



JOINT PROGRAMME: Accelerating Progress Towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment



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Context

Rural women account for 51% of Nepal's rural population, that represent nearly 80% of the country's total population. Despite being central to agriculture—where around 70% of employed women are engaged¹—their contributions remain largely underrecognized and undervalued.

In Madhesh Province, deeply rooted discriminatory social norms and gender roles continue to limit women's mobility, access to resources, decision-making power, and participation in public life. These norms often confine women to unpaid care and domestic work, restricting their economic opportunities and leadership potential.

The increasing trend of male out-migration has further reshaped rural dynamics. With many working-age men seeking employment abroad, women are assuming greater responsibilities as farmers and heads of households. While this transition increases women's workload, it also presents an opportunity to strengthen their agency, leadership, and role in local economies.

In this context, empowering rural women farmers is critical not only for gender equality but also for sustainable and inclusive economic growth. The Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress Towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment (JP RWEE) contributes to this transformation by promoting women's economic empowerment, leadership, and rights, while also aligning

with the Government of Nepal's evolving priorities on governance reform, inclusive development, agricultural transformation, and economic revitalization.

Programme overview

The JP RWEE is a global initiative with an overarching goal to secure rural women's livelihoods, rights and resilience in the context of sustainable development.

Building on the achievements of Phase I (2014–2021) in Sindhuli, Sarlahi and Rautahat in Nepal, Phase II (2022–2027) is being implemented in Siraha and Saptari districts of Madhesh Province covering five local governments.

PHASE I
2014–2021
Sindhuli
Sarlahi
Rautahat

PHASE II
2022–2027
Siraha
Saptari
districts
of Madhesh
Province

The JP RWEE is jointly implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the World Food Programme (WFP) and local partners, and supported by Ireland, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, through the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF).

1 ILOSTAT/World Bank. 2018. Nepal Labour Force Survey (NLFS).

In Nepal, JP RWEE Phase II aligns with the Government's Agricultural Development Strategy (ADS) and its Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Strategy that was developed with technical support from the JP RWEE in Phase I. The programme contributes to national priorities while supporting the global 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The JP RWEE adopts a multi-sectoral strategy to achieve four interrelated outcomes:

-  Improved food security and nutrition;
-  Increased income, decent work, and economic autonomy;
-  Enhanced participation and leadership in rural institutions;
-  A more gender-responsive policy environment.

The programme targets rural women in the most vulnerable

situations—those facing food insecurity, climate shocks, limited income and exclusion from decision-making.

It prioritizes marginalized groups including survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), single women, Dalit women², Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities and women-headed households.

Key results

The programme reaches 5,500 rural women and 500 men across 5 municipalities. As of May 2026, over 5,700 participants have engaged through 200 women farmers' groups, gaining access to agricultural inputs, entrepreneurship training, financial literacy and leadership development.

The JP RWEE in Nepal has made significant strides across its four outcome areas, demonstrating tangible improvements in the lives of rural women and their communities.

In 2025 the programme has achieved the following results:

 Food Security & Nutrition Improved agricultural capacity and household resilience	
-13% Household food insecurity decreased	-22% Individual food insecurity declined
4,455 Women accessed climate-smart agricultural inputs 4,840 adopted climate-smart practices, improving productivity and resilience	82% Women achieved minimum dietary diversity (MDD-W) Improving household nutrition
5,115 Women accessed climate, market, and advisory information Using ICT-based services	1,705 Women accessed labour-saving technologies Through Custom Hiring Service Centres, reducing drudgery
Crop productivity increased Vegetables (+217%), pulses (+181%), and nuts/seeds (+482%), wheat (+76%) and paddy (+44%) compared with baseline	

 Income & Decent Work Increased economic autonomy and financial inclusion	
+63% Average annual farm income increased	+14% Off-farm income increased Strengthening livelihood resilience
1,489 Women accessed financial services Such as savings, credit, insurance, strengthening financial inclusion	73% Women participated in household financial decision-making Reflecting enhanced economic agency
2,750 Women accessed social protection schemes	4,235 Women initiated or scaled businesses With strengthened entrepreneurship and financial literacy
NPR 21.2 million generated in sales Women farmers entered local food procurement markets, creating new market opportunities previously unavailable	

 Participation & Leadership Enhanced involvement in community decision-making	
52% Women actively participated in community organizations and governance platforms Strengthening collective agency	550 Women assumed leadership roles Chairpersons, secretaries, committee leaders
>50% Programme participants strengthened leadership and governance capacities Including through Women Leadership Schools	706 Community members, including men and boys, engaged in dialogues to shift gender norms and unpaid care roles
Improved household dynamics Greater joint decision-making and increased male engagement in shared responsibilities	

 Policy Environment More gender-responsive legal frameworks and awareness	
6 Gender-responsive policies and frameworks adopted at local level Including agriculture and GESI policies with implementation plans	~84% Women improved awareness of legal rights and services Including GBV prevention and social protection
323 Women directly engaged in policy dialogues and planning processes Influencing local decision-making	5 Municipalities conducted GESI audits Strengthening institutional accountability and planning
NPR 5.61M Allocated by local governments for women-focused agriculture, entrepreneurship, and social protection initiatives	

² Women belonging to the Dalit community, a historically marginalized group in South Asia, particularly India and Nepal, who face overlapping forms of discrimination based on their caste and gender.



Looking forward

In 2026–2027, JP RWEE in Nepal will focus on consolidating results, strengthening institutional ownership, and ensuring sustainability of women-led economic transformation.

Findings from the Mid-term Review (MTR) reaffirmed the programme's strong relevance and results, while highlighting the need to further strengthen coordination, sustainability, and scaling of successful models; these insights have informed the programme's strategic focus for the remaining period.

Key priorities include scaling climate-smart agriculture, promoting post-harvest management and market systems, and expanding women-led agri-enterprises and value addition.

The programme will deepen women's economic empowerment and leadership, through enhanced access to finance, social protection, and gender-responsive care systems, while strengthening women's participation in governance and decision-making platforms.

At the systems level, the JP RWEE will support local governments to institutionalize gender-responsive policies, budgeting, and data systems, ensuring that women's priorities are integrated into planning and public investment.

As the programme approaches closure of Phase II in 2027, efforts will prioritize capacity transfer, policy uptake, knowledge sharing, and scaling of proven models, positioning rural women as key drivers of resilient and inclusive rural economies.

Shyambati Kumari Sardar, Laxmipur Patari

Facing early marriage, caste discrimination and poverty, Shyambati Kumari Sardar, 40, once believed that hardship and exclusion defined her future. Today, she is a community leader driving economic, social and institutional change.

Her turning point came three years ago when she joined the Jitmahan Women Farmers' Group supported by the JP RWEE. Through the programme, she gained technical skills that significantly increased her household income to approximately 100,000 rupees per year.

With greater financial stability and growing confidence, Shyambati returned to formal education after a 20-year interruption and completed Grade 12. She also took up tailoring, building on skills acquired through ward-level training—an initiative made possible after women supported by the JP RWEE successfully advocated with local authorities.

Shyambati's role in her community has since expanded. As a trained psychosocial counsellor, she leads awareness sessions and supports individuals facing domestic violence and family disputes. In one notable case, she assisted a young man in obtaining citizenship in his mother's name—an important achievement in a context where such cases remain rare, highlighting how the programme is strengthening women's access to legal recognition and support systems.

In recognition of her work, Shyambati was selected for an advanced six-month psychosocial training programme in Kathmandu. She is now working with the ward to establish a dedicated counselling desk to extend these services to a wider community.

Reflecting on her journey, Shyambati shares: *"Earlier, I believed it was my fate to endure hardship and isolation. JP RWEE helped me realise that I can transform my life—and support others to do the same."* She adds, *"Now the sky is the limit for me. I am doing so many things that I always wanted to do. And I will not stop."*



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