

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



SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS FOR RURAL WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

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

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SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS FOR RURAL WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

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

This policy brief, “Sustainable Livelihoods for Rural Women’s Economic Empowerment: Experiences and Ways Forward from the Joint Programme on Rural Women’s Economic Empowerment,” is part of a series to present evidence from the strategies and praxis of the United Nations Joint Programme on Rural Women’s Economic Empowerment (officially called “Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women” or “JP RWEE” in short form). Based on case studies, experiences and evaluations from the JP RWEE, the brief draws conclusions and makes recommendations to promote sustainable livelihoods for rural women. This brief situates the experiences of the JP RWEE in the context of current policy debates and scholarship to highlight approaches to achieve sustainable livelihoods for rural women. It also identifies challenges and gaps in JP RWEE programming to inform international, national and local stakeholders’ formulation of evidence-based policies that build on the JP RWEE’s achievements and lessons learned so far on sustainable livelihoods in order to expand the programme’s positive impact.

The JP RWEE is a global initiative that aims to secure sustainable 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, Rwanda, Tanzania and Tunisia.

Contents

1 Sustainable livelihoods for rural women	2
Addressing gender inequality to achieve sustainable livelihoods for rural women	4
2 Strategies to promote sustainable livelihoods to achieve rural women’s economic empowerment: Lessons from the JP RWEE	6
Promoting rural women’s sustainable livelihoods through education	8
Developing rural women’s resilience through access to financial services, savings and credit	9
Promoting rural women’s economic empowerment through land rights and tenure security	10
Implementing legal protections and gender-responsive development planning to create inclusive environments for rural women	11
3 Policy recommendations for achieving rural women’s economic empowerment through sustainable livelihoods	13

A close-up photograph of a woman wearing a traditional Kyrgyz headscarf (doppo) and a black jacket with intricate embroidery. She is looking down with a focused expression. The background is slightly blurred, showing more traditional decor.

Sustainable livelihoods for rural women

1

The concept of sustainable livelihoods emerged as a distinct development approach in the early 1990s, arising from an evolving understanding of the relationship between economic development, poverty reduction and sustainability among development scholars.¹ While there is no singular definition of sustainable livelihoods, most definitions expand upon the seminal work of Chambers and Conway published in 1992. In this work, the authors explain that sustainable livelihoods encompass the various capabilities, assets and activities that enable individuals to access the resources and income they need to withstand shocks and maintain long-term stability. These capabilities, assets and activities may include education and training, access to financial services and asset ownership.²

The concept of sustainable livelihoods has inspired diverse approaches to the promotion of rural women's economic empowerment and the development of inclusive social and political environments. Development strategies inspired by these approaches focus on enhancing the individual and collective capabilities required to secure resilient and sustainable livelihoods. These strategies place particular emphasis on improving the livelihoods of marginalized and disadvantaged groups, including rural communities and women.

Achieving sustainable livelihoods in rural areas requires programming and policy that address context-specific needs and risks faced by rural communities. The complexity of developing such sustainable livelihood strategies requires engaging a multitude of stakeholders to understand the specific needs of local communities, particularly among groups that have been historically excluded from decision-making processes. This is particularly

important to fostering the inclusivity of institutions at all levels and ensuring they are responsive to the needs of disadvantaged groups, such as women, low-income households and people with disability. Promoting rural women's sustainable livelihoods requires implementing gender-responsive programming and policy that supports their economic empowerment, resilience and sustainability. While development programming has contributed to progress toward sustainable livelihoods for rural women, formidable barriers continue to hamper their economic empowerment.

Given the particular importance of agricultural production in rural communities, achieving sustainable livelihoods for rural women requires addressing the low yields and profits that characterize many agricultural activities. While the structure of the global economy continues to change, the agriculture sector remains an important source of employment for rural women. In 2019, nearly 27 per cent of workers around the world were employed in the agricultural sector, representing 25 per cent of all women participating in the labour force.³ The number of rural women working in non-agricultural sectors remains significantly lower than those engaged in the agriculture sector. Many rural women's livelihoods depend solely on income-generating activities in the agricultural sector, including farming, livestock breeding and fishing. While rural women's agricultural production is essential to global and local food supplies, many rural women are employed in precarious, poorly compensated and informal jobs.⁴ Improving rural women's economic resilience and sustainable income-generating opportunities thus requires addressing the vulnerability of women's employment across economic sectors.

1 Julie Thekkudan and Rajesh Tandon. "Women's livelihoods, global markets and citizenship." IDS Working Papers 2009.336 (2009): 01–36.

2 Robert Chambers, and Gordon Conway. *Sustainable rural livelihoods: practical concepts for the 21st century*. Institute of Development Studies (UK) (1992).

3 FAO. Employment indicators 2000–2019. Global and regional trends. FAOSTAT Analytical Briefs Series No. 36. Rome. (2022).

4 World Bank. "Female labour force participation." The Gender Data Portal. (9 January 2022).

Addressing gender inequality to achieve sustainable livelihoods for rural women

Tackling gender inequality is essential to achieving the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals and increasing women's access to sustainable livelihoods. Achieving gender equality requires guaranteeing women equality before the law and transforming gender norms and attitudes that disadvantage women. This includes the adoption of legal protection of women's human rights and the dismantling of customary laws that limit their educational attainment, asset ownership, access to financial services, and rights to land and tenure security.⁵ It also requires the transformation of gender norms and attitudes that prevent women from participating in social and political activities and leads to the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work between women and men. For rural women in particular, promoting women's rights to land and tenure security and educational attainment is essential to creating equitable access to sustainable livelihoods.

Low levels of asset ownership among rural women hinders their access to financial services and credit. Women are significantly less likely to have equal access to, control over and ownership of land than men; this includes agricultural land, despite women making up nearly half of agricultural workers worldwide. In 2018, FAO found that globally, just 15 per cent of land was owned by women.⁶ While gender norms often function as barriers to women's land ownership,

in many countries women also lack adequate legal protection of their equal rights to own and inherit land and tenure security. Where these protections do exist, they are often not sufficient to secure women's equal rights. Notably, a recent study of land rights in 180 countries found that 162 countries have adopted legal frameworks to provide equal legal protections for women's right to land.⁷ Addressing gender inequality in land rights and tenure security requires both the eradication of norms and practices that disadvantage women and the adoption of legal protections that guarantee women's ownership, control and use of land.

In addition to inequality in access to land, rural women also have unequal access, ownership and control over other assets. There are many methodological challenges in measuring women's asset ownership, including many that arise from the limited availability of sex-disaggregated data in many countries. Where adequate data are available, the ownership gap between men and women is notable. A recent pilot study by the Asian Development Bank found that women in Georgia and Mongolia were less likely than men to own livestock and small agricultural equipment.⁸ Productive assets—such as livestock and farming equipment—are integral to income generation in many rural communities where access to off-farm employment is limited. Equality in asset ownership can have positive impacts on intra-household relations by increasing women's bargaining power and autonomy. Ensuring women have equal opportunities to own and control assets is essential to achieving sustainable livelihoods.

5 These rights entail the ability of women to own, use, access, control, transfer, inherit and otherwise take decisions about land and related resources, as well as women's rights to secure land tenure (including community, customary, collective, joint and individual tenure). For more, see OHCHR and UN Women. *Realizing women's rights to land and other productive resources*. Geneva and New York. (2021).

6 FAO. "The gender gap in land rights". (2018).

7 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN Women. *Realizing Women's Rights to Land and Other Productive Resources*. (2013).

8 Asian Development Bank. *Pilot Surveys on Measuring Asset Ownership and Entrepreneurship from a Gender Perspective*. (2018).

Sustainable livelihood strategies must also address the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work that pushes many women into time poverty. Women across cultures and economies remain the primary providers of unpaid care and domestic work in the majority of households despite their growing participation in the labour force. Around the globe, women dedicate an average of 4 hours and 41 minutes per day to unpaid care and domestic work, while men average a mere 1 hour and 23 minutes per day.⁹ For many rural women, the time required to complete their households' unpaid care and domestic work increases as a result of the lack of adequate infrastructure and resources in their communities. Many rural communities lack adequate access to water and sanitation, electricity, fuel and transportation. Subsequently, many women have to travel long distances to access, collect and transport basic household goods and supplies, such as water, firewood and foodstuffs. Achieving sustainable livelihoods for rural women necessitates the equal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work between men and women.

In many rural communities, gender norms around unpaid care and domestic work negatively impact women's and girls' ability to attend school and participate in educational activities. Lack of access to economic resources and transportation also plays a role in limiting rural women's and girls' educational attainment. In 2020, it was estimated globally

that among females aged 15 years and older, illiteracy was 17 per cent.¹⁰ The inability to read greatly hinders other types of literacy that are increasingly essential to economic empowerment, such as financial and digital literacy. Financial literacy is particularly important for rural women's economic resilience—a key component of sustainable livelihoods. Developing women's capabilities to manage their enterprises, engage with financial institutions and control their assets can help women cope with shocks and economic instability. Guaranteeing women and girls equal access to educational opportunities, including vocational training, serves as a foundation upon which women can build sustainable livelihoods.

Rural women's ability to fully participate and equally benefit from income-generating activities, including development policies and programmes, is constrained by gender inequality at the household and community levels. Establishing sustainable livelihoods for rural women requires bridging the gender gaps in access to education and job training, asset ownership and financial services. Improvements in these areas must be accompanied by strategies to guarantee their sustainability and create gender-responsive institutions that promote enabling environments for rural women. The following section highlights the JP RWEE's achievements in each of these areas across the programme's participating countries.

9 ILO. "How much time do women and men spend on unpaid care work?" (2022).

10 The World Bank. Databank. (2022).



Strategies to promote sustainable livelihoods to achieve rural women's economic empowerment: Lessons from the JP RWEE

2

The JP RWEE implemented diverse strategies to promote sustainable livelihoods for rural women across the programme's seven participating countries. These efforts can be categorized into four areas: the provision of educational opportunities, the empowerment of women to engage with financial services savings, the expansion of ownership and control of land and assets, and the promotion of the adoption of gender-responsive policies by governments. These measures aimed to

achieve resilient and sustainable livelihoods for rural women by addressing women's needs in areas beyond income generation. Achieving sustainable improvements in women's and their communities' well-being requires designing programmes that not only have positive impacts on women's economic empowerment and gender equality, but do so in ways that can be expanded and maintained by local communities.

BOX 1

JP RWEE measures implemented to achieve sustainable livelihoods for rural women

Increasing access to education

- Expanded the availability of accessible and effective literacy and numeracy programmes for rural women.
- Provided educational opportunities for rural women to build on their literacy and numeracy skills through engagement in leadership and business training.
- Supported rural girls' academic retention by reducing the cost of continued attendance through in-kind and monetary support for students and their households.

Promoting savings and expanding access to credit

- Provided opportunities for both rural men and rural women to engage in participatory methodologies to increase intra-household equity.
- Established and strengthened rural women's organizations that support collective savings and provide access to credit for members.
- Developed rural women's financial literacy through educational programming and opportunities to implement their knowledge by participating in local organizations.

Promoting land rights and asset ownership

- Contributed to advocacy efforts to promote the adoption of legal frameworks that guarantee women's equal rights to land ownership and control.
- Provided technical support to stakeholders tasked with drafting and adopting gender-responsive legislation on rural women's rights to land.
- Increased rural women's control over community assets by creating gender-inclusive plans for their construction and management.

Creating inclusive environments through legal and policy action

- Engaged government stakeholders in interministerial working groups to establish gender-responsive policies across all sectors.
- Expanded the practice of gender mainstreaming into government policies and plans by serving as technical advisors for civil servants across government.
- Conducted research on the status of rural women to inform the development of government strategies and programmes.

Promoting rural women's sustainable livelihoods through education

Literacy is crucial for enhancing rural women's livelihoods, opportunities to engage in entrepreneurship, and representation in leadership positions. The JP RWEE participants recognized literacy as a key to full participation in community life, including in local collectives and organizations. Despite many women's desires to attend literacy programming, rural women face numerous challenges to engaging in educational activities. Gender norms and attitudes regarding women's education and their role in undertaking unpaid care and domestic work often serve as informal barriers to women's educational attainment. Similarly, the opportunity cost of attending courses and training versus participating in income-generating activities also limits women's ability to continue their education. The JP RWEE addressed these challenges through programme measures that provided incentives and support for women and girls to gain literacy skills and continue their education. These efforts included supporting girls' educational attainment by distributing scholarships for secondary education, establishing spaces where women can access technology, and providing literacy and numeracy programming for thousands of women.

In Guatemala, the JP RWEE promoted women's digital literacy by collaborating with the New Sun Road organization to create two Stellar Ixq-Saq'e (SIS) digital community centres. These two rural centres were strategically placed in municipalities that lack access to electricity—Panzós and San Miguel Tucurú—to provide rural communities without digital infrastructure the ability to access the Internet. The SIS digital centres include solar power systems that generate and store electricity used to power broadband and wireless internet and computer systems. SIS digital community centres serve as hubs for digital literacy training, business development and community engagement. These sustainable digital centres are managed by local members of women savings groups, with monitoring and support services provided remotely by New Sun Road. The JP RWEE also partnered with Guatemala's National Literacy Committee (CONALFA) to provide literacy training for 904 rural women. Participants received a literacy certificate to demonstrate their proficiency to potential employers that have education requirements, which has expanded their access to employment opportunities beyond the agricultural sector.

In Niger, the JP RWEE supported education through the provision of scholarships to promote the retention of girls attending primary and secondary school. In four

communes, girl students received cash transfers that increased in amount as they progressed through academic quarters. These cash transfers were coupled with the provision of sensitization sessions on gender equality, early marriage and nutrition. The programme supported 1,222 girls through scholarships —exceeding its initial target of 970 girls. The JP RWEE also supported girls enrolled in secondary schools in Liberia. Nearly 1,200 girl students received school kits that included book bags, scientific calculators, textbooks and geometry sets. The provision of in-kind school supplies aimed to reduce the financial burden that girls' continued schooling presents for their families. Removing financial barriers to girls' school attendance is integral to promoting higher levels of educational attainment among low-income rural communities.

The JP RWEE's efforts to provide educational opportunities for rural women and support the retention of rural girl students will have long-term benefits for both programme participants and their communities. Literacy serves as a foundation upon which rural women and girls can expand their skills and engagement with financial and digital services. To ensure the sustainability of expanded access to rural women and girls' education, the JP RWEE's support should include strategies to establish and strengthen partnerships with local institutions that can provide long-term access to education. Additional programme measures to transform gender norms and attitudes that disadvantage rural women and girls are also necessary to sustain and expand the educational gains of women and girls achieved with programme support.

Developing rural women's resilience through access to financial services, savings and credit

Establishing gender equality in decision-making power, asset ownership and the division of labour is essential to achieving sustainable livelihoods for rural women. Research has demonstrated that increasing women's access, control and ownership of resources and assets can increase their decision-making power. Equitable intra-household relations ensure that women have the freedom to engage in opportunities to expand their financial literacy and engage in resource management. The JP RWEE implemented programme measures to support gender equality in the control of resources and financial literacy to bolster rural women's resilience in the face of economic insecurity and shocks. The programme also implemented and supported programming to transform gender norms and attitudes that disadvantage women.

For example, the JP RWEE supported programming to engage participants in the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) with the support of IFAD. In Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal and Rwanda, GALS was implemented with women and men from marginalized groups to help rural men and women articulate their vision of sustainable livelihoods. A signature feature of GALS is the Gender Balance Tree/Happy Family Tree tool that helps people analyse and address gender inequalities in the division of labour and decision-making power within their households. Engaging men and women in the analysis of their intra-household relations empowers women to take full advantage of programme components by increasing their agency and ability to engage in new livelihood strategies.

In Ethiopia, the JP RWEE worked to expand rural women's access to savings and credit by strengthening and expanding the work of local Rural Saving and Credit Cooperatives (RUSACCOs). RUSACCOs allow local women to pool their financial resources with the aim of providing credit to their members on a rolling basis. Cooperatives can be particularly useful in rural areas where access to traditional financial institutions, such as banks, is limited. To encourage the participation of rural women, cooperative members were provided with training on business management and savings. Developing women's financial literacy was essential to developing members' confidence to take out loans to support their entrepreneurial endeavours. The JP RWEE's support for RUSACCOs reached 4,127 women members from 12 cooperatives in Ormania and 673 from 6 cooperatives in Afar. Notably, 70 per cent of RUSACCO members obtained access to credit sufficient to support diversifying their income-generating activities.

The JP RWEE supported similar efforts to increase rural women's access to savings and credit in Niger. With the support of the programme, 11,145 rural women participated in Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs). Collectively, VSLAs provided women in their associations with US\$112,690 in small loans to strengthen and diversify income-generating activities. The VSLAs also served as a space for women to expand their social networks and identify strategies to create economic and food security. For example, VSLA members used their pooled resources to mobilize cereal stocks to be sold during the lean season. This investment strategy generated over US\$76,000 that VSLA members utilized to smooth their consumption across seasons.

The JP RWEE also implemented measures to develop more equitable intra-household relations and bolster women's access to savings and credit. Engaging rural women in collective actions to establish community

solidarity and expand income-generating opportunities improved economic and food security within individual households and communities. Increasing rural women's access to and control of resources generated sustainable improvements in women's economic empowerment. Expansion of the JP RWEE's support of rural women's organizations and financial literacy training is integral to increasing the number of women who can achieve sustainable livelihoods.

Promoting rural women's economic empowerment through land rights and tenure security

Ensuring women's equal access to, control over and ownership of land is essential to achieving women's economic empowerment and creating sustainable livelihoods. In many rural communities, the formalization of land ownership remains uncommon, as many lands are owned collectively rather than individually. Gender inequality often limits rural women's participation in decision-making processes related to collectively owned lands and hinders their ability to make formal claims to land. This contributes to the gender gap in ownership and control of land, which limit rural women's income generation and access to financial services. Similar inequality is observed in the control and ownership of assets, including agricultural tools and livestock. The JP RWEE implemented numerous measures to combat inequality in land and asset ownership and promote more gender responsiveness in the use of public lands.

Increasing women's knowledge of their legal rights to land and implementing strategies to change customary laws that disadvantage women are crucial to increasing women's ownership and control of land. In Niger, the JP RWEE partnered with producer organizations (POs) and Dimitra Clubs to

implement awareness-raising programming to promote gender-equitable land rights. Programme partners reported that these efforts supported the purchase or inheritance of land by 515 rural women, with an additional 2,714 women gaining access to land through rentals, loans and other means. The JP RWEE also promoted rural women's participation in decision-making processes related to land rights by ensuring their inclusion in 20 local land commissions. As a result, the overall rate of women land commission members increased from 10 to 18 per cent.

In Ethiopia, the JP RWEE partnered with the Ethiopian Women's Land Rights Task Force (EWLRTF) to advocate for and develop tools to promote women's land ownership. The programme identified gaps in existing legal provisions related to land and proposed several gender-responsive provisions to protect the rights of women and other vulnerable groups. As a result, the Ministry of Councils adopted measures to incorporate affirmative action, disseminate information on women's rights to compensation, and implemented the mandatory inclusion of women in meetings on land compensation regulations. The programme's partnership with the EWLRTF also resulted in the creation of knowledge products, including a bibliography of research on women's land rights and an assessment of the benefits of land certification for rural women.

In Nepal, the JP RWEE supported measures to expand women's ownership and control of household and community assets. The programme supported disaster response efforts by contributing to the Food Assistance for Assets programme, which provides cash and in-kind transfers to women who participate in the construction and restoration of community assets. These efforts included the construction of three Community Agriculture Extension Service Centres and four agricultural storage centres to support women's efforts to rebuild their connections

to local supply chains and the national Home-Grown School Feeding Programme. In post-disaster contexts, the construction of community assets served as a source of paid work for rural women and contributed to re-establishing food security within the affected communities. To ensure the sustainability of rural women's participation in the administration of community assets, local cooperatives and user groups formed operation and management committees. The selected committee members were then provided training on asset management, construction and business development to ensure they had the knowledge and confidence to continue and expand their participation in community asset management.

Rural women's ability to achieve sustainable livelihoods requires equity in the control and ownership of land and assets. Equal legal protection of rural women's rights is central to their ability to buy and inherit land and assets. While the adoption of equity-based legal frameworks is imperative, legal action must be coupled with efforts to transform customary laws and practices that inhibit women's ability to claim their legal rights. The JP RWEE's efforts to promote rural women's sustainable livelihoods should include the continued engagement of stakeholders across government and civil society to promote women's equal access to land and asset ownership and control.

Implementing legal protections and gender-responsive development planning to create inclusive environments for rural women

Achieving sustainable livelihoods for rural women requires the creation of inclusive and enabling environments, including within government institutions at all levels.

Establishing such environments requires gender-responsive legal frameworks that define and protect women's equal rights, as well as institutions capable of implementing policies that support gender equality across various sectors. Efforts must also be taken to ensure that rural women, including members of the most disadvantaged groups, are included in decision making at all levels.

In Rwanda, the JP RWEE supported government efforts to address gaps in gender-responsive policies and legal frameworks. The programme engaged in extensive policy dialogue with the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion and the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources. These efforts contributed to the adoption of five laws and five strategies to promote and protect women's ownership and control over assets. This included the Law on Matrimonial Regimes and Succession of Property, which codifies women's equal rights to succession and inheritance of property in Rwanda.

The JP RWEE advocated for the adoption of an updated Land Rights Act by the Liberian Senate. The law, adopted in 2018, advanced women's right to land formalization, joint titling and equal distribution. The Act also strengthens women's claims under customary land practices, which often disadvantage women despite their equality before the law. In addition, Liberia's Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection reinstated its Land Desk, which provides public officials, including the nation's land task force, and the public with information on women's land rights and provides support in the event of disputes.

In Kyrgyzstan, the JP RWEE supported gender mainstreaming efforts in the drafting of six sectoral policies through collaboration with interministerial working groups. Among these policy strategies and plans were the National Gender Equality Strategy (NGE) 2021–2030 and the National Programme on Support to Women's Entrepreneurship. Both documents incorporated strategies to improve rural women's access to income-generation activities. To further enhance the ability of sectoral representatives and civil society to address the needs of rural women, the JP RWEE also assisted in the development of 10 analytical briefs. The briefs assessed the status of rural women in Kyrgyzstan, highlighting the challenges faced by disadvantaged groups of women, including migrants, the elderly and survivors of violence. The briefs informed the drafting of the NGE and will serve as a foundation on which future gender-responsive strategies and policies can be developed.

The JP RWEE has implemented a series of measures to promote and establish inclusive and enabling environments. Efforts included the provision of technical support to stakeholders involved in shaping legal frameworks and development plans and supporting advocacy efforts to include rural women in decision-making processes at all levels. The programme partnered with government stakeholders to support institutional efforts to adopt and implement gender-responsive policies. These efforts will have long-term benefits on women's ability to access their rights to asset ownership and participate in decision-making processes. The JP RWEE should continue to provide technical support to government and civil society stakeholders to bolster their capacity to maintain an inclusive environment and to expand upon the progress achieved.



**Policy recommendations
for achieving rural
women's economic
empowerment through
sustainable livelihoods**

3

The JP RWEE has improved women's ability to achieve sustainable livelihoods by implementing programme measures and engaging in advocacy that enhances women's access to education, financial services, and asset ownership and control. While the programme reached tens of thousands of participants across seven countries, ensuring the sustainability of access to sustainable livelihoods will require the expansion of programme measures and the introduction of new efforts. The JP RWEE policies to sustain and expand the benefits of future programme participation should include:

- The integration of specific measures into programme measures in all areas to reach the most disadvantaged rural women.
- The expansion of strategies implemented to transform gender norms and attitudes that are designed to effectively engage men and boys in rural communities.
- Efforts to enhance rural women's leadership skills to promote their participation in leadership roles and better engage with decision makers in the public and private sectors.

Establishing and strengthening rural women's organizations provides members with opportunities to create collective strategies to achieve sustainable livelihoods and expand their social relations. Both outcomes contribute to women's ability to develop the resiliency required to cope with economic shocks. To ensure that women's organizations do not mirror the inequalities among women in their communities, measures must be implemented to ensure that women from disadvantaged groups are equally represented among members. Efforts to bolster the inclusivity of women's groups can take many forms, such as ensuring that income requirements for savings and loan organizations are feasible for the poorest women and adopting outreach strategies for specific groups to increase their participation. The principles of inclusion should also be

incorporated into financial literacy, leadership and entrepreneurship training provided to programme participants to promote the dismantling of norms and attitudes that contribute to the exclusion of certain groups of women.

The implementation of strategies to create productive and safe spaces for women and men to collaborate are also essential to achieving sustainable livelihoods for rural women. While efforts to support women-only organizations are necessary, adopting strategies to engage men in transforming gender norms and attitudes that marginalize women are integral to the ability of rural women to benefit from programme measures. The use of participatory methods, such as the Gender Action Learning System, can be implemented in various contexts to generate discussions on how gender inequality manifests within households. Further opportunities should be developed to create dialogue at the community level, particularly related to the expansion of rural women's income-generating activities and control of community assets. Providing safe spaces for the discussion of gender equality is integral to transforming gender norms and attitudes that hinder rural women's achievement of sustainable livelihoods.

Ensuring that stakeholders across government sectors understand how to craft gender-responsive policy must be complemented by increasing the participation of rural women in policymaking and decision-making processes. Including women in these processes requires educating stakeholders on the importance of creating welcoming environments that promote the participation of rural women. Establishing such environments requires identifying and prohibiting the implementation of exclusionary practices and policies that constitute barriers to rural women's participation in decision-making processes. Efforts to promote rural women's participation

in leadership roles should also include the expansion of programmatic measures to increase women's knowledge of government systems and the development of their leadership capabilities. Building upon rural women's foundation of knowledge and skills can aid in ensuring that their participation in policy and decision-making processes is effective.

The JP RWEE enhanced rural women participants' ability to achieve sustainable livelihoods by increasing access to education, financial services, asset ownership, and land rights and tenure security. To sustain and expand these benefits, it is necessary to implement measures that reach rural communities' most disadvantaged women,

challenge inequitable gender norms and attitudes, and promote gender-responsive development planning and policies. These aims can be achieved by supporting inclusive rural women's organizations, strengthening partnerships with government at all levels, and creating productive and safe spaces for men and women to collaborate. It is also important to increase rural women's participation in policy and decision-making processes by educating stakeholders on gender-responsive policy and promoting leadership development. By implementing such strategies, the JP RWEE can continue to support rural women in achieving sustainable livelihoods and building resilience in the face of economic and climate-related shocks.

**JOINT PROGRAMME:
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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:
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