me, it was only a question of self-esteem: it was my questioning of myself that led to a lack of respect from the group and a very bad time for us all.”

For months, the farming group experienced difficulties selling its produce and getting enough money due to what was perceived as poor management. But thanks to JPRWEE, Mari received one-week training on organizational

capacity and leadership of farming groups, giving her a better understanding of how to organize, manage and lead her group. The group recognizes its agricultural activities have improved and income increased.



Mari telling her story at the local market

“Now they see me as a good leader. I am ready to take my group to the next level, becoming a role model, not only for my family and fellow members of the group, but also for my community.”

Mari and the other women of Arbleejay are now convinced that, thanks to the ongoing support provided by JPRWEE — including the distribution of agricultural

supplies like seeds and farming tools —and the possibility of joining a savings association, they have a bright future ahead.

12. Adult literacy programmes: unlocking the potential of rural women

Regina Moore, a 38-year-old mother of five children aged between 6 and 20, is today a successful business woman. Having been withdrawn from school at a young age, Regina never learned to read or write. She started helping in her mother's business at age 12. As an adult, Regina decided to give herself a second chance by accessing the adult literacy classes provided by JPRWEE.

Regina is determined to succeed — so committed to learning that she pays 10 LD (US\$ 0.11) for tutoring over and above the regular group classes. Her 6-year-old daughter, who is in the first grade, often joins, sitting

next to her mother as she does her homework and occasionally stepping in to correct Regina's pronunciation as she learns the English alphabet. She is proud of Regina's determined to learn and share her knowledge with others.

Regina says:

“ Little by little, I will fulfil my dream of speaking English. ”



Regina in her tailoring workshop

She believes that as a literate woman, she will be able to improve the human rights training she provides to the members of her women's group. The objective of the training is to combat the high rate of gender-based violence in rural communities. “Ma Moore” — as she is

known with respect and affection in her community — teaches women about human rights and women's rights so that they will know how to recognize, reject and report violent behaviour from men.

“ I believe that through adult literacy training, women will become more independent, eventually leading to increased business profits and greater participation in decision-making in our communities. ”



NEPAL

BACKGROUND

In Nepal, 83 percent of the population lives in rural areas, and the majority of them are women. Rural Nepalese women perform multiple roles as mothers and spouses/partners, as well as farmers, workers, leaders, producers, entrepreneurs and service providers. They comprise approximately 65 percent of the labour force in agricultural activities and play a key role in food production, especially through subsistence farming. The decade-long internal conflict in Nepal called on women to fill the gaps at home and in their communities. This, combined with the quota set by the Government mandating that women must comprise at least 33 percent of representatives in local and national decision-making structures, provided an opening for women's participation and leadership.

Over the past decade, due to increased outmigration of men and youth, the agricultural sector experienced a severe shortage of labour, and has become increasingly dependent on the labour of women, older people and vulnerable social groups. As a result, women have stepped into community leadership roles and become their families' sole breadwinners. In Nepal, women's empowerment is a key to overall economic productivity.

Nepal's 20-year Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS) is committed to including women, disadvantaged groups and geographically disadvantaged populations throughout planning, implementation and monitoring. The ADS vision is of a self-reliant, sustainable, competitive and inclusive agricultural sector that drives economic growth and contributes to improved livelihood and nutrition security.



A woman participant feeding her child more nutritious food

TARGET POPULATION

JPRWEE is being piloted in the three districts — Sindhuli, Sarlahi and Rautahat — of the Central Development Region, the poorest of Nepal, targeting 3,597 rural women.

ACTIVITIES

JPRWEE Nepal supports activities including commercial fresh vegetable production, leadership strengthening, initiatives promoting access to capital, the creation of saving groups, and nutrition training. Moreover, in terms of institutional strengthening, rural women's groups created through JPRWEE have been registered in the District Agriculture Development Office and three fully operational Community Agriculture Extension Service Centres have been established and handed over to the Government, ensuring the sustainability of the programme activities.



A woman proud of her tomato production



One of the women's' groups formed with support from JPRWEE

13. Reaping the rewards of their labour

Kala Thapa is a thirty-year-old smallholder farmer living in Ranichauri, a village in the Sindhuli District of southeastern Nepal. Like many women farmers in Nepal and other parts of the developing world, she faces a number of barriers to improving her agricultural productivity and increasing her income.

Many of these barriers are related to cultural norms that limit women's access to productive resources, such as land and agricultural inputs. In many cases, women do not own any land, working instead on family farms owned and managed by husbands or male relatives. As a result, women reap few of the financial benefits of their labour.

Even when women own or control land, regardless of plot size, the burden of household chores — that in most homes is placed solely on women — greatly limits the time they have to work on their land. In addition, many families

are reluctant to let women go to market to buy seeds or fertilizers, further limiting their mobility and productivity.

Kala, for example, owns no land. Yet she is responsible for tending her family farm, working roughly 16 hours per day for little or no profit. She also engages in a great deal of unpaid work at home, such as cooking, cleaning and childcare, all of which is both physically demanding and time-consuming.

Since early 2016, JPRWEE began working with Kala and other smallholder women farmers in Ranichauri, to help them improve their agricultural productivity and food and nutrition security, and increase their income.

With the support and training received through JPRWEE, the women — including Kala — have made swift progress, increasing their yields and selling their surpluses at market. Kala explains:

“ JPRWEE provided me with technical knowledge and agriculture inputs — seeds, fertilizer and equipment — and facilitated access to credit so that I could produce more crops to in the market. ”



Kala in front of her house with her husband and two children



Kala collecting tomatoes in her farm

The women participating in the JPRWEE activities have also learned how to reap the benefits of crop diversification. Kala points out that one kilogram of maize would sell for 40 Nepalese rupees (US\$ 0.4) in the market, whereas the fruits and vegetables she now grows and

sells throughout the year bring in up to 120 Nepalese rupees (US\$ 1.2) per kilogram. The steady market for their produce helps to ensure a consistent and sustainable source of income.

She adds:

“ Now the prices are good and the money comes on time. This was not the case when I used to sell maize in the market. ”

14. Women farmers take charge of their lives and livelihoods

Although rural women in Nepal contribute significantly to agriculture, they are often not viewed as farmers. However, in Pratappur Paltuwa village in the Rautahat District, another narrative is unfolding.

Chanda Devi, a mother of three from a marginalized Madhesi community, is among 130 women earning

an average wage of US\$ 120 per month from their contributing to the building of a Community Agriculture Extension Service Centre (CAESC). The CAESC — which will be fully owned and managed by the community, mainly under the leadership of rural women farmers — will provide agriculture services to the entire village.

“

We are very motivated by the construction of the CAESC. As women, we feel we are making a difference. We can now support our families by earning money and buying supplies and medicines.

”

Chanda also participated together with 175 women in building an irrigation channel. The improved water supply has helped Chanda and other villagers grow more vegetables, both to eat and to sell at the local market. With support provided by JPRWEE, farmers' groups comprising 25-20 rural women each were established. These groups have supported rural women farmers to become more active in the community.



Chanda watering her nursery with another member of her group

“

This group has a lot of us running from one place to the other, getting work done or solving problems such as getting our CAESC registered and signing up new members. It has been keeping a lot of us on our toes

”

says Chanda.

Overall, JPRWEE is bringing rural women together by strengthening their leadership role at the local level. At the same time, it is helping bring about a shift in attitudes among men.

“

Before, we were not allowed to step out of our homes even for a short period of time. Things are changing. Now, men are supporting and even encouraging us to spend quality time outside, earn a livelihood and become independent. It is very positive and I am especially happy for my daughter

”

explains Chanda.



Chanda spraying fertiliser on her vegetables

15. Better nutrition for a better life

Santa Daruwal is a young member of the farmers' group in the Village Development Committee of Bhimeswor, in Sindhuli District. At twenty-eight years old, she owns a small vegetable field and was among the 175 rural women farmers who collaborated on a recent JPRWEE-supported irrigation project to bring fresh water closer to their homes.

With temperatures hovering around 40°C for up to seven months per year, the flat terrain of the village is often parched and dry due to scarce rainfall. Prior to JPRWEE, the village relied mainly on the nearest river as a source of water for cooking and feeding cattle, forcing rural women farmers to walk for hours to bring water home.

“ Before, there was a severe scarcity of water in our village. The source was far away, and due to the scorching heat, our little buckets could not carry enough water for our crops. As a result, we suffered huge losses during every crop cycle ”

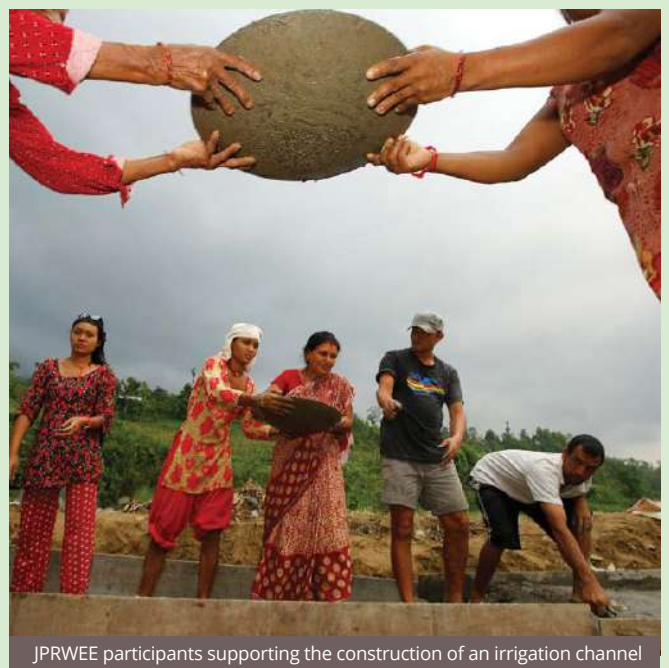
recalls Santa.

The construction of the irrigation channel was finished in 26 days. The improved water supply has helped Santa and other villagers grow more vegetables, both to eat and to sell at the local market. “Before, my children used to have dry wheat for breakfast, now I feed them rice, lentils and vegetables that I grow myself”, says Santa. “I sometimes sell these vegetables in the market and with the money I can also feed them chicken and goat meat.”

The year-round irrigation has enabled Santa to continuously produce a variety of seasonal vegetables. She has also increased production, thanks to her enhanced knowledge on vegetable farming gained through training opportunities and to improved seeds provided by JPRWEE.

Santa explains how JPRWEE is having an impact on all aspects of her life, she concludes with a smile:

“ Not only has the programme economically empowered us through support for kitchen gardening, commercial fresh vegetable production, construction of assets and strengthened leadership skills; it has also raised our confidence level and enabled us to speak up on issues related to decision-making in our households and communities. I often share what I learn about women and empowerment with children from a primary school. I am so happy that I am helping them learn about important gender concepts from an early age. ”



JPRWEE participants supporting the construction of an irrigation channel



NIGER

BACKGROUND

Niger is a landlocked country in the Sahel region of Africa particularly prone to drought. It is subject to chronic food insecurity that has deadly impact on the most vulnerable, especially children and women. Approximately 45 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, the vast majority of them in rural areas. Women account for four out of five poor people, and rural women and girls face specific constraints on their well-being and socio-economic potential, including illiteracy (only 11 percent of women can read and write), very high fertility rates (women have an average of 7.6 children), and limited access to markets, information, social services and productive resources (land, agricultural inputs, finance and credit, extension services and technology).

TARGET POPULATION

JPRWEE reaches a total of 25,200 women and men in Niger through the households of the 3,600 direct participants it targets —2,400 of them women and girls, and 1,200 boys and men — in the regions of Dosso and Maradi.

ACTIVITIES

JPRWEE activities in Niger focus on strengthening the capacities of programme participants in participatory communication, nutrition education, gender and governance of producer organizations. Access to productive assets, including labour-saving technologies for women, and support to income-generating activities are also part of the integrated approach taken by JPRWEE in Niger, which is using Dimitra Clubs to promote social cohesion and greater dialogue among women and men. Dimitra Clubs are groups of women, men and young people – mixed or not – who decide to organize themselves so as to work together to bring about changes in their communities.



One of the meetings of the Dimitra Clubs

16. New technologies reducing the burden of work on rural women

As in many other developing countries, the burden of time allocated to unpaid care work weighs heavily on rural women in Niger. This division of labour is perpetuated from one generation to the next, further exacerbating rural women's growing poverty, poor health and malnutrition, and lack of political participation and leadership roles their communities. As part of the JPRWEE response, ten multipurpose time-saving platforms were installed in seven villages of the Dosso and Maradi regions, accompanied by training for 210 women on how to operate the machines and carry out minor technical repairs.

The positive impact includes reports from women that using the grinding mills and threshing machines has

helped them save significant time — time they have in turn invested in childcare, learning new trades, diversifying their economic activities and improving their personal and family hygiene. Men also reported that the new technologies have encouraged healthier family eating habits.

Mariama Kiema is 28-year-old member of the committee that manages the platform in the village of Detagui Yamba. Having felt for herself the benefit of training on how to use the platform, she hopes to attend a literacy course to further develop her skills. She explains how it was decided to put in place a system to provide access for women who could not afford to pay in cash to use the platform:

“ We allowed them to pay with their millet or other cereals so they can still take advantage of the grinding and threshing. We will then sell the cereals to pay for the running costs of the machine, so we can continue managing it even after the programme ends and invest in other labour-saving technologies, for example to reduce the time we spend fetching water or firewood. ”



Women and girls participating in JPRWEE

17. Improving nutrition through a participatory approach

Nutrition education is among the key components of JPRWEE in Niger. Over a period of five months, women and men programme participants received information on basic concepts of nutrition, malnutrition and their consequences, along with information on essential good practices, such as hand-washing and breastfeeding. The inclusive participatory approach used in these sessions was central to their success, leading to meaningful behavioural change. Participants discussed the nutritional profile of locally available ingredients then became aware

of the challenges represented by seasonal fluctuations in their availability. As a result, they began thinking about solutions to maintain healthy, varied and balanced diet at all times.

Biba Saley is the leader of a women's Dimitra Club in Kokoukou, in southwestern Niger. She is 30 years old and has four children. She explains how, thanks to the information provided through JPRWEE, she now knows the basic principles of nutrition:

“ We now know that there are three food groups and that we must eat some of these every day... We know that green and yellow coloured foods contain vitamin A and that is important to live in a clean and healthy environment. ”

Through participatory cooking demonstrations, Biba and the other women members learned how to prepare a nutritious meal for their families using locally available food: *“We have learned that it is important to vary our meals and those of our children. Our village is also cleaner, our children fall sick less often and they eat better, so they don't lose weight anymore.”*

All participants reported having passed on the information to at least one person who had not present at the discussions. In this way, the nutrition education efforts traveled beyond the villages directly involved, even reaching isolated areas.

“ We learned a great deal about malnutrition and the role of food in our bodies and we are happy to pass this knowledge to other people so we are all going to pay closer attention to the food we give to our children. ”



A woman and her child attending one of the nutrition workshops organised by JPRWEE

18. Women's leadership and active participation in rural institutions

Yahaya Abou, a 34 year-old mother of five, lives in El Kokia in Maradi region, a small village of 8,005 inhabitants, over 4,600 of them women. She says she lived in a world of semi-darkness before JPRWEE started its activities. Today, thanks to the exchanges organized through the Dimitra Clubs, she has a sense of self-esteem and renewed confidence. As a result of actions she and other village

women have taken to better organize themselves, she has broadened her horizons.

Yahaya decided to make a modest contribution to the development of her village by sharing what she has learned. She explains:

“*First of all, it's thanks to the Clubs that the women of my village and the surrounding area have understood the importance of antenatal consultations, exclusive breastfeeding, vaccinations and a great many other things, and that's an important step forward in our rural environment. Secondly, thanks to the Clubs, we have understood the importance of peace, social cohesion and gender relations. I am the Secretary General of the Decentralized School Management Committee (COGES) in my village. I must confess that I did not really understand the role I had been given, but since last year, I have understood both my role and responsibilities.*”



Another moment from a meeting of the Dimitra Clubs

Thanks to her efforts, the number of girls attending the primary school has risen, from 200 in 2015 to 250 in 2016. But Yahaya is willing to go a step further,

encouraging girls and boys alike to look at their future. She organizes awareness-raising sessions on different topics, such as women's rights and land rights.

“*We are encouraging girls and boys to continue their studies so that it will be easier for them to find a job. I am pleased to say that as a result of greater awareness and mobilization of the entire village, this year we have built 15 huts as classrooms to protect our children against bad weather.*”



RWANDA

BACKGROUND

In Rwanda, where 80 percent of the population lives in rural areas, most people are involved in farming, depending either directly or indirectly on agriculture for their livelihoods.

Women represent 69 percent of the total labour force in the agricultural sector, and perform most of farm work related to ploughing, planting, weeding and harvesting. However, their income does not correspond to the amount of time they invest. In addition, agricultural services such as farm inputs, extension services and rural development loans are accessed primarily by men. In practice, women do not have control over revenues from crop and livestock sales.

While, from a legal point of view, land ownership and property rights are shared equitably between husband and wife, in practice, women face difficulties in accessing land due to negative attitudes towards their land rights. Similarly, despite there being no legal restriction in Rwanda on women's access credit, in reality such access is limited by a range of factors including a lack of financial literacy and of collateral.

Rwandan farmers have limited access to, and therefore make limited use of, improved seeds and organic and inorganic fertilizers, with the gaps more severe for women than for men. The proportion of female agricultural extension workers is also notably low, at only 18 percent of the total.

TARGET POPULATION

To date, JPRWEE has targeted 17,363 participants — 9,625 women and 7,738 men — in the eight target districts where it works in Rwanda: Kamonyi, Kayonza, Kirehe, Musanze, Ngoma, Nyagatare, Nyaruguru and Rubavu.

ACTIVITIES

JPRWEE support in Rwanda includes activities relating to post-harvest equipment, agricultural tools and inputs, water harvesting at the household level, upgrading informal cooperatives into formal, providing training on compost preparation and commodity post-harvest handling and storage. Moreover, policy dialogue on gender and climate-smart agriculture as well as training on women's access to finance and business planning were organized. The Gender Action Learning System (GALS) has been scaled up.



Women participating in JPRWEE

19. No two women's stories are the same

The holistic approach adopted by JPRWEE allows for different activities for different women. For some, mastering new farming techniques has boosted harvests and incomes. For others, new business skills and access to credit have helped them start new enterprises. Whatever their path, the rural women participating in JPRWEE have all achieved the same goal: they have begun to build a better life for their families, and can now afford school fees and medical insurance that they previously could not.

In the northeastern district of Nyagatare, the JPRWEE initiative provided training in modern farming techniques and post-harvest handling to women farmers, including 45-year-old Anastasia Nyiraturatsinze. A member of a farmers' organization, Anastasia has increased her maize production by more than 70 percent by applying the knowledge she gained about food storage and the use of agricultural inputs, such as fertilizers and improved seeds.



Anastasia in her maize field



Anastasia with other members of her farmers' group

Anastasia also participates in a savings and credit scheme set up by the group, and received a loan that she has invested in her family business:

“With the increased income from the maize I sell, I was able to buy two additional hectares of land for farming. I also purchased five cows and upgraded my family house. But, more importantly, I am now able to pay school fees for my four children, and I managed to pay for medical insurance for my entire family.”

20. Skills for a brighter future

Josephine Mushimiyimana, a 36-year-old mother of four, was married at the age of 26 to a poor man in the village of Bugara, in Nyaruguru District. The only skills she had at that time were in farming, but her husband had no land of his own nor a permanent job. Josephine had to engage in casual labour to survive. However, the greatest challenge they faced was their fast-growing number children, whom they were unable to support.

In 2016, JPRWEE arrived in Josephine's village, aiming to help rural women through on- and off-farm job creation and strengthening market opportunities. Through the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach — participatory capacity-building for efficient, sustainable and inclusive food production systems — Josephine received support in the form of sensitization and training on nutrition, hygiene and skills for starting a business. After receiving fortified bean seeds, a young pig, and training on establishing a kitchen garden, she rented a field to grow beans.



A woman leader participating in one of the village's meeting

Thanks to JPRWEE support, her family graduated from the most severe — poorest of the poor — to the third-most severe category as established by the “Ubudehe” programme of the Government of Rwanda.

Josephine, like other programme participants, has pledged to ensure the sustainability of JPRWEE outcomes once the Joint Programme closes, working in collaboration with local authorities, which recognize the women supported by JPRWEE as role models to encourage other to lift themselves out of poverty.

“*The transformation in the lives of women is evident to their neighbours, and a change of mindset is seen in the way participants want to help other women and neighbours who have not benefitted from the initiative*”

observes a local district official in Bugara.

“*The productivity is high because I employed the techniques I learnt from the FFS*”

says Josephine.

Family planning was another course that had an impact in her life, as she affirms:

“*I told my husband we cannot have any more children. We discussed it and we decided to stop having children. I am now more energetic and more productive than before. We can support them.*”



Josephine with the tomatoes she produced

21. Diversifying livelihoods to increase income

Drocella Nyiramaruhe, in her early 40s, lives in the Nyarurugu District with her husband and four children, aged 2 to 12, in a three-room mud house they recently built in collaboration with JPRWEE participants in Cyahinda. This is not all: through JPRWEE, Drocella has also received support in the form of sensitization and training on nutrition, hygiene and family planning.

Before the local JPRWEE project, the family lived in a one-room house belonging to a neighbour and was struggling to make ends meet. Since the project began, Drocella has been attending weekly meetings of women participants in her village. In addition to training, Drocella received fortified iron-rich beans, sweet potato cuttings that are rich in Vitamin A, a young female pig and training on how to take care of it. In parallel, the group started a savings and credit scheme.

As a result, Drocella's life has undergone a transformation. Her living standards having improved significantly since her family moved into a three-room house. She owns a pig, around 60 guinea pigs and rabbits, chickens and a cow. She farms a variety of vegetables to feed her family, improving the nutrition of the entire household. She has been able to extend and diversify her small businesses, improving her income security. The most important changes for Drocella have been social, feeling more strongly integrated into her community.

She said:

“ I have seen my life and that of my family change in a positive way. I now feel part of the community. I think I have become an inspiration for the other project participants, as I show them how things can work out if you try to invest in your own business, take some risk and hold on to something that you started. ”



Drocella working in her field

Drocella plans to further develop her existing activities and to help the community by inspiring others to work together. Her dream is to start a similar group with

a savings and credit scheme, building on the mutual support she has seen bear fruit through JPRWEE.

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JOINT PROGRAMME ON:
**Accelerating Progress towards the
Economic Empowerment of Rural Women**



SUCCESS STORIES

ETHIOPIA

GUATEMALA

KYRGYZSTAN

LIBERIA

NEPAL

NIGER

RWANDA



This publication illustrates some of the results and lessons that emerged from the Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (JPRWEE) by sharing the experiences and stories of change reported by women in the seven countries participating in the Joint Programme: Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda.

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