

ACCELERATING PROGRESS TOWARDS THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN

BI-ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT REPORTING PERIOD: 1 JANUARY – 30 JUNE 2025

Programme Title & Project Number Programme Title: Accelerating Progress Toward Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Nepal MPTF Office Project Reference Number: 00132318	Country, Locality(s), Priority Area(s) / Strategic Results Country: Nepal Locality: Province Madesh. (District Saptari with rural municipalities of Tilathi Koiladi and Chinnamasta) (District Siraha, with urban municipality of Karjanha and rural municipalities of Laxmipur, Patari and Sakhuwanankarkatti) Total programme beneficiaries: 6,000 (5,500 women, 500 men) (5,500 women, 500 men - without overlap across all 4 outcomes including 200 policymakers of which 200 are group members) Total programme Indirect beneficiaries: 35,000 Direct beneficiaries for 2025: 3,000 (2,850 women, 150 men - without overlap across all 4 outcomes including 100 policymakers, and 120 groups) Strategic result: Ensure rural women's livelihoods and rights in the context of sustainable development and the SDGs.
Participating Organization(s) FAO, IFAD, UNWOMEN, WFP	Implementing Partners Government: Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (Federal level), Ministry of Land Management, Agriculture and Cooperatives (provincial level), Participating five Local Governments (Local Level) Civil Society: DidiBahini, Support Activities for Poor Producers of Nepal (SAPPROS)
Programme/Project Cost (US\$) Total approved budget as per project document: US\$ 5 Million MPTF Contribution for 2025 only - FAO US\$1,117,170 - IFAD US\$ 1,16,170 - WFP US\$ 1,157,170 - UN Women US\$ 1,563,490 Agency Contribution - by Agency (if applicable) NA Government Contribution (if applicable) NA Other Contributions (donors) (if applicable) NA TOTAL: US\$ 1,333,739	Programme Duration Overall Duration: 5 YEARS Start Date (25/05/22) End Date (24/05/27)
Programme Assessment/Review/Mid-Term Eval. Assessment/Review - if applicable <i>please attach</i>¹ ☒ Yes ☐ No Date: May 2022 – August 2025 Mid-Term Evaluation Report – if applicable <i>please attach</i> ☐ Yes ☒ No Date: dd.mm.yyyy	Report Submitted By Name: Mehtap Tatar Title: Deputy Representative Participating Organization (Lead): UN Women, Nepal Country Office Email address: mehtap.tatar@unwomen.org

¹ **Mid Term Review report** (preliminary findings) will be reported and attached as annex to the Annual Work Plan 2026. Final MTR report will be disclosed as annex to the Annual Report 2025.

ABBREVIATIONS & ACCRONYMS

AMIS	Agriculture Management Information System
CHSC	Custom Hiring Service Center
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FEBL	Financial Education and Business Literacy
GALS	Gender Action Learning System
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GRB	Gender-Responsive Budgeting
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
JP RWEE	Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress Towards Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Nepal
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NFS	Nutrition Field School
NPK	Nitrogen, Potash and Phosphorus
NFS	Nutrition Field School
PUNO	Participating United Nations Organization
UN Women	United Nations Programme for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

NARRATIVE REPORT

I. Summary

In the first half of 2025, the JP RWEE in Nepal has demonstrated tangible progress across all four (4) Outcomes, with implementation on track and over 40% of annual targets already reached. While participants continue to benefit from productive assets and climate-smart agriculture inputs delivered in previous years, this semester reflects a scale-up in women's skills for nutritious food production, literacy, and digital inclusion (Outcome 2), expanded access to financial and business services (Outcome 3), and strengthened leadership capacities for engagement in governance structures (Outcome 4).

In Nepal, the JP RWEE has driven significant impact across food security, economic empowerment, and gender-responsive governance. Through the provision of climate-resilient inputs, Nutrition Field Schools (NFSs) and gender-responsive nutrition over 2,900 women farmers (101% of the target for 2025 from five (5) participating local governments in Madhesh Province), reported increased yields and improved household nutrition, demonstrating the effectiveness of climate-smart agriculture and targeted training. The financial literacy and entrepreneurship support, enabled 139 women to launch or expand businesses, generating over USD 25,000 in income and improving market access—particularly for landless and single women. At the policy level, the JP RWEE facilitated Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) audits and public hearings across five (5) municipalities, and where women raised critical issues for the first time, leading to pledges for inclusive services such as childcare and irrigation. These shifts reflect growing institutional accountability, strengthened women's agency, and a more inclusive development trajectory.

Challenges in reporting structures within the government counterparts have partially affected consistency in commitment and coordination with the Participating United Nations Organizations (PUNOs). However, participatory audits, community-led training models, and early engagement with local officials and male allies have proven effective in driving grassroots ownership, improving access to gender-responsive services and contributing to shifting social norms that have historically limited women's roles and visibility in society, as well as norms around lack of trust in women's ability to lead, mobilize resources, speak publicly, and establish their own identity.

The Mid-term review (MTR) process in Nepal is gaining momentum, as the country team has onboarded consultants with the expectation of receiving a preliminary draft of the MTR findings report by the first week of October. There is a high likelihood that the programme may fall slightly off track in completing all planned activities by December 2025, with some expected carry-over into 2026—particularly those requiring direct government engagement. This delay is primarily due to the recent Gen Z protests in Nepal, which led to the tragic loss of many young lives, damage to government infrastructure, a change in government, and the announcement of elections to form a new parliament in March 2026.

II. Results

Outcome 1: Improved food security and nutrition for rural women and their households that contribute to equitable and sustainable food systems. (*Beneficiary Target 2025 – 3,000 Total – women 2,850 + men 150*) – 97% achieved.

During this first semester, the programme has already achieved 97% of our 2025 target of participants and remain on track to meet or exceed our overall goal by the end of the year. Consistent collaboration and coordination with women's farmers groups and local government representatives has strengthened ownership and integration of climate-resilient practices at community level. Early crop-cutting assessments² conducted in cooperation with extension services show increased yields in wheat, lentils, and off-season vegetables,³ confirming the effectiveness of improved seeds and training with NFS. These results reflect growing impact on food security and nutrition among rural women, as the programme equips them with essential climate-smart practices to build resilience and reduce the negative effects of climate change on agricultural productivity. It also supports the maintenance of nutrient-dense diets and provides the knowledge and tools needed to make informed nutritional choices. Two (2) knowledge management products have been developed under this outcome to generate evidence of higher productivity achieved through access to climate-resilient inputs and improved technical skills: a “Crop Cutting Report” and “Flyers on improved paddy cultivation practices”, which contribute to enhancing farmers’ technical farming skills and encouraging a shift away from traditional cropping practices.

More specifically, 92% of the rural women now access and use climate-resilient inputs such as early vegetable seeds, improving yields and aligning harvests with market demand and half of them have adopted submergence-tolerant paddy varieties, reporting improved yields, crop stability, and increased incomes⁴. To strengthen community-level seed systems, the JP RWEE distributed 510 kg of foundation seeds, building on last year’s pilot efforts. Knowledge-sharing has also expanded: exchange visits in *Saptari* brought together women farmer leaders and local officials, fostering ownership of women-led, climate-smart farming. Participants felt encouraged to replicate these practices locally. In parallel, access to labor-saving technologies has grown, with existing 360 women continuing to benefit from Custom Hiring Service Centers (CHSC). These centers generated NPR 95,000 [*approximately USD 708*] through a cost-recovery model, supporting service sustainability.

Through NFS, where training in gender-responsive nutrition, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), and climate-resilient agriculture has been provided, participants (2,341 farmers - 2,274 women, 67 men) reported improved household food practices and sanitation, with 80% applying better food planning. Since 2023, the total non-overlapping outreach under this output—aimed at supporting women in nutritional food production and promoting sustainable healthy practices—has reached 3,465 women. Pregnant and lactating women noted enhanced dietary diversity, and a quarter of trainees initiated or expanded home gardens. This year, through collaboration with provincial laboratories, integrated soil fertility management, based on site-specific Nitrogen, Potash and Phosphorus (NPK) and pH was introduced to 200 farmers (196 women, 4

² A preliminary crop-cutting assessment is an early-stage evaluation method used to estimate agricultural productivity—typically crop yields—before the final harvest data is available. It helps assess the effectiveness of agricultural interventions, such as climate-resilient inputs and training

³ Wheat yields reached 3,100 kg/ha (a 154.1% increase from the baseline of 1,220 kg/ha); lentil productivity rose to 1,156 kg/ha (a 413.8% increase from the baseline of 225 kg/ha); and off-season vegetable cultivation averaged 6,350 kg/ha (a 184.2% increase from the baseline of 2,234 kg/ha).

⁴ These data are reported as a result of the beneficiary contact conducted from January to June 2025 with Field visits by the PUNO. These beneficiary feedback collected during the field visits and reported in the PUNO’s progress reports will be triangulated with the upcoming Outcome monitoring exercise planned at the end of the year to measure the impact of the programme as per the JP RWEE Performance Results Indicator Framework.

men). This analysis support in improving yields and drought resilience. Finally, additional 125 women introduced with Agricultural Management Information Systems (AMIS) applications,⁵ bringing the total number of beneficiaries to 3,547 since 2023. Through AMIS, these women now have gained access to timely weather forecasts, market prices, and agrometeorological advisory services—marking a significant step forward in informed agricultural decision-making.

Outcome 2: Rural women’s income, decent work and economic autonomy are increased to secure their livelihoods and build resilience. (*Beneficiary Target 2025 – 2,400 Total – women 2,240 + men 160*) – 69 % achieved.

The programme continues to make meaningful progress under Outcome 2, with a clear shift toward inclusive, climate-resilient, and market-driven livelihoods for rural women. To date, more than a half of the scaled-up interventions planned in 2025 are ongoing and on track, with a quarter of those already completed and for which additional 1,653 participants (97 % of them women) have been benefitting against 2,400 yearly targets, reflecting strong momentum in community engagement and uptake.

A key driver of this progress has been the work focused on enhancing women’s entrepreneurial capacities and access to markets. Since 2024, over 2,308 farmers strengthened their financial and business skills to date, supported by 25 newly trained community facilitators using the Financial Education and Business Literacy (FEBL) approach and the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) ‘lite’ module. In 2025 alone, 313 additional farmers were reached—marking a significant milestone in empowering rural communities with essential financial capabilities. As a result, 2,068 women launched or expanded enterprises to date including 139 in 2025, and many transitioned from subsistence farming to income-generating activities. Vegetable production by nearly a quarter of those reached yielded 66 metric tons, generating NPR 3.37 million [*approximately USD 25,000*] in income and contributing to household nutrition and school feeding in 2025. Improved market access and negotiation skills led to a 35 % increase in prices received by farmers. Notably, mushroom cultivation emerged as a promising new enterprise for landless and single women this year, generating income and attracting a pledge of support from the local government for scale-up, highlighting its potential for sustainability and replication. Gender equality considerations were central throughout, recognizing women as producers and equal business partners, which strengthened outcomes across the value chain.

The programme expanded access to decent work and social protection in line with the scaling up planned in 2025. Additional 1,653 participants improved their understanding of key schemes in 2025, gaining practical knowledge on eligibility and application processes. This brings the total number of participants reached since 2024 to 3,358. 825 women successfully accessed child nutrition allowances, reducing financial strain and supporting household well-being demonstrating an important step toward broader coverage and inclusion.

Results have already been observed on increasing access to financial services, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), and other enabling tools. To date, over 2,300 women opened savings accounts including 430 in 2025 alone. Additionally, 384 women accessed formal credit with 168 doing so in 2025, and nearly 1,000 began using agro-advisory apps and mobile banking platforms—narrowing the digital divide and enhancing financial independence. Additionally, 100 farmers enrolled in livestock

⁵ Smart Krishi, Geo Krishi apps etc.; Follow-up engagement from 2024 confirmed that 20% of 270 new users were actively using digital tools for farm-level decision-making.

insurance, demonstrating improved preparedness for climate-related risks and contributing to more resilient livelihoods.

This second semester, the programme will prioritize reducing women's household drudgery by providing appropriate tools and technologies, and piloting care initiatives. Women will be equipped with comprehensive support—including supplies and psychosocial counselling—to help safeguard against disasters and climate shocks, aligning with the programme's social protection objectives. In parallel, efforts will be made to link women to markets and financial institutions. This integrated approach aims to transition women into income-generating roles, foster the development of decent work plans, and strengthen their economic autonomy.

Outcome 3: Rural women's voices and agency are increased for full and equal participation and leadership in their households, communities, organizations and governance systems. *(Beneficiary Target 2025 – 1,000 Total⁶) –127 % achieved.*

Under Outcome 3, the programme is driving meaningful change in women's civic engagement and leadership. Half of the planned interventions this year are presently scaling up steadily and almost completed in reaching their targets, while only few are scheduled for the upcoming quarters at mid-year.

During the reporting period, rural women demonstrated increased political agency and leadership confidence, with many expressing intents to contest the 2027 local elections. This shift was evident as 95 women farmers actively voiced priorities in ward meetings—building on 193 participants in 2024. For the first time, 15 women's groups, representing over 400 participants, formally submitted development proposals to ward offices. These proposals, focused on income generation and infrastructure, were acknowledged by ward chairpersons and are being considered for integration into local budgets, reflecting growing engagement in gender-responsive governance. The programme will continue to strengthen women's representation in local governance structures, while aligning them with networks and alliances to amplify their voice and influence.

In these first two quarters of 2025, interventions focused on strengthening women's skills and capacity to participate in local governance and decision-making structures. In 2025, an additional 1,716 women enhanced their leadership capacities in gender, rights, advocacy, and political participation compared to 2,917 in 2024, supported by 30 women catalysts who led cascading sessions within producer organizations. Likewise, an additional 1,124 women joined 40 new producer groups, with 120 taking on decision-making roles. This adds to the 5,508 women who have joined 200 groups since 2024. Community dialogues engaged 265 men to promote shared responsibilities and support for women's leadership, while 69 participants reflected on the transformative impacts of FEBL and GALS methodologies—leading to improved household dynamics in 14 couples. These efforts are contributing to a shift in social norms, with women increasingly recognized as credible leaders by local governments and male allies. However, challenges remain, including limited political party support, financial constraints, and entrenched patriarchal norms about women's participation and decision making.

The JP RWEE has invested on scaling up productive group's organizational capacities and social capital using GALS approach. These interventions are fostering inter-ward connections, peer nominations for leadership, and sustained engagement with governance forums, particularly among marginalized women who were previously unheard within their households and communities. For the first time, 484 women

⁶ This number has been reviewed and corrected from the targets established in the AWP25.

gained practical knowledge on strengthening their networks and alliances through participatory tools such as ward level network and stakeholders mapping. While the programme, has enhanced group management and institutional capacity for more than 1,124 women to form additional 40 productive groups, four (4) of those were officially registered with local governments, enabling their access to extension services. By December 2025, all 40 groups are expected to be formally registered and benefit of extension services.

Outcome 4: Gender-responsive legal frameworks, policies and institutions are strengthened to create an enabling environment for rural women to secure their livelihoods, rights and resilience.
(Beneficiary Target 2025 – 1,900 Total – women 1,800 + men 100 included elected leaders and government officials) – 45% achieved.

Under Outcome 4, the programme keeps laying the groundwork for systemic change by strengthening institutional capacities and form a cohesive strategy to institutionalize gender equality and empower rural women to shape the policies and systems that affect their lives. Participants have been engaged under the current initiative making steady progress toward the 2025 target. For instance, elected representatives and government officials demonstrated increased capacity and ownership for gender-responsive governance. This was reflected in the institutionalization of permanent GESI structures and the completion of GESI audits across five (5) local governments. These advancements are contributing to more inclusive, transparent, and accountable planning and budgeting processes, and build a strong foundation for sustained gender equality at the local level. Due to the recent Gen Z-led protests, this component is likely to be significantly affected, as most activities are planned in collaboration with the government. However, in the event of political stability, the programme will focus on strengthening capacities in Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB), supporting the development of more gender-responsive policies, and conducting policy advocacy across all three (3) tiers of government. These efforts aim to direct public financing more effectively toward rural women in agriculture, applying an intersectional lens.

The JP RWEE is scaling up intervention aiming at enhancing the capacities of policymakers and stakeholders to design, implement, and track gender-responsive policies and budgets. All five (5) local governments conducted their first GESI audits, supported by GESI Committees and Taskforces, marking a shift from awareness to accountability. In public hearings, 83 women farmer representatives raised critical issues, many speaking publicly for the first time. 36 officials from the five (5) participating local government pledged concrete actions, including cold storage, irrigation, legal outreach, and inclusive services. Findings from a gender-responsive care infrastructure assessment were shared with three (3) municipalities, drawing their attention to the need for establishing childcare and eldercare centres and prioritize women-focused programmes in local budgets. These public commitments signal growing policy responsiveness and institutional willingness to embed gender equality into service delivery.

Steady progresses have been done as well on building the capacity of rural women and their organizations to engage in and influence policy forums. An additional 848 women from 30 producer organizations strengthened their understanding of legal rights, gender roles, Gender Based Violence (GBV), and marginalization in 2025 alone. This effort has boosted women's confidence, improved access to services, and enhanced community-level GBV response. Peer solidarity and strengthened knowledge are now driving grassroots advocacy for gender-responsive policies, particularly for marginalized women in agriculture. As a result, they are now vocal about their needs and aspirations, actively claiming their rights and holding

local governments accountable for designing and implementing gender-responsive programmes and policies through available platforms such as policy hearings, advocacy dialogues, and meetings.

III. Delays in implementation, challenges, lessons learned, successes.

In Nepal, a limited number of activities from the 2024 workplan have been carried over into 2025 due to **delays** in delivering the 2024 targets by December last year. Under Outcome 3 the planned sensitization campaigns with value chain actors and beneficiaries to ensure that both female and male leaders take better account of specific gender issues associated with their organizations' products, services and procurement (i.e. gender-responsive procurement), (Activity 3.2.2) were not initiated. The delay is primarily due to slow coordination and limited engagement with value chain actors. To address this, the activity has been scheduled for Q3–Q4 2025 and is working to strengthen local-level partnerships to ensure timely delivery. Under Outcome 4, federal-level trainings on gender-responsive budgeting (Activity 4.1.1) and disaster-resilient agricultural policy development (Activity 4.1.2) remain pending. These delays are linked to challenges in aligning with national stakeholders and securing technical inputs. Both trainings are planned to be completed by December 2025, with targeted technical backstopping and renewed engagement with federal counterparts.

Key lessons learned and success have emerged from participatory GESI audits, which showed strong conceptual uptake but revealed gaps in monitoring and inclusive service delivery. Community-led cascading models, covering FEBL, GALS, leadership, and agricultural techniques, proved transformative, fostering grassroots ownership, boosting women's confidence, and contributing to shifts in social norms. Early engagement of local officials and male allies enhanced institutional ownership and community buy-in, while inclusive platforms for rural women improved government accountability and access to gender-responsive agricultural support. Several women trained through the leadership components are now participating in ward forums, considering candidacy in local elections, and advocating for their rights, reflecting increased confidence and growing acceptance of women in leadership roles.

The MTR process in Nepal is progressing well. The country team has onboarded consultants, with the preliminary draft of the MTR findings report expected by the first week of October. To accelerate the process, the team has already reviewed the inception report. To strengthen multi-stakeholder coordination, one (1) joint field missions involving participating UN agencies were conducted in April. During these missions, all five (5) local governments were briefed on the JP RWEE implementation plans within their jurisdictions. These engagements also contributed to enhancing local-level impact through coordination committee meetings. At the national level, a high-level Steering Committee meeting was held on 7 July to seek strategic guidance and foster alignment with national government priorities. All these preliminary elements will feed the annual workplan for 2026. A restitution workshop will take place in November when findings and recommendations will be formally validated.

IV. Performance Indicator Table

Performance Result Indicators at outcome and output level are measured at the end of the year. Therefore, no changes will be reported bi-annually. For status of the Performance Result Framework (PRF), please refer to [Nepal Annual Country report 2024](#).