

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



MAKING MARKETS AND VALUE CHAINS WORK FOR RURAL WOMEN

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



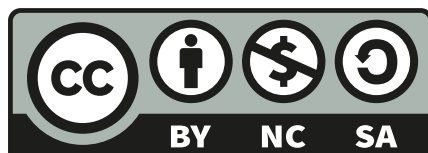
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MAKING MARKETS AND VALUE CHAINS WORK FOR RURAL WOMEN

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

This policy brief, 'Making markets and value chains work for rural women', is based on the experience of the UN Joint Programme on Rural Women's Economic Empowerment (known officially as "Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women" and the "JP RWEE" for short). The JP RWEE is a global initiative that aims to secure livelihoods and rights for rural women. The programme is jointly implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in seven countries: Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda.

The brief places JP RWEE strategies and experience in the context of current debates and frameworks to highlight the innovations developed. It aims to inform international, national and local stakeholders' formulation of evidence-based policies that build on JP RWEE achievements so far and addresses some of the challenges and gaps experienced in ways that can effectively promote rural women's economic empowerment through making markets and value chains work for rural women.

Contents

1	Making markets and value chains work for rural women	2
2	Empowering rural women through market and value chain development	6
	Developing and strengthening groups, organizations and cooperatives	7
	Improving market participation through the promotion of savings, credit and financial services	8
	Promoting income diversification, skills development and job creation	9
	Establishing links between women, markets and value chains	10
	Increasing women's influence on market-related policy-making	11
3	Creating markets that benefit rural women	13
	Creating sustainable access to markets for rural women	14
	Promoting inclusion to expand rural women's access to markets	14
	Amplifying rural women's collective voice and gender equality in policymaking related to markets and value chains	15
4	Building on the achievements of the JP RWEE	16

Making markets and value chains work for rural women

1

PROGRAMME CONJOINT
Accélérer l'autonomisation
des femmes rurales

The persistence of gender inequalities and discrimination in markets and value chains continues to constrain women's incomes and benefits from their earnings. These interlinked and mutually reinforcing inequities function on all levels, beginning at the individual and household levels and spanning enterprises, markets and value chains. In some contexts, restrictions on women's freedom and mobility exclude women from participating in markets. In others, women's participation is limited to roles characterized by heavy workloads and low wages. Women's access to and benefits from markets are often determined by their diverse identities and demographics, such as age, marital status, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location.¹ Given the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusion women experience, policy measures must be designed to address the needs and desires of the women they aim to empower.

The gender inequalities and intersecting forms of discrimination that restrict women's full and gainful participation in markets also hinder broader economic development by reducing the efficiency of markets and value chains.² A growing body of research has highlighted the positive relationship between women's economic empowerment and sustainable development. This literature has demonstrated that expanding women's access to markets can bring about numerous positive economic impacts. While researchers acknowledge that assessing the relationship between economic growth and women's economic empowerment raises many methodological issues, scholarship has

demonstrated the benefits of increasing efforts to expand women's access to markets and value chains and investing in economic sectors—such as agriculture—where women are disproportionately represented in labour-intensive, low-wage and informal employment.³

Policymakers and other stakeholders have designed and implemented a broad range of interventions aimed at developing women's economic empowerment by promoting women's access to and participation in markets and value chains. These include measures and policies that 1) aim to empower disadvantaged producers and workers, including by increasing their production and efficiency, 2) develop markets and value chains by collaborating with private sector actors and public organizations to increase gender-sensitive procurement and 3) advocate for gender-responsive economic policy.

This diverse set of measures are both complementary and necessary approaches to addressing the complex and dynamic challenges facing stakeholders working to advance women's economic empowerment and in particular for rural women who face additional barriers to markets. The effective expansion of rural women's access to markets and value chains and increases in the productivity of small-scale producers require strategies that engage a gamut of public and private stakeholders.⁴ Policy complementarities must be identified and effectively implemented if rural women's economic empowerment is to be achieved, contributing to sustainable development, poverty reduction and climate resilience.

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1. Berik, Günseli, Yana van der Meulen Rodgers and Stephanie Seguino. "Feminist economics of inequality, development and growth." *Feminist Economics* 15, no. 3 (2009): 1–33.
 2. Cuberes, David and Marc Teignier-Baqué. "Gender inequality and economic growth". World Development Report 2012. Gender Equality and Development. Background Paper (2012).
 3. Kan, Sophia and Stephan Klasen. "Macroeconomics and Gender: Recent research on economic growth and women's economic empowerment." *Women's Economic Empowerment* (2021): 75–101.
 4. UN Secretary-General's Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment. *Leave No One Behind: A Call to Action for Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment* (2016): 1–14.

This policy brief uses current literature and the experiences of the JP RWEE strategies to explore the way forward to making markets and value chains work for rural women. The JP RWEE contributed to rural women's economic empowerment in seven participating countries in its first phase.

The success of many of the JP RWEE measures presents an opportunity for partners to identify promising measures for expansion and contexts in which their replication could be successful. These measures are summarized in Box 1 below and discussed in further depth in Section 2.

BOX 1

The JP RWEE measures to empower rural women through market and value chain development: What has worked

Developing and strengthening producer groups, organizations and cooperatives

Successful measures included:

- The development and strengthening of women's groups enhanced rural women's ability to claim their rights and establish relationships with local government by increasing their visibility as economic actors.
- The expansion of rural women's organizations improved women's entrepreneurship skills, market access and ability to negotiate with market and value chain stakeholders.
- The creation of opportunities for rural women to share experiences, best practices, and technical knowledge was integral to the adoption of new approaches and the introduction to different markets.

Improving market participation through the promotion of savings, credit and financial services

Successful measures included:

- The establishment of local savings and credit groups enhanced rural women's ability to cope with shocks by increasing their economic resilience and confidence in the face of economic instability.
- Linking local savings and credit groups, including Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), to formal financial institutions expanded rural women's access to credit.
- Creating partnerships between women's groups, financial institutions and local government increased the visibility and recognition of rural women as economic actors.

Promoting income diversification, skills development and job creation

Successful measures included:

- The provision of entrepreneurship skill development enhanced rural women's ability to establish businesses, manage their finances and develop strategies for long-term sustainability.
- Fostering relationships with local government and institutions to promote gender-responsive procurement increased rural women's income by providing access to local and reliable market opportunities.
- The expansion of women-led enterprises to produce new higher yield crops and non-agricultural sectors diversified income streams.

Establishing links between women, markets and value chains

Successful measures included:

- The establishment of sustainable sales outlets were leveraged for rural women producers in local and national public sector markets, such as school feeding programmes and the WFP's P4P programme.
- The introduction of labour-saving technologies enabled rural women producers to attract new customers by reducing their production time and increasing their yields.
- The promotion of rural women's products on local platforms, including radio programming and digital forums, helped disseminate information about their enterprises with the aim of increasing sales.

Increasing women's influence on market-related policy-making

Successful measures included:

- The creation of links between rural women and local policymakers enhanced the effectiveness of women's advocacy relating to gender mainstreaming in local development planning.
- Enhancing the voice of local women's organizations and leaders increased advocacy efforts related to reforming legislation that upholds gender inequality in access to and control over resources.
- The development of women's leadership increased the number of rural women elected to and participating in decision-making forums.

A portrait of a middle-aged woman with a gentle expression, wearing a grey headscarf and a vibrant red vest over a blue and white patterned blouse. She is holding a green and white knitted item, possibly a hat or bag, in her hands. In the foreground, there are several balls of yarn in orange, brown, and blue. The background is softly blurred, showing more of the same patterned fabric.

Empowering rural women through market and value chain development

2

Rural women's economic empowerment is essential to improving women's well-being, while also being a prerequisite for the effective functioning of markets and value chains. Developing markets and value chains that are accessible and beneficial to women involves linking diverse strategies and stakeholders. It also requires dismantling the gender norms and attitudes within households, communities and institutions that impede women's participation in markets. This section describes five central approaches to promoting women's participation in markets and value chains through women's economic empowerment measures.

Developing and strengthening groups, organizations and cooperatives

Many women's economic empowerment programmes have focused on increasing women's collective negotiating power by encouraging the establishment and expansion of women's groups, organizations and cooperatives. These spaces present opportunities for women to expand their social relations, increase income generation and develop a collective voice. They also enable service providers to deliver holistic and integrated multiservice measures on a continuous and sustainable basis.⁵ Through the JP RWEE, rural women and producer organizations, cooperatives, VSLAs and self-help groups have been established, strengthened and expanded to:

- Increase rural women's access to productive resources including land, agricultural inputs and time-saving technologies.
- Promote rural women's leadership, gender-equitable governance and gender mainstreaming in local development plans.
- Facilitate access to services offered by national governments and private sector actors, such as commercial banks and credit associations.
- Develop strategic connections to broader and more lucrative markets for both products and inputs.
- Deliver capacity-building and technical training to develop rural women's entrepreneurship skills and increase their productivity.

The nature of the services and organizations developed and strengthened through the JP RWEE varied between countries. For example, in Ethiopia agro-processing groups focused on cattle and goat fattening, milk processing and grain production. Programme participants were educated on how to increase their production and sales, and formalize their cooperatives. In Niger, Ethiopia and Rwanda, producer organizations adopted regulations and practices that led to improved financial management and gender-equitable governance. In Rwanda, the JP RWEE supported the establishment of a working relationship between women's cooperatives and Africa Improve Foods, a public–private partnership that aims to increase access to nutritious foods across the region. Women's participation in cooperatives increased their ability met their families, basic needs, including food, health insurance, housing and clothing.

5. ILO. "Leveraging the cooperative advantage for women's empowerment and gender equality". Cooperatives and the World of Work Series No. 1 (2014).

In Guatemala, there was a correlation between the formalization of women's groups, the continuation of producer activities and the sustainability of increased income generation. Several formalized cooperatives supported by the JP RWEE achieved commercial success, for example:

- Fabric produced by the Cucanha, a group of artisanal fabric producers, is now being sold by Casa de los Gigantes—an international retailer based in the nation's capital. Cucanha members received training in new techniques and design and were connected to Casa de los Gigantes through the JP RWEE.
- The Canlun community group now sells its surplus agricultural outputs to the Ministry of Education for use in local school meal programmes. Local representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture helped the group navigate the legal requirements of supplying their produce to local schools.
- The establishment of the Centro Certificado [Certification Centre], an artisanal community group in Polochic, enabled the group to sell its products in supermarkets and pharmacies. The group is now working with the Ministry of Finance to add the Centre to the national environmental and health registers to create a pathway for sales in larger markets.

The JP RWEE had notable success in creating and strengthening local organizations and cooperatives that support women as they begin and expand their engagement with new markets and value chains. The provision of continued support is necessary to ensure the sustainability of gains in women's collective organizing and action. The JP RWEE should continue creating opportunities for women to come together to strengthen their collective access to markets and value chains.

Improving market participation through the promotion of savings, credit and financial services

The JP RWEE country programmes promoted savings and loans groups with a specific focus on starting income-generating activities at the individual and group level. The support of rural women's savings and access to credit varied between countries, depending on context and the models in which implementing partners have expertise. Examples included:

- Kyrgyzstan: Self-Help Groups (SHGs)
- Guatemala, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda: Village Saving and Loans Associations (VSLAs)
- Ethiopia: Rural Saving and Credit Cooperatives (RUSACCOs).

While the ability of microfinance services to stimulate positive changes in gender relations has not been rigorously assessed, evidence suggests that such programmes do have the potential to contribute to women's economic empowerment. In Ethiopia, women reported an inability to save and a lack of a savings culture before participating in Rural Saving and Credit Cooperatives. Participants later reported that the savings skills they learned in the JP RWEE financial education components helped them cope with new challenges they faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Guatemala, strengthening savings and loan groups improved financial and accountancy skills among participating members. It also enabled group members without collateral to access loans to start their businesses, secure capital for productive inputs and engage in livelihood alternatives in non-farming sectors.

The JP RWEE employed the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) to strengthen women's capacity to increase their household savings and plan for the effective use of loans

to increase income generation. In Rwanda, savings planning has been linked to GALS household-level planning, empowering participants to better cope with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by using their savings to purchase household essentials. In Nepal, GALS improved women's control over income and increased their capacity to save. Many members of the three women's groups in Gujara municipality opened bank accounts in their names and increased the amount of their savings. In almost all groups, women increased the balance of their joint saving accounts and the regularity of their contributions. In addition, some mothers opened savings accounts in their children's names and began making regular deposits to secure their future financial stability. Increases in savings were facilitated by changes in household expenditure brought about by adopting the GALS "gender balance tree" tool, which assisted families in identifying areas of spending that could be reduced or eliminated.

The JP RWEE country examples discussed above highlight the importance of facilitating women's capacity to engage with markets and value chains by expanding their access to savings, credit and financial services. Increasing women's access to and control over resources increases their financial capacity to invest in their enterprises, including growing their production, adopting new technology, and targeting new markets. It also plays an important role in empowering women in their relationships within and outside of their households by increasing their decision-making power, agency; and autonomy. The provision of reliable and sustainable support for women's savings and access to credit and financial services is essential to the JP RWEE's expansion of their engagement with markets and value chains and creating economic resilience in the face of shocks.

Promoting income diversification, skills development and job creation

Women's income generation opportunities are often limited by a lack of knowledge related to entrepreneurship and production. The JP RWEE provided training to 4,200 programme participants to develop their business management skills, financial literacy and marketing strategies. The programme also provided technical training on the incorporation of tools and technology to reduce production time and losses while increasing businesses' yield and value. The provision of capacity-building across various areas of business education for thousands of women across the programme's seven countries increased their competitiveness in formal markets, value chains and non-farm economic activities.

Capacity-building activities also focused on developing women's leadership skills to support and enhance their ability to make decisions about what markets to engage with, from farming activities to forestry. These decisions were informed by assessing the benefits and limitations of different products in terms of their nutritional benefits, climate resiliency and the possibility of off-farm income generation. In general, women chose to undertake economic activities with which were already familiar. Support was lent to the production of crops that diversified and increased income streams, such as: fortified maize and beans, pineapple, sweet potato for flour, bananas and hibiscus in Guatemala; doughnuts, peanut oil and ready-made meals in Niger; and chilies, cauliflower, radishes and beans in Nepal.

While the JP RWEE participants generally chose to undertake and expand familiar income-generating activities, initiatives were implemented to promote entrance into new markets. For example, IFAD piloted the Business Action Learning for Innovation (BALI) tool. This tool aimed to expand women's market engagement by diversifying their economic activities. BALI empowered women to identify, evaluate and select innovative, diverse and profitable businesses that can flourish in the local context. More than 90 per cent of the 281 participants from 30 self-help groups were able to start and implement innovative economic projects. Such projects present opportunities for women to leverage their existing skills to produce new and differentiated products and enter new markets.

Sustained capacity-building to equip women with the skills to engage with new markets and partners is needed to expand the demand for their products and labour developed during the first phase of JP RWEE. These efforts are essential to empowering women to incorporate new tools and technologies into production and enterprise management. There is also a pressing need for the JP RWEE to expand its partnerships with employers to increase women's access to decent wages and formal work in non-farming sectors.

Establishing links between women, markets and value chains

The JP RWEE included strategies to increase rural women's access to markets and value chains for women and women's collectives. The promotion of gender-responsive procurement—the acquisition of goods produced by women-owned and gender-responsive companies—was essential to

establishing local and sustainable market opportunities.⁶ New linkages between women and markets were established by collaborating with government institutions and private sector actors to identify sources of demand and promote gender-responsive procurement. In addition, existing links between women and markets were strengthened by providing women with the tools and knowledge to attract and fulfil greater demand by becoming more efficient producers at scale.

Initiatives at the local level have been designed to expand and safeguard women's long-term empowerment. In Nepal, workshops and exposure visits facilitated vegetable market linkages between local wholesalers and market vendors. Women participants were also provided with temporary employment at decent wage rates to construct two market outlets for women's surplus produce. Bank accounts were opened for participating women and their wages were paid directly as Nepal Cash Transfers. Employing the cash transfer infrastructure to pay women workers was used to capitalize on the benefits of increases in women's income by promoting financial inclusion and increasing women's control over resources. In addition, participants were elected to management committees and trained in market outlet management, maintenance and repair. Market outlets provide a sustainable and safe space where more than 2,000 rural women farmers can now sell their surplus produce.

The JP RWEE also worked to establish partnerships with local government institutions to facilitate women's access to sustainable and reliable local markets. In Niger, WFP purchased foodstuffs for the National School Feed Programme from local women producers. Establishing a link

6. UN Women. Gender-Responsive Procurement. Guidance Note. Principle 5. (2020).

between school feeding programmes and women producers has long-term benefits for women's income generation and enables schools to purchase locally sourced, culturally appropriate and nutrient-dense foods. In Nepal, the JP RWEE linked the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSF) Pilot with the government of Nepal's cash-based National School Meals Programme. The HGSF also established a link between local producers and women's collectives by providing collectives with access to storage facilities to manage the purchase of produce from local farmers and its distribution to schools. Through the HGSF programme, women trained in supply-chain management were able to gain first-hand experience following institutional food guidelines and managing the volume of production and pricing of goods.

The JP RWEE also worked to establish connections between women, larger markets and actors in the private sector. In Ethiopia, regional and national-level market exposure was established by linking women cooperatives and urban women enterprises with trade fairs. This provided participants an opportunity to connect with other women producers and collect information about market demand beyond their local markets. In Kyrgyzstan, the JP RWEE expanded women entrepreneurs' access to markets through the online marketplace "Buy from Women". By the end of the programme's first phase, 300 women entrepreneurs had established profiles on the platform to expand their network of potential buyers and investors.

The JP RWEE expanded women's access to markets and value chains by leveraging existing demand and creating new sources of demand for goods and services produced by women. While the programme successfully established gender-responsive procurement in several countries through partnerships

with local government institutions, greater effort is required to engage private sector actors in the practice. Emphasizing the importance of women producers' adoption of new technology and engagement with tech platforms is also essential to reach a broader market of potential buyers in the private sector.

Increasing women's influence on market-related policy-making

A key aim of the JP-RWEE is to create an enabling environment for rural women and organizations to expand women's access to decent work opportunities in the formal and informal economy. All participating countries have legislation and policies on gender equality and demonstrate an openness to adopting gender mainstreaming strategies. The programme has provided capacity-building opportunities to policymakers at all levels to promote the expansion and adoption of gender-sensitive policies in agriculture, nutrition and rural employment plans and legislation.

In Guatemala, the JP RWEE partnered with the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food to develop and institute the country's first-ever Institutional Policy for Gender Equality and its Strategy (2014–2023). In parallel to these efforts, the JP RWEE provided rights-based education to strengthen women's understanding of their rights, election laws and the framework for local development councils. Subsequently, the share of rural women elected to Municipal Urban and Rural Development Councils increased from 5 to 18 per cent. In Ethiopia, capacity-building opportunities were provided to 1,434 experts representing local and regional government and women's associations through workshops on gender mainstreaming, gender-responsive budgeting and leadership.

In Rwanda, gender-responsive planning and gender-awareness trainings were provided to 799 local authorities. Rwanda adopted five laws and five strategies to protect rural women's ownership of productive assets in the first phase of the JP RWEE, including the National Gender Policy and the Gender Mainstreaming Strategy in Agriculture. Local government and local-elected women leaders in Nepal attended a workshop on gender equality, social inclusion and gender-responsive budgeting. As a result, local-level officials committed to creating opportunities for women's meaningful participation in local planning processes and allocated funds for women's activities in various thematic areas.

The JP RWEE also built more sustainable and participatory structures to reflect rural women's priorities in regional and global policy processes. These changes were established through dialogue between rural women and local government on the promotion of women's rights, challenging gender stereotypes and ending gender-based violence. In Niger, Dimitra Clubs served as effective forums for women to raise issues and present new ideas to local officials. Participatory communication and leadership training was provided to 240 Dimitra Club leaders, enhancing the ability of club leaders to educate fellow members and engage with local officials.

Creating gender awareness within government institutions is essential to creating an enabling environment within government institutions that provide opportunities for women to engage in the policy process without experiencing discrimination and marginalization. It is also integral to establishing strategies to collect the data required to track and measure progress on rural women's economic empowerment. Assisting governments and organizations in institutionalizing gender mainstreaming should be prioritized to ensure that gains in women's participation in leadership and elected positions are sustained in the long term.



**Creating markets that
benefit rural women**

3

Market and value chain development for rural women's economic empowerment involves linking diverse strategies and stakeholders at all levels. In most cases, it also requires the dismantling of gender inequalities within households, communities and institutions. Empowering women from different backgrounds in diverse contexts requires policy responses tailored to the specific needs of women in all their diversity. To build an enabling environment for rural women to participate in markets and value chains, policy measures at the individual, household and community level must mainstream gender into both their design and implementation. This section explores three areas of activity for creating markets that are accessible to women, and from which they can receive greater benefits.

Creating sustainable access to markets for rural women

The JP RWEE implemented diverse measures across participating countries to ensure the sustainability of rural women's increases in income generation, partnerships with government and private sector actors, and improvements in intra-household and community gender relations. The programme employed several strategies to create sustainable opportunities for rural women to use the skills they gained through its educational components. To increase rural women's income generation, the programme connected local producers with institutions with a sustainable demand for their produce, increased the market reach of local producers by creating opportunities for them to connect to broader markets, and partnered with actors in the private sector to create decent work opportunities.

Such success should be expanded and strengthened to ensure that rural women's access to sustainable markets is maintained in the long term. This will require continuing partnerships with governments to ensure sustained access to institutional demand for women-produced goods. Similar relationship building and maintenance must be implemented to expand rural women's access to decent work, particularly in sectors beyond agriculture.

Promoting inclusion to expand rural women's access to markets

Gender norms underpin the discrimination women experience when engaging in markets and participating in the labour force. Engaging men in deconstructing these norms is now widely acknowledged as essential to promoting women's economic empowerment and achieving gender equality. Men also play a significant role in upholding the gendered barriers that limit women's participation in the labour force and access to the resources required to engage in entrepreneurial activities. In many contexts, men's support of women's participation in economic empowerment measures is integral to their success. Strategies to engage men in women's economic empowerment measures must cultivate men's support to ensure that such interventions do not create conflict within households and communities.⁷

While the JP RWEE did not have an overarching strategy for engaging men, all participating countries did involve men in various capacities. Many programme measures engaged women and men in the deconstruction of local gender norms that contribute to women's economic

7. ILO. "Engaging Men in Women's Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship Development Interventions: An ILO-WED Issue Brief". Women's Entrepreneurship Development Programme (2015).

marginalization. Greater emphasis should be placed on integrating transformative measures aimed at establishing more equitable gender relations to ensure the sustainability of women's gains in income generation and well-being in the long term.

Beyond the engagement of men, inclusive and transformative practices should also be integrated into the selection of women programme participants. Programme targeting is often driven by the assumption that programme benefits will reach lower-income and more disadvantaged women through women entrepreneurs providing decent wage employment opportunities. However, research on women's economic empowerment interventions suggests that even within women's groups and cooperatives, more marginalized women are often excluded. Exclusionary practices have the potential to create and intensify conflicts within communities. To broaden the positive impact of the JP RWEE, strategies should be integrated into programme interventions to ensure that the most disempowered women from participating communities have the skills and opportunities to collectively engage with markets.

Amplifying rural women's collective voice and gender equality in policymaking related to markets and value chains

A key aim of the JP RWEE is to create an enabling environment for rural women and organizations to expand women's access to decent wage opportunities in the formal and informal economy. All participating countries have legislation and policies on gender equality and an openness to adopting gender mainstreaming strategies.

The JP RWEE provided gender awareness and gender mainstreaming training for various government representatives across participating countries. These measures should continually be reinforced by engaging government representatives in training on gender-responsive policy and expanding the availability of such training across all levels of government.

The programme also provided leadership training and capacity-building opportunities to policymakers to promote the expansion and adoption of gender-sensitive policies by agriculture, food, nutrition and rural employment plans and legislation, and in general, to increase women's collective voice in policymaking processes across participating countries. Research suggests that involving women in policymaking is essential to creating an enabling policy environment for the adoption of gender-sensitive economic policy. Development planning is another mechanism for ensuring the sustainability of gains in women's economic empowerment, in which local and national officials should make women's access to markets and value chains a priority.

Increasing women's ability to inform and influence local and national decision-making related to women's economic empowerment improves the ability of institutions to respond to the needs of women. Additional measures will be required to ensure that women's access to leadership and elected positions continues to grow, which may include creating organizational procedures and legal quotas to promote and protect women's participation in leadership roles. The JP RWEE successfully increased the number of women in leadership roles in organizations, cooperatives and in government elected positions.

**Building on
the achievements
of the JP RWEE**

4

The JP RWEE created and strengthened women's access to markets and value chains by implementing context-specific gender-responsive programming. Women, and in many cases men, in the programmes, seven participating countries engaged in capacity building and training to develop their entrepreneurial and leadership skills. The programme developed opportunities for participants to implement the skills they acquired by linking them with broader markets and promoting gender-responsive procurement. Women's increases in income generation were also bolstered by efforts to promote savings and access to credit and financial services. The expansion of women's control over resources was integral to

empowering them to transform gender inequities in their interpersonal and professional relationships. The JP RWEE's economic empowerment measures also encouraged women participants to develop a collective voice, take on leadership positions and engage in gender equality advocacy. While the programme increased women's economic empowerment in many contexts, there remains a plethora of opportunities to expand its activities and implement new measures to expand and sustain its positive impact. Recommendations for the expansion of the JP RWEE's efforts to achieve women's economic empowerment moving forward are listed below in Box 2.

BOX 2

Policy recommendations to expand rural women's sustainable access to markets and value chains

Creating sustainable access to markets

- Develop and strengthen partnerships with local institutions to broaden access to sustainable markets for rural women within their communities.
- Leverage sustainable sales outlets for rural women producers in local and national public markets, such as school feeding programmes and the WFP's Purchase for Progress (P4P) programme.
- Implement strategies to partner with more private sector actors to expand access to non-farm decent work for rural women.
- Provide regular forums for rural women to connect with wholesale buyers and vendors.
- Promote rural women's products on local platforms, including radio programming and digital forums, to disseminate information about their enterprises to increase sales.

Promoting inclusion to expand rural women's access to markets

- Identify and integrate best practices for engaging men in support of rural women's economic empowerment across participating countries.
- Expand efforts to promote gender equality through men's and women's joint participation in activities that challenge and dismantle inequitable gender roles.
- Integrate strategies for the inclusion of disadvantaged rural women into efforts to support women's organizations, VSLAs and cooperatives.

Fostering gender-responsive policies for market and value chain integration

- Promote women's voices in policy advocacy and in decision-making forums to establish an enabling environment for rural women in informal and formal economies through the design and implementation of gender-sensitive policies.
- Create links between rural and local policymakers to enhance the effectiveness of women's advocacy related to gender mainstreaming in local development planning and access to and control over resources.
- Increase rural women's leadership development including the number of women elected to and participating in decision-making forums.
- Establish organizational procedures and legal requirements that institutionalize opportunities for rural women's participation in leadership roles and policymaking.





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

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