

Prize for Women's creativity in rural life



Meet the
500 Laureates
1994 - 2025

An initiative created by the

Women's World Summit Foundation
Fondation Sommet Mondial des Femmes



www.woman.ch

Summary

WWSF Prize for Women’s Creativity in Rural Life 1994-2025

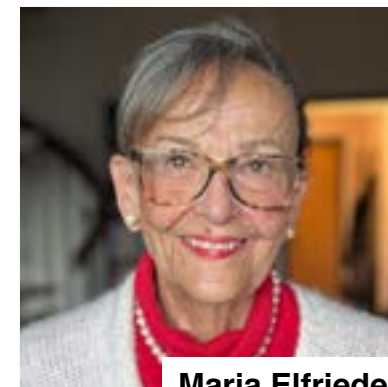
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Message from the Founder



Maria Elfriede (Elly) PRADERVAND
Women’s World Summit Foundation (WWSF)
Geneva, Switzerland

“Dear Friends, Sponsors and Future Nominators,

After 30 years of awarding the WWSF Prize for Women’s Creativity in Rural Life (1994-2025), we wish to celebrate in 2025 our 30th anniversary and share brief profiles of the 500 laureates awarded to date in an e-booklet format online, learning about their creativity, strength and compassion as well as about their challenges and hope for a better future in rural communities.

Awarded since 1994, the Foundation WWSF, an international, non-profit NGO, serving the implementation of women’s and children’s rights including the Rural Women Prize (US\$ 1000 per laureate) honors women and women’s groups around the world that exhibited exceptional courage, creativity & commitment for the improvement of the quality of life in rural communities.

Thanks to the outstanding support and creativity by Cynthia Guerrero, WWSF Communication Officer, the Prize e-booklet draws brief attention to the laureates’ contributions to sustainable development, household food security, land rights, and so much more, thus generating recognition and support for their initiatives.

While rural women are vital in providing examples of sound practices in their communities, they still do not have full access to tools needed for sustainable development, such as education, digital technology, access to credit, land rights, participation in decision-making, and so much more.

By highlighting and awarding creative development models, innovation and experiences enhancing the quality of rural life, WWSF participates in addressing the urgency to eradicate rural poverty & discrimination & increase women’s empowerment in rural areas.

We hope you enjoy reading about the prizewinners and that you consider sending **nominations for the 2026 Prize award selection process** to help advance the realization of the “UN Sustainable Development Goals - Agenda 2030”, presented below.”

Click here to discover
our 2025 WWSF Laureates



What is the WWSF Prize

for Women's Creativity in Rural Life 1994-2025

An award to honor women's creativity, courage and compassion.

The "Prize for Women's Creativity in Rural Life," created in 1994 by WWSF in Geneva, annually selects from nominations received of creative rural women leaders and actors, for WWSF to select the prize candidates who help to advance and improve the quality of life in rural communities.

The prize award of US\$ 1000 per laureate represents our solidarity contribution for efforts and obstacles overcome, and is not meant to be a project fund, although in many cases the prize money is re-invested in the laureates' projects.

Each year on "International Day of Rural Women – 15 October," WWSF honors its annually selected laureates with the Prize, and receives images from their local celebrations.



India



Italy



Kenya



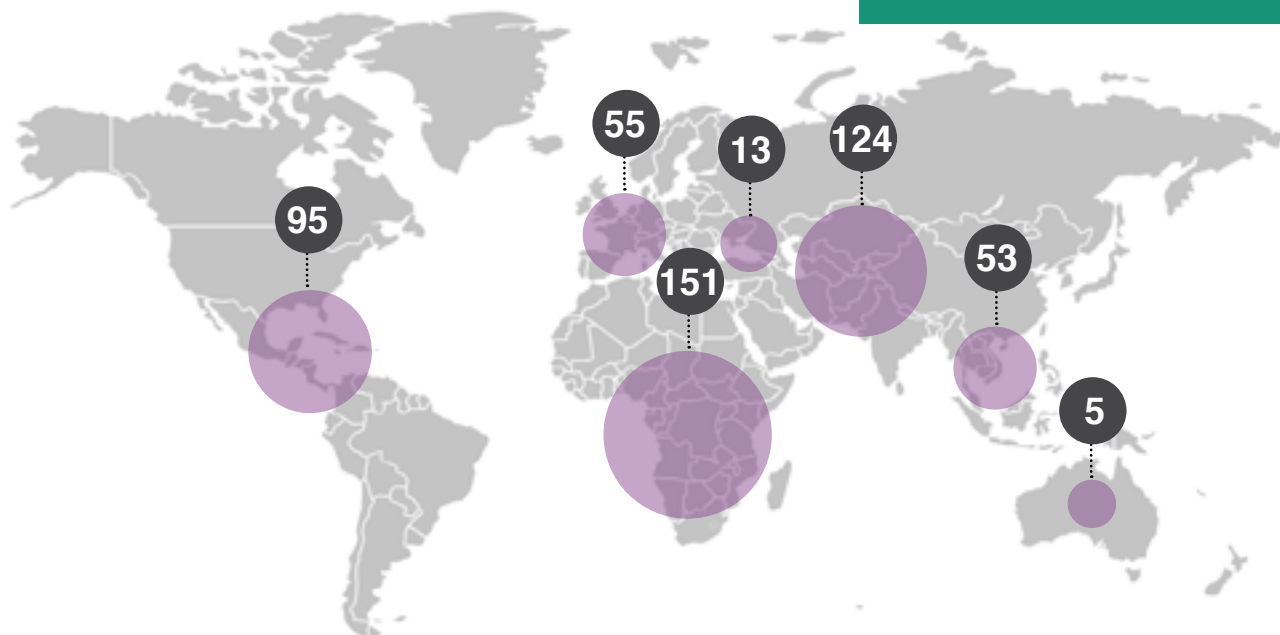
Peru



Award Ceremony in Geneva for SEWA, India

Examples of Prizewinners from around the world

Over 500 prizes have been awarded to date in more than 120 countries, across 30+ years of history.



Selected Messages

from Prizewinners 1994 - 2025

These messages below are a selection of the many testimonies received from laureates over the years after receiving the WWSF award. The prize award encourages other rural women to redouble their efforts and engage in community action, creating a ripple effect of positive change.

[Click here to read more selected messages](#)



Laureate from Uganda, Petty Angida-Omagor

"The Prize has brought me recognition in my district and in my country at large and the cash helped expand the growing of soya beans and training of single mothers in child-care. I pray that more rural women from Uganda will be awarded this kind of award."

[Click here to view her profile](#)

Laureate from India, Dr. Lata Kachchawah Society to Uplift Rural Economy

"I'm deeply indebted to WWSF for awarding me with a prize for my work with rural women. The prize has encouraged me to a great extent to work vigorously with the downtrodden rural population of this backward desert area of western Rajasthan."

[Click here to view her profile](#)



Laureate from Pakistan, Rural Women Welfare Organization

"The WWSF prize money was not only an honor for the organization but an appreciation and recognition of our uneducated but qualified rural women activists who achieved the deserving status in society. We utilized the prize money for surgical operations of 10 poor and needy women who were suffering from the worst gynecological problems."

[Click here to view her profile](#)

Laureate from Nicaragua, Gladys Caceras

"After receiving the prize, Gladys initiated an annual Central American Forum for women's creativity in rural life, convinced MAELA, the AgroEcological Movement of Latin America to focus on rural and indigenous women as one of their priorities."

[Click here to view her profile](#)



Laureate from the Philippines, Portia Navye-Rossi

"I was almost discouraged and was planning to end this 20-year-old farm project demonstration due to lack of funds but your support gave me renewed energy and inspiration"

[Click here to view her profile](#)

Laureate from Germany, Christa Off

"Personally it was my special concern to help improve income situation and sustainability of our farms and especially to keep small family farms alive. We expect more than 1 million guests on Bavarian farms this year which is an enormous value increase for rural areas. My prize money will be for the benefit of a Bavarian Association, supporting rural families in need"

[Click here to view her profile](#)



The International Day of Rural Women - 15 October (see annual poster below) is an occasion to celebrate the prize-winners, interact with the communities and encourage development programs.

In partnership with civil society organizations during the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, WWSF created the International Day of Rural Women - 15th October.

In 2007, the Day was declared an official UN Day by the UN General Assembly. WWSF took the lead in mobilizing governments around the world and fundraised for the development of the 15 October campaign program.

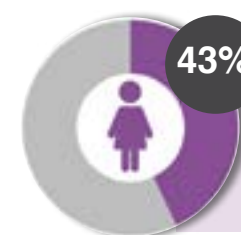
Organizing the International Day of Rural Women in rural communities is an opportunity to raise public awareness and remind governments about the role rural women play in development, household food security, preserving traditional knowledge, biodiversity, peace-building, and more, and to prioritize actions that support them.



15 October 1999 - International Day of Rural Women Celebration by Association Vivogbe, Benin



We wish to share some of the latest (2024 2025) global and regional statistics, findings, and challenges concerning rural women's rights to development, including their economic, social, legal, and digital rights.



43% Labour force & agriculture participation

Women make up about **43%** of the agricultural workforce globally, and in some countries, up to **70%**. However, rural women often work more hours than men, and much of this work is unpaid, informal, or contributing family work.

[Read more](#)

Land ownership, legal rights



In nearly **80%** of countries with data, fewer than half of women have ownership or secure rights to agricultural land. Many countries (**58 out of 84 reviewed**) lack adequate legal protections for women's land rights in areas like inheritance, family law, etc.

[Read more](#)

Climate change, Vulnerability



Under worst case scenarios, climate change could push up to **158 million** more women and girls into poverty and **236 million** more into food insecurity by 2050.

[Read more](#)

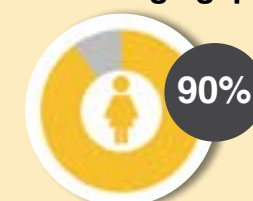
Legal discrimination



Globally, **61 out of 131 surveyed countries (~47%)** still have laws that restrict women from doing the same jobs as men.

[Read more](#)

Gender wage gap



90% of the wage gap between men and women (in many settings) is unexplained, meaning it results from discrimination, lessened opportunity, or structural barriers.

[Read more](#)

Social protection



As of 2025, **26.5%** of working age women globally are legally covered by social protection systems, compared to **34.3% of men**. Rural women are disadvantaged since many are in informal work without formal protections.

[Read more](#)

Political representation



As of January 2025, **women hold about 27.2% of seats** in national parliaments globally. That is up a little from previous years but far from parity.

[Read more](#)

Progress & Positive Trends

More countries are reforming laws to strengthen women's land rights. Integrated programs are improving women's productivity and resilience. Gender-responsive climate adaptation is also on the rise, recognizing rural women's role in food security and climate resilience.

[Read more](#)

Acknowledgement of selected Prize Sponsors

Thanks to many generous sponsors and friends, WWSF could award during 30 years 500 laureates with the annual “Prize for Women’s Creativity in Rural Life.” There are many more generous sponsors and we express gratitude from the heart to all of them.

 Republique and Canton of Geneva	 City of Geneva	 Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)	 Liechtenstein Department of Foreign Affairs	
 Beau Rivage Hotel, Geneva	 Borel & Barbey - Avocats	 Delance	 Geneva Airport	
 Jouvence Edition	 Manor	 Pictet Bank	 The World Bank	
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Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates

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2025



Women’s Word Summit Foundation - WWSF

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AMAKA UGWU Juliana (45)
Nigeria

Pioneering Sustainable Farming Solutions
This project supports the following SDGs

Professor Juliana Amaka Ugwu, a member of the Nigerian Women in Agricultural Research for Development (NiWARD), is committed to promoting sustainable agriculture in Nigeria by reducing chemical pesticide use. She combines scientific innovation with community engagement to improve farming practices. Through her initiatives, Juliana has trained over 200 rural women in poultry farming, snail farming, and small-scale agribusiness. She also provides food-processing machines to widows, boosting food security and household income. Her workshops integrate STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education, digital literacy, and work-life balance, empowering women and youth in underserved communities to build new skills. As a Research Professor of Forest Entomology at the Federal College of Forestry, Ibadan, Juliana focuses on developing affordable, plant-based biopesticides using botanical extracts. These eco-friendly solutions enhance crop yields while reducing reliance on harmful chemicals.



HARP ITURRIBARRIA Maria Lorena (62)
Mexico

Empowering Communities for a Healthier Future
This project supports the following SDGs

"I aim to empower communities with sustainable solar cooking, improving health and fostering lasting change."

Maria Lorena Harp Iturribarria has introduced solar cooking to rural families through Solar Household Energy (SHE). By reducing reliance on gas and firewood, her efforts have lowered energy costs, decreased indoor pollution, and protected women and children from health risks linked to open-fire cooking, identified by the United Nations and the World Health Organization as a leading global health hazard. Through local demonstrations and hands-on training, Lorena empowered communities to adopt solar cookers as clean, cost-effective alternatives. These cookers are used to prepare meals, heat bath water, roast seeds, dye wool, and even make organic beauty products, expanding their utility. Lorena built a network of partners and educators to ensure long-term impact, and she designed improved cooker models, including smaller versions for children, making sustainable living a family-centered practice. By using solar cooking herself, she set a powerful example. Her perseverance has made solar cooking widely accepted and accessible at the grassroots level.



MUKANSANGA Eugenie (53)
Rwanda

Reducing Gender-Based Violence with Clean Water Access
This project supports the following SDGs

Since its launch, the Bright Future initiative led by Eugenie Mukansanga has provided 250 households in Agateko Cell, Rwanda, with direct access to clean water through a nearby tap point. This has reduced the time women and girls spend collecting water and lowered the risk of gender-based violence during travel. Reports of assaults have dropped, and 30 vulnerable households now receive free water and soap. Over 250 individuals, primarily rural women, have been trained in gender rights, hygiene, and small business skills. Family conflicts have decreased as couples engage in gender balance workshops, sharing responsibilities more equitably. Bright Future is a community-driven project addressing gender-based violence through clean water access, public awareness, and support services. Despite challenges like limited funding and cultural skepticism, Eugenie successfully forged partnerships with WASAC (Rwanda's national water utility), local leaders, and health workers. Her work is transforming social norms, fostering inclusion, and improving the community's well-being.



RODRIGUES Nelly (64)
India

A Vision for Rural Progress
This project supports the following SDGs

"Transforming rural life by empowering women to lead, build self-reliance, and drive community development."

Through years of community-based action, Nelly Rodrigues has transformed rural life in Goa, India, empowering thousands of women to move beyond traditional housewife roles and actively contribute to the social, economic, and political development of their communities. Her initiatives have led to the creation of self-help groups, vocational training, healthcare sessions, and career guidance for girls, boosting women's self-reliance and participation in local decision-making. With a background in education and activism, Nelly has partnered with government agencies, NGOs, and associations to address grassroots challenges. As president of a prominent community club in Goa, she launched local facilities like a computer center, library, senior citizen hub, and more, strengthening rural infrastructure and services. Now serving as President of the Association of Local Government of India, Nelly continues to encourage rural women to take on leadership roles. Her focus on confidence-building and skills development has made women and girls agents of change.



KOUTANGNI Adideme (44)

Togo

"My mission is to enhance rural healthcare through sustainable solar solutions while fostering community resilience and women's empowerment."

Solar Power Transforming Rural Healthcare

This project supports the following SDGs



Over 100,000 people in rural Togo now benefit from improved healthcare access thanks to the solar electrification of 14 health centers led by Adideme Koutangni. Since 2023, she has directed Solafrika's Solar Health program, installing photovoltaic systems in remote clinics and training communities in their upkeep. This model not only enhances care, particularly for women and children, but also ensures long-term sustainability through local ownership. Adideme leads inclusive implementation by organizing field visits, selecting beneficiaries, overseeing installations, and training women as community health workers. Her engagement with traditional leaders and health collectives builds trust and secures community support in a field where women's leadership is rare. As founder of the Kekeli-Miig Association, she furthers women's autonomy by offering free vocational training and supporting income-generating initiatives. The group also provides school supplies to disadvantaged children, reinforcing its community commitment. Adideme's persistence and strategic thinking help her navigate logistical hurdles, resource constraints, and cross-sector collaboration.



AKUT MAJAK Nqueny (23)

Uganda

Changing the Narrative for Rural and Refugee Girls

This project supports the following SDGs



"My initiative aim to empower rural girls with skills, confidence, and support to lead and thrive in their communities."

Since 2023, the "Learn Lead Thrive" project has directly supported over 100 rural girls and reached 265 more in Kampala and the Kiryandongo refugee settlement in Uganda. The initiative provides hygiene kits, connects girls to vocational training centers, and teaches practical skills like carpentry, welding, computer literacy, cooking, soap making, and weaving. It also offers mentorship and mental health support, helping girls stay in school and build confidence. So far, it has led to the creation of seven small businesses and encouraged ten girls to take on leadership roles in their communities. As a South Sudanese refugee and student at Makerere University, Nqueny Akut Majak brings lived experience to her advocacy for girls' education and inclusion. Her project, part of the Young Alumni Engagement, Umurage Growth initiative, focuses on accessible, practical solutions for underserved youth. She received a DAFI scholarship (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) and has since supported 15 fellow students in securing similar scholarships.



CHEPTOO Regina (24)

Kenya

Strength in Soil and Solidarity

This project supports the following SDGs



"Through Jenga Jamii organization, we help women heal, gain skills, and thrive, economically, socially, and environmentally"

Regina has transformed the lives of over 2,000 beneficiaries in West Pokot County, Kenya, through integrated programs focused on health, economic empowerment, and environmental sustainability. Her financial literacy and skills training workshops have empowered more than 150 survivors of gender-based violence to start businesses, adopt regenerative agriculture, and gain financial independence. Her organization, Jenga Jamii, champions women's economic cooperatives, climate education, and sustainable farming tailored to pastoralist women and youth in underserved rural areas. These efforts address immediate vulnerabilities while building long-term resilience against climate and socio-economic challenges, benefiting hundreds of households and their communities. Engaged in community service from a young age, Regina founded Jenga Jamii to empower marginalized women and girls through health education, economic inclusion, and climate resilience. She leads initiatives targeting at-risk teenage girls and unemployed rural women, driven by her own experience in a community where female genital mutilation and silencing of women persist, fueling her commitment to dignity, education, and autonomy.



BARAL Jaysara (49)

Nepal

Bees, Biodiversity, and Empowerment

This project supports the following SDGs



"I believe when women work with nature, they don't just grow food, they grow strength, purpose, and community."

Through her work in beekeeping and sustainable agriculture, Jaysara has strengthened biodiversity, food security, and women's empowerment in her Nepali community. Her leadership has helped rural women gain practical skills and earn income through honey production and organic farming. As a partner in BlinkNow's sustainability program, which promotes eco-conscious practices in education, agriculture, and community development, Jaysara mentors women and works with schools to deliver hands-on learning in composting, kitchen gardening, and sustainable living. Her efforts encourage families and youth to adopt environmentally responsible habits, supporting long-term resilience. Despite challenges like limited funding and operational demands, Jaysara remains committed to advancing financial independence and leadership among the women she supports. She transforms traditional roles through inclusive, nature-based approaches to rural development. Her innovation lies in linking beekeeping with education, biodiversity, and organic farming, creating a model that is both socially empowering and ecologically sustainable, building stronger, more self-reliant rural communities.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



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2024

Highlights from the 2024 award ceremonies



Laureate **SHROTT PRENN Sabine**, Italy receiving the WWSF Prize



Laureate **Go Mang Epse Nguen Lydiadine**, Cameroon receiving the WWSF Prize



Local Prize Award Ceremony in Italy



GO MANG EPSE NGUEN Lydiadine (54)

Cameroon

Mobilization for Sustainable Development

This project supports the following SDGs



"Together, we transform cassava into opportunity, empowering women to build stronger, self-reliant rural communities."

For several years, the Women's Association Network, led by President NGUEN Lydiadine, winner of the 2024 "Prize for Women's Creativity in Rural Life" in partnership with RAFARBY Network members, has mobilized its members to empower rural women through income-generating activities, mostly on a volunteer basis.

These initiatives enable women to sustain their association while maintaining jobs in administrative or private sectors. The group organizes workshops to transform cassava (manioc) into various products, which are sold and well-received by the wider public, showcasing their creativity and hard work.

Cassava, a staple food in Cameroon, averages 63 kg per person annually, 42 kg as fresh tubers and the rest as processed products. Its cultivation involves nearly all agricultural resources, primarily for self-consumption and as a reliable income source for rural households. Female labor plays a crucial role in all stages, especially in planting cuttings, harvesting, and processing.



LOPEZ Gregoria (71)

Argentina

Respecting Nature and Trusting Justice

This project supports the following SDGs



"Our strength lies in defending our land with dignity, unity, and respect for Mother Earth."

The community, made up of over 50 families, has long united in a peaceful struggle to defend their land and territory against the Seabord Corporation (formerly Ingenio San Martin del Tabacal). This difficult experience has strengthened their organization, rooted in their indigenous identity and values of caring for Mother Earth while promoting self-sustainability through respectful use of natural resources.

For more than twenty years, they have successfully defended their land despite violent attacks from the company, relying on justice and community dignity rather than handouts, which symbolize the widespread impoverishment in Argentina. Everyone, from men and women to elders, youth, and children, has been involved.

Gregoria Lopez plays a vital role in her Aba Guarani community and actively supports other local communities, collaborating with public and private institutions. She exemplifies leadership for new generations by fostering community spirit and prioritizing environmental care in all food production activities on their land.



Sr.A. Femina DAS (45)

India

“Empowering women starts with awareness, opportunity, and breaking barriers in every village I visit.”

Compassion is her Leitmotiv

This project supports the following SDGs



Sr. A. Femina Das, a member of a religious order, works with the St. Amalarakkini Education Economic and Social Development Society in Tamil Nadu. She coordinates Dalit women in villages, helping them overcome ignorance and superstition while raising awareness of their potential. She introduces income-generating schemes such as vegetable cultivation, beekeeping, kitchen gardening, and marketing in rural areas. Sr. Femina also facilitates loans from banks to support Women’s Self-Help Groups, enhancing their financial sustainability. As a social activist, she has prevented many child marriages and raises awareness about child marriage prevention and girls’ health. Traveling to remote villages around Tiruvannamalai district, she listens to Dalit and Tribal women’s concerns and inspires marginalized women. Driven by a lifelong desire to serve women, she pursued academic qualifications to support her mission. Sr. Femina Das has had a significant impact on village women and visually impaired girls, empowering many socially, economically, and culturally through her inclusive service and leadership.



Women Acting Together for Change (WATCH)

Nepal

Supporting and Promoting Rural Women’s and disadvantaged People’s Human, Legal Rights and Accessing Resources and Services

This project supports the following SDGs



WATCH began its work in rural areas in 1991, organizing women, children, and disadvantaged communities. Officially registered in 1992, it helped form national networks such as FECOFUN (community forestry), NFIWUAN (irrigation water users), and Iron First/Awake Rural Women’s Organizations. WATCH provides training for rural women’s groups, initially six weeks, later extended to six months, to help them establish and run their organizations. To date, it has organized over 1,500 women’s groups, around 400 children’s groups, and several groups for HIV-positive women and people with disabilities or leprosy. WATCH also leads movements against low wages and long working hours, rescues bonded laborers, and supports their independence. In 1995, WATCH held a national public hearing to raise government, MP, and ambassador awareness about trafficked women and HIV-related issues. The organization supports violated, abused, and ostracized women and children by empowering them to claim their rights and access resources and services through advocacy and lobbying efforts.



KISHAN Sana

Nepal

PGS Empowers Women Farmers in Nepal

This project supports the following SDGs



“By growing food locally and organically, we nourish our children, empower women, and protect our land.”

The Sana Kishan farmers in rural Nepal develop organic farming guidelines, support one another through peer accountability, and improve incomes while increasing access to healthy food. They supply produce to the Kopila Valley School’s lunch program, the Valley Children’s Home, and local markets. As Syani Chaudhary, Member & Sustainable Coordinator, shares: “Yesterday I was just a mother. Today I am a woman, mother, and farmer supporting my children’s education and health. I am a proud farmer.” Small farmers in remote areas face limited market access and growing pressure to meet organic and ethical standards. To address this, they partnered with the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) to localize the food system and support community well-being. In collaboration with CEAPRED and the Karnali Province Ministry of Land Management, Agriculture & Cooperatives, they promote organic practices. This women-led initiative challenges gender norms, fosters climate resilience, environmental protection, and economic inclusion—creating a replicable model of empowerment and sustainability.



SHROTT PRENN Sabine (44)

Italy

Seed Festival Pioneer Championing Local Biodiversity

This project supports the following SDGs



“Old varieties aren’t just history, they’re our future on the farm, in the kitchen, and for biodiversity.”

Sabine Schrott runs a farm in South Tyrol with her husband Franz and son Julian. Passionate about gardening since childhood, she studied horticulture and worked from 2004 to 2008 at the technical college for fruit, wine, and horticulture in Laimburg. There, a course on old fruit varieties led her to join a small group of seed propagators, sparking her deep commitment to plant diversity. Her goal is to revive Pustertal Valley varieties and reintegrate them into daily culinary life, not preserve them as mere curiosities. With nearly 400 cultivated varieties, many old and rare, Sabine is now one of South Tyrol’s most dedicated guardians of agricultural biodiversity. In 2021, she founded the “Bio-diversity Farms” (Artenvielfaltshöfe) association to support farms conserving plant diversity. She regularly advocates for fair seed laws that protect local conservation efforts. Her tireless work strengthens biodiversity, the cultural landscape, and sustainable farming across the Alpine region.

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2023



SEYNOU Madjala (38)

Burkina Faso

**A Creative Force
Ending Rural Poverty**

This project supports the following SDGs



"Through regenerative farming, we strengthen women's livelihoods and create lasting food security for our communities."

FARM SAHEL, founded by Madjala Seynou of Burkina Faso, focuses on improving food security and soil fertility through community-based, participatory approaches.

The organization promotes regenerative farming practices that address climate change and support rural resilience. Its core mission is to equip women farmers with the tools and knowledge needed to both feed their families and generate income through surplus produce, enabling them to send their children to school and increasing access to quality education, particularly for girls. To date, Madjala has established 10 agricultural cooperatives, collaborated with 31 communities, and supported over 1,000 women in enhancing their farming techniques, resulting in harvest increases of more than 50%.

Her work significantly contributes to ending rural poverty and empowering the most vulnerable. By integrating climate action, education, gender equality, and sustainable agriculture, FARM SAHEL directly supports the achievement of multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and creates lasting impact in Burkina Faso's rural communities.



LUPFAYA Esther (65)

Malawi

**A Relentless Crusader
for the Poorest**

This project supports the following SDGs



"Through seeds, soil, and song, we nurture health, resilience, and hope in every rural family we serve."

Esther Lupfya has positively impacted around 20,000 poor farmers by improving farming techniques and boosting soil productivity, enhancing food production and family health.

A nurse by training, she led the Maternal and Child Health unit at Ekwendeni hospital, where she witnessed malnutrition's impact firsthand.

In 2017, she founded the Soils, Food and Healthy Communities (SFHC) organization, which is governed by local farmers skilled in agroecological methods. SFHC supports hundreds of villages in improving food security, nutrition, sustainable land management, and gender equality. One key project is a community seed bank providing families with diverse indigenous seeds to enhance nutrition. Esther promotes soil fertility through composting and agroforestry, focusing on Malawi's most vulnerable households. To address widespread illiteracy among rural women, she creatively uses health-promoting songs for education.

Esther's courage, innovation, and persistence have made a profound and lasting impact on her community, advancing both sustainable agriculture and social empowerment.



ONWUKA Mabel Ifeoma

Nigeria

From Waste to Wealth

This project supports the following SDGs

An Associate professor specialized in soil chemistry, University of Agriculture. UMU-DIKE, Abia State, Ifeoma's passion for adding value to humanity made her volunteer to enhance the lives of rural women farmers and girls by training them in using waste organic materials, compost and biochar (a soil condition) to improve soil nutrients and crop yields. She managed to translate complex research results into simple practical terms that made meaning to mostly women farmers. She of course spoke in the local Igbo language. She came up with a low-cost pyrolysis unit which she trained rural women to fabricate and use, not just for their farm but also for sale, to increase the very modest income of their families. To date, Mrs. Onwuka has never received any reward in recognition of her pioneering work. She not only trains the farmers but evaluates the results of their progress in adopting novel technologies. Mrs. Onwuka is very passionate about empowering and building the capacity of rural women and girls. Apart from the technical training on improving their agricultural techniques, she has also helped build their capacity in leadership skills, their rights as women & other important social issues.



BOUCARD Anne (54)

Argentina

Connecting People with Farming Life

This project supports the following SDGs

"I show that a farmer can feed, heal, innovate, and unite, at the heart of their community."

Anne Boucard has many times been acknowledged as an exceptional farmer, in great part because she managed to harness internet to promote the cause of farmers. At a time when the immense challenges of the rural sector are little known and "agribashing" a favorite practice in some circles, Anne Boucard has shown that a modern farmer is not a claustrophobic individual enclosed between his stables and his barns with a few fields forming the extent of his vision of the world, but can be a very active personality in their community. Anne played a key role in her community in the fight against cancer. She met her husband, François Boucard, a farmer in Bournois in the Doubs region of France. She impelled her husband to introduce improvements in the field of animal well-being with the introduction of automatic milking machines or soft technologies in the area of animal prophylaxis, introducing for instance essential oils or the practice of energy treatments (e.g., Reiki). Because of her numerous commitments in the field of agriculture, she was nominated a Knight of Agricultural Merit in 2018. Her ethics can be summarized in two words: generosity, solidarity. She has really enabled the spirit of solidarity to prosper in the field of agriculture.



SOTO Maria Eva (59)

Argentina

Reclaiming Land, Culture, and Future

This project supports the following SDGs

"I fight to restore our land and language, so our children can stand proud and free."

Born into a family of nine siblings, Maria Eva had to fight to attend school, as her parents feared losing cultural identity. She earned a degree in Guarani culture and linguistic revitalization. After the 1994 Constitution reform, indigenous groups revived, and Maria Eva united women in their cause. Faced with ongoing violations of indigenous rights and lands stolen since the Conquest, she led the struggle for land recovery. Supported by ENDEPA, an institution accompanying the Guarani people, Maria helped reclaim stolen lands, resulting in the state's commitment to return 11,000 hectares. Her fight also included land rights and intercultural bilingual education, working with youth. An active environmental defender, she protects the bush (KAA) and water, denouncing deforestation, illegal logging, and pollution—fearlessly confronting large companies. Forests hold sacred and medicinal value for her people. Maria promotes rainwater harvesting and cistern installation, collaborating with many women's groups. As a spiritual leader, she lives by Guarani values of love, respect, and solidarity. Her greatest achievement is passing on her knowledge and language, dreaming that Guarani women will stand strong and their youth gain education and decent living.

Jai Jagat Movement and the CESC organization

India

WWSF collaborated in 2023 for the first time via a partnership Prize collaboration with the Jai Jagat Movement and the CESC organization (Center for Experiencing Socio Cultural Interaction) in Tamil Nadu, India. On the following page, you find the photos and profiles of the five 2023 additional prizewinners at their Award Ceremony in Tamil Nadu, India, organized by Jai Jagat and CESC.





Sivarani

Tamil Nadu, India

Sivarani has worked in the development sector for three decades. She graduated with a BSC in Agriculture and began working on sustainable agriculture. For 24 years, she worked for the Dhan Foundation in Salem. Throughout her worklife, she promoted Women's Federations in 6 Districts of Tamil Nadu where among other activities, she extended livelihood opportunities, education and social security women's groups. Since 2019 she has been an Advisor for 25 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPO) and Companies, which have helped 15'000 farming families. Since 2019 she has been running the ACE Foundation (ACE Foundation is an NGO, working with underprivileged and marginalized youth from various locations in India.), and leading a Farmer Producer Organization (FPO). She advises other FPOs as well.



Ashitha Ash

Kerala, India

Ashitha completed her MSC in Environment Studies from University of Kannur in 2010. Thereafter she worked with Kerala State Biodiversity Board and Pesticide Action Network India. She started an eco-shop in Kannapuram to support her husband to market his farm products, traditional rice and to gain a better price through value addition. She is passionate in cooking and artwork as well. So she utilised her cooking skills to market the traditional rice varieties by cooking and selling to food festivals, cooking shows, workshops and on social media. Her training are customized to different segments of the population. Her goal is to make people aware of the range of recipes and achieving a healthy lifestyle. Health reasons have forced her very recently to interrupt her activity as a farmer, but her legacy in the field of social communication will survive for a long time.



Bhaqyalakshmi

Tamil Nadu, India

Born in a natural agriculture-based family with livestock, she joined Tamil Nadu Women's Collective (TNWC) in 2015 and she was associated with a farmer's women's group within the Collective called "Kanjium Women Farmers Sangam" for the same period. When she started attending Kalanjium Farmers Sangam, she was trained in biodiversity farming, kitchen gardening, roof gardening, safe food, livestock and saving traditional seeds and started preparing natural manures & how to make natural compost (Vermicompost). She was also trained in collective farming, millet farming, and awareness of climate change. After attending all the training, she was very much confident to do agriculture on 1 ½ acre of her land. She focused on food security crops which made a big difference. More than 12 varieties of food crop seeds & vegetable seeds were saved, i.e. home garden tomatoes, green chilis, leafy vegetables, castor, vegetables & greens, etc. Bhaqyalakshmi has also taken 3 acres of leased land for food crops, self-consumption, seed saving practices and growing food crops to sell in the market.



Suchila Pandian

Tamil Nadu, India

Suchila's work has extended over the past 4 decades. Currently she runs an organization called Community Action for Social Transformation (CAST). She has done enormous work in the District of Tirunelveli in the areas of community health, sanitation, AIDS prevention, children's welfare, watershed management, handicraft development, and helping women who are victims of sexual violence. The employment of 220 marginalized women in 11 self-help groups for livelihood generation and the creation of micro-enterprises, of which one of such interventions was the production of handicrafts out of natural fibers like sisal and banana, she received a great deal of recognition from The National Bank For Agriculture And Rural Development (NABARD). She has also worked with artisans on beads making and helped them to get Artisan credit cards. She is the President of SIPA, South India Producers Association.



Lakshmi Unnikrishnan

Kerala, India

The women produce umbrellas that cost 350 Indian Rupees (IR) (4,10 USD) each, and this is a way to raise funds for child nutrition and ending poverty. Since 2016, they have earned between 500IR (5,85 USD) to 700IR (8,20 USD) per day. They are being given help by Thampu, a tribal voluntary organization and peace collective.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



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2022



RENNER Victoria (51)

Sierra Leone



A Rural Leader with Heart

This project supports the following SDGs



"I aim to empower survivors to reclaim their futures through skills, leadership, and safe spaces for growth."

As founder and director of the Association for Women and Children at Risk (AWCR) in Sierra Leone, established in 2015, Victoria works towards a society where women and children live free from fear, discrimination, intimidation, and poverty. She empowers rural women with skills, information, sustainable livelihoods, and opportunities to realize their potential and promote women's leadership. Victoria has coordinated agricultural activities with rural women, including war widows, survivors of gender-based violence, Ebola survivors, and those affected by natural disasters such as floods and mudslides.

She has empowered over 300 survivors at various stages of their healing and recovery. In addition, Victoria supports disadvantaged girls by creating safe spaces inside and outside schools, training early school leavers in skills like tie-dye, beadwork, and agriculture. Her projects focus on developing rural communities, particularly girls forced into early marriage, teenage mothers, and marginalized women. Committed to improving learning environments, Victoria is also a passionate advocate for water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities in schools, organizing annual Menstrual Hygiene Day events through her organization.

Association Women Leaders of the Littoral

Cameroon



A movement of Great Solidarity "Muato Project"

This project supports the following SDGs



The Association, registered under Cameroonian law, supports vulnerable women, including victims of violence, out-of-school girls, girl-mothers, and internally displaced women, in the Littoral region. Though women make up half the population, they receive little public investment and face many socio-cultural and institutional barriers, leading to higher poverty rates, especially in rural areas. The project aims to reduce rural poverty, promote social inclusion, gender equity, and sustainable development. It popularizes modern farming and breeding techniques, fish farming, rabbit and pig breeding, beekeeping, and tuber crop processing, to improve livelihoods in Bonalea and Dibombari communes.

The Association supervises and evaluates these activities. It also strengthens rural economies by helping women adopt mechanized agropastoral methods, easing manual labor. Training is provided to women, men, and traditional leaders on family law and women's protection to fight gender-based violence. The Association facilitates marketing and commercial networking through F2L algorithms and plans to create a small business incubator to boost entrepreneurship.



OTU ROBERT Rita (42)

Nigeria

"I believe women farmers can transform communities by growing food, building skills, and inspiring future generations."

A Visionary Feminist for Rural Women

This project supports the following SDGs



Rita is an international award-winning agriculturalist, environmentalist, and feminist from a fifth-generation farming family in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Growing up around her father's co-cocoa and palm oil export business, she developed a deep connection to agribusiness. She earned a B.A. in Agricultural Economics/Extension from the University of Calabar, where she served as Vice President of the National Association of Agricultural Students, focusing on economics and agriculture research. After completing her master's degree in the UK, Rita returned to Nigeria and founded Beau Haven Farms, dedicated to ending hunger and poverty by growing corn, cassava, cucumbers, pepper, plantain, cocoyam, and vegetables. The farm educates consumers, creates educational materials, and mentors through the Girls Farmers Club. Through "#SHE's Empowered through agriculture," a PEAS Foundation initiative, Rita has helped 50,000 women, especially widows, build skills and confidence to start commercial cassava farms in Akwa Ibom. Passionate about Nigerian agriculture, she shares positive stories and images of women farmers to inspire future generations and spark conversations around food production.



PETER Christina (54)

Pakistan

A Precious Energy for Humanity

This project supports the following SDGs



"I started AWARD to give rural women a voice, a skill, and a chance to thrive"

Christina started her NGO named AWARD (Association for Women's Awareness and Rural Development) with a dream to make women aware of their rights and improve the economic conditions of poor rural women. Over the past 27 years, through AWARD and under five thematic areas, she has opened 130 vocational training schools in 130 villages of Punjab and KPK, training 7,000 young school drop-out girls. She also started a small microcredit program and a small business grant program, helping nearly 4,500 women and 1,300 youth to open small businesses. Christina supported 2,000 rural children to get into school and continue their education. She sensitized 45,000 men and women on women's rights, protection laws, and the harms of early marriage. To challenge gender inequality, she conducted human rights workshops with rural communities, especially with men. Christina also served thousands of vulnerable people during the 2005 earthquake, 2010 floods, and COVID-19. Under her leadership, 722,656 trees were planted across Punjab and KPK, promoting environmental care and reducing deforestation.

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2021





BALBONE Salimata (43)
Burkina Faso

Exceptional Courage and Perseverance
This project supports the following SDGs

Originally from Tenkodogo in Boulgou province and a mother of two, Salimata pursued her studies up to the third grade at the CEG of Pama, Burkina Faso. A determined and courageous woman, she travels long distances through difficult bush paths on her motorcycle, braving torrential rains, dust, intense heat, slippery tracks, and river crossings to reach schools. Her commitment and perseverance have earned her the trust and appreciation of the educational community, with whom she builds long-term partnerships aimed at bringing lasting behavioral change. In the field, she was trained in key areas of hygiene and rural health through her work with AVORB (an association of widows and orphans in Bittou) on topics such as sanitation, child and prenatal health, nutrition, family planning, AIDS, excision, and other community health issues. As a Community-Based Health Agent (ASBC) for the Bittou health district, she focused on similar health themes. Since January 2017, she has worked as a school trainer for FASODEV durable, Graine de Baobab's local partner, impacting 46 schools. During school holidays, she supports women's agro-ecological projects in financial education, gardening, food processing, and soap making.



KIDULAH Phillipine (40)
Kenya

Lifting Women & Girls out of Poverty and Illiteracy
This project supports the following SDGs

"I returned home to help girls rise above poverty, violence, and fear into strength, dignity, and hope."

While pursuing her Master's degree in the United States, Philippine Chepkoech Kidulah (Pini) was already shaping her vision to return to her home in West Pokot County, Kenya, and start an organization to support girls and women facing poverty, inequality, and the growing impact of climate change. In 2012, with the name Jitokeze Wamama Wafriki and a butterfly logo symbolizing transformation, she launched her NGO with a focus on ending female genital mutilation, reducing early forced marriages, and promoting women's economic empowerment. She created the Farmers' Empowerment Program and the Girls' Empowerment Program, encouraging women and girls to join self-help groups. She faced resistance from local leaders, tribal chiefs, and elders, and even received death threats. Yet, grounded in values of courage, purpose, and determination, Pini persisted and earned the respect of her community. Drawing from her own experience of poverty and discrimination as a woman from a minority tribe, she trained young women in sewing, literacy, vegetable farming, and small business management, helping them build independent futures.



BAPTISTA Eulalia Fernando (60)
Mozambique

A Fish Trader with Integrity and Passion
This project supports the following SDGs

"I fish not just to feed my family, but to protect the ocean for future generations."

With the country's independence from Portuguese rule, Mrs. Baptista enrolled in adult education and completed the 6th grade. From a young age, she understood the importance of working to support herself and her family. After becoming a widow in 1986, with limited education, she turned to artisanal fishing, one of the few available livelihood options in her poor coastal hometown. Today, she runs a small fish-selling business in the Inhassoro district, Inhambane province, as the sole provider for a household of eight, mostly children and grandchildren aged 6 to 18. Witnessing declining fish catches, Baptista began promoting social cohesion among fishers, processors, and traders by encouraging them to join associations and management units. In 2011, she became a founding member of the legally recognized Fisheries Community Council (CCP) of Fequete. Due to her commitment, she was chosen in 2013 to represent Inhambane Province at a UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) seminar on sustainable fisheries. She now serves as Deputy Secretary of one of Mozambique's most active CCPs and is among the pioneers using the OurFish app to promote transparent and responsible fishing practices.



Movimiento de Mujeres por la Vida (4)
Colombia

A Custodian for Peace, Land and Seeds
This project supports the following SDGs

"We organize to protect our land, our food, and our dignity because rural women deserve justice and peace."

The Movement Cajibío, known as MoMuViC, was founded in June 2017 during a national and international Caravan of Solidarity with women victims of violence. This movement arose to defend the rights of rural women, denounce violence, and demand dignified living conditions for women and their families. It is rooted in the collective voice of peasant, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant women, community mothers, leaders, seed guardians, and youth from 23 rural communities and one urban center. MoMuViC works to recognize women's vital contributions to family, community, and society, and to support their continued organizing for justice and equality. Its coordination team is made up of delegates from these communities, supported by a team focused on organization, training, dialogue, and political advocacy. One of the greatest challenges they face is the expansion of coca crops, introduced seven years ago by external actors, which now threaten food sovereignty and traditional farming. Despite the pressure from armed actors and the negative impact on women's lives, MoMuViC continues to work with strength and hope to improve rural living conditions.



SERNA SALINAS Marylèn (55)

Colombia

Speaking out for Peasants, Indigenous Groups & Women

This project supports the following SDGs

The last decades of Colombian history have been especially difficult for small peasants and Indigenous communities, marked by land grabbing, deforestation, forced displacements, conflict, persecution, and the growing pressure from multinational companies. Marylèn Serna Salinas, born in a peasant family in the department of Cauca, has been a strong voice for the rights of peasants and women since her early twenties. A natural convener, her social and political commitment has played a key role in the creation of several human rights-focused community organizations. In the 1990s, alongside fellow peasants, she helped launch a regional peasant movement to reclaim land and defend rural communities. Her life and that of her family were threatened in the early 2000s, forcing her to relocate and continue her work from the city. Despite this, her voice has only grown stronger. Today, she is a recognized spokesperson for movements such as the Minga of Social and Community Resistance and serves on the National Steering Committee of the National Council for Peace, Reconciliation, and Coexistence. She also represents Colombia in international human rights spaces.



AMAYA MACIAS Maria Cristina (54)

Colombia

An Example of Humility, Humanity and Solidarity

This project supports the following SDGs

"I work alongside women to rebuild our communities and create real, lasting opportunities for change."

Born in San Andrés district of Tello, Huila, Colombia, Maria Cristina comes from peasant roots. After finishing high school, she joined the FARC-EP until the 2016 peace agreement. Returning to civil life, she dedicated herself to working with rural communities affected by armed conflict, focusing on peasant women, victims, youth, single mothers, and those rebuilding the social fabric. In 2018, Maria Cristina and 63 reincorporated individuals founded COOAGROPAZ, a solidarity economy cooperative in Neiva, Huila. Today, it includes 836 members, reincorporated persons, peasants, victims, and female heads of households across Huila, Cundinamarca, and southern Tolima. As Cooperative President, she champions women's participation, having formed a women's committee with 52 members. She manages diverse projects: a laying hen farm in Santa Lucia; five kitchen gardens with Neiva's Mayor's Office; a fish farming initiative supported by the European Fund and Spain's Mondragón Cooperative; a bamboo shoot rehabilitation center project with NGO LAS NANAS; and backing the FUNDAUTRAHUILCA peasant market. Maria Cristina empowers communities to succeed by recognizing their potential and fostering unity.



CORDOVA Ximena (55)

Galapagos, Ecuador

Gender & Environmental Justice through Girl's Education

This project supports the following SDGs

"I stand with women and protect our island's future, because caring for people and nature is one."

The picture-perfect pristine waters, long sandy beaches, and exotic wildlife of the Galapagos Islands hide a much darker reality: the prevalence of gender-based violence due to systemic gender inequalities. Ximena Cordova, a resident of Isabela Island, personally experienced the endemic issue as she struggled for years at the hands of a violent husband, a fate shared by more than half the women on the islands. Out of that ordeal came a strong desire to help the women in the Galapagos Islands. At the same time, the young woman who was trained in visual arts and graphic design started working for the Charles Darwin Research Station, further becoming a naturalist guide for the Galapagos National Park Services. Through this experience, she realized that the urgent need to protect the fragile ecosystem of the island. She created the Emma Darwin Foundation, "created by women, for women, and for the planet." The foundation, named after Charles Darwin's wife in recognition of her role in her husband's research and writing, seeks to empower girls through education. The association also provided a meeting place for women for exploring their creative potential, as well as awareness-raising events for children to learn about native plants and animals.



NORALES RAMIREZ Martha (24)

Honduras

Encourage Banks of Hope for Garifuna Women

This project supports the following SDGs

"Together, women build financial strength and protect nature, securing a better future for our community and land."

Martha Norales Ramirez, from the Garifuna community of Iriona, Honduras, showed great courage and determination by leaving her hometown to study in the city. Despite facing discrimination, sexism, and financial hardship, she achieved what many women before her could not, a college degree in natural resource management and environment. Returning to Iriona, Martha committed herself to supporting her community and protecting its natural resources. She helped establish six saving clubs for Garifuna women, now totaling 150 members. These clubs provide access to financial services like small loans and serve as a safety net during crises such as COVID-19, helping with education and health expenses. The clubs function as community-run banks where members share interest and set their own rules, allowing women to "set dates for their dreams and projects." As coordinator of the municipality's environmental unit, Martha also leads efforts to conserve Iriona's rich ecosystems, including marine life, mangroves, and forests. She has played a key role in projects like establishing Honduras' first community-led marine protected area, blending social empowerment with environmental stewardship.



Sr JESSY Maria BS (50)

India

"Protecting forests and fighting trafficking, I help communities build safe, sustainable futures close to home."

Dedicated to Rural People, their Land, their Youth

This project supports the following SDGs



Sister Maria Jessy's love for rural life and its people grew during the daily three-kilometer walk to school from her small village in Mangalore. Joining the Bethany Sisters at age 15, she dedicated her life to supporting disadvantaged communities, from educating street children in Delhi's slums to improving rural livelihoods in Jharkhand. In Maluka, where forests were being cut down for firewood, she launched the "Social Forestry" program. With government support, her awareness and skills training helped replace hundreds of trees and create a forest economy no longer dependent on firewood. In Badibahal Sambalput, she piloted rainwater collection through pond systems for irrigation. Deeply concerned about human trafficking, Sister Maria Jessy founded the Damruhat Project. Despite risks, she tirelessly advocated across 112 villages, significantly reducing trafficking by offering young people training and income opportunities to remain in their communities. Her work continues to empower rural populations while protecting the environment.



ROKA MAGAR Dil Kumari (51)

Nepal

From Maoist Fighter to Women's Champion

This project supports the following SDGs



"Financial independence helps women lead change and build stronger communities grounded in resilience and hope."

Dil Kumari Roka Magar was a young mother of three when the Nepalese civil war erupted in 1996. Living in the remote village of Khumil, Rolpa, her husband became a Maoist combatant and went underground, leaving her family exposed to abuse. Forced to flee in 2004 and separated from her children, Dil later joined the Maoists herself. After the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Accord, she settled in Tinau, Palpa, and sought sustainable ways to support her family. Turning to agriculture, she began commercial mushroom farming and vegetable gardening, viewing financial independence as key to women's freedom. Dil formed women's groups, cooperatives, and production collectives, empowering many women to become economically self-sufficient. Beyond agriculture, she championed community forest and resource management, encouraging rural women to assume leadership roles in these initiatives. A relentless advocate for women's empowerment, Dil believes that advancing women's status is essential to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and fostering lasting social change in her community.

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2020





BOUBA Aeisatu (30)

Cameroon

"Through FFAC, we empower indigenous women to rise, against forced marriage, for education, leadership, and dignity."

From Runaway to Respected Leader

This project supports the following SDGs



Bouba Aeisatu has led both a rare and challenging journey. A member of the indigenous Mbororo pastoralist minority from the English-speaking North-West region of Cameroon, her story is one of resilience. At 12, her family attempted to force her into marriage with an older man. She defied them, fled, and endured marginalization from her community. Despite constant family pressure, she earned a university degree. Early marriage, common across the continent, exposes many girls to lifelong trauma, gender-based violence, and lost opportunities. Determined to change this, Bouba founded the "Forum des Femmes Autochtones du Cameroun" (FFAC). The organization supports indigenous women, mostly from rural areas, to break free from patriarchal traditions, gain environmental awareness, improve food security through agricultural training, and pursue leadership in politics and administration. Thanks to her efforts, over 1,200 indigenous girls have escaped forced marriages and continued their education. In the deeply traditional Adamaoua region, over 6,000 rural women have been mobilized for civic engagement, with 15 of 20 local female candidates elected to council positions.



DR. AHMED-AMSHI Mairo (60)

Nigeria

A Powerful Advocate of Women's Rights

This project supports the following SDGs



"We use agriculture not just to grow food, but to grow opportunity, dignity, and hope for women and youth."

Dr. Ahmed-Amshi is the Commissioner for Agriculture of Yobe State in N. Nigeria. She has a PhD in plant physiology and production. She has been nominated due to her extensive contribution via various gender inclusive actions. As part of her activities, she established the Yobe State Youth and Women's Agricultural Employment Program. She has played a special role to get the central importance of Fulani woman pastoralists in the field of nutrition and health accepted. All across the Sahel region, the Fulanis enable small children to have access to the vital milk products necessary for their growth. In a male dominated culture and tradition, implemented under the directives of the Islamic religious doctrine, Dr. Mairo needed to be truly creative to enable women in rural areas to progress in terms of their rights. She has also played a key role in enabling women and youth to access soft loans. In her action she is guided by the UN SDGoals 1 to 5 and is passionate about achieving results by 2030. She is also a role model for the rural women and girls of N-E Nigeria where girl-child education is still being threatened by patriarchal attitudes inherited from the past.



ARRIOLA SANCHEZ Jeannette Maitee (43)

Mexico

Enabling the most Rejected to Become Respected

This project supports the following SDGs



"Empowering indigenous communities through sustainable development, we honor their culture, restore dignity, and create lasting change."

Dr. Jeannette Arriola has dedicated 22 years to uplifting Mexico's most marginalized indigenous communities, restoring their dignity and worth through tireless passion and respect. Her approach stands out by gaining the full trust of these groups, honoring their cultural norms rather than imposing external suspicion. Historically burdened by poverty and exclusion, these communities have long suffered from limited opportunities. Under Dr. Arriola's wise leadership, she forged strong cooperation between public and private sectors, creating her unique "Comprehensive Model for Sustainable Development." This model supports indigenous self-management through food security, access to clean water, environmental protection, gender equality, civic participation, and sustainable employment. Her work has also helped society at large recognize the ancestral and spiritual knowledge foundational to indigenous cultural identity in Latin America. Academically, Dr. Arriola has amplified indigenous voices by organizing six Annual National Meetings, which became pivotal forums for sharing and celebrating indigenous customs and traditions nationwide. Through her efforts, indigenous peoples of Mexico have gained a respected and vibrant platform within society and academia.



MARVAN Alicia (30)

Mexico

Connecting with her Roots

This project supports the following SDGs



"Art and ecology unite here to empower communities, heal the land, and inspire lasting social change."

Alicia is a leader whose multidisciplinary career as an artist, educator, and cultural manager spans the US, Europe, and Mexico. Yet, she is deeply rooted in rural Michoacán, where she founded the Guapamacátaro Center for Art and Ecology. This community-oriented residency brings together artists, scientists, and locals of Maravatío to foster creative solutions for sustainable development. Born from Alicia's passion to address social inequality and ecological decline, she convinced her family to cede a dilapidated hacienda, which she restored over years while building community trust. For 14 years, nearly 200 residents from diverse backgrounds have engaged with Maravatío's landscape and people. Each year, up to twenty artists and academics commit to programs with local students and community workshops, focusing on water, land, and craft. One standout project, developed with artist Kaitlin Bryson, created mycelial bio-remediation pillows filled with oyster mushrooms to detoxify water near a septic tank. This inspired the community to self-organize and improve their wastewater system, exemplifying the residency's impact on social and ecological resilience.



UIKEY Saraswati (43)

India

When a Poor Tribal Woman Rises as a Powerful Role Model

This project supports the following SDGs

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"I walk so my people are no longer ignored, and so others like me can rise without fear."

The tribal populations of India are among the most despised inhabitants of the country. Saraswati comes from such a tribe, the Gond. She comes from a very poor family of laborers working the land. At 14 years old, she is already a mother, living the challenging life of a day laborer. But her contact with Ekta Parishad, an organization of landless farmers, transformed her existence and at 18 she starts a new life. She becomes an active militant fighting for the right of access of her people to land, water and forest rights, not without having had to overcome major prejudices where she lives. But thanks to the practice of non-violent communication and great inner strength, she overcame all obstacles and was included in the 50 marchers of the Jai Jagat organization which in 2019-2020 undertook to walk the 11'000 km. separating New Delhi from Geneva.



SHAH Shabnam (33)

India

Inner Strength and Strong Determination Win the Day

This project supports the following SDGs

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"We walk so justice reaches the most forgotten, and leadership rises from the grassroots."

Since the age of 18, Shabnam has been striving with great tenacity for the land rights of tribal people, among the most discriminated populations of India. Being a young woman who was also a member of a minority religion, she needed to and has manifested great strength, talent and determination. She joined an organization fighting for the rights of the dispossessed, Ekta Parishad, at the outset of her struggles for land rights (she was still in high school). Her work for the most dispossessed of all extends to over 100 villages and she has succeeded in getting land rights for 1470 families. She is gifted with a natural ability to deliver strong speeches. Her work has been mainly for one of the most primitive and exploited tribal people of India, the Saharya tribe. Alcohol was wreaking havoc among these people and she has managed to reduce drastically the all-pervading threat alcohol posed to these tribal populations. In June 2019, she was selected to be one of the 50 Jai Jagat marchers for this organization's New Delhi-Geneva march on foot. Her commitment to her family and her work is such that she chose to stay single, a quasi-heroic decision in the Indian cultural context.



KUJUR Nirmla (37)

India

A Champion for the Poorest of the Poor

This project supports the following SDGs

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"I fight so my people can keep their land, water, and dignity, the foundation of our survival."

Nirmla Kujur is an inspiring, self-made, independent woman activist who took part in the Jai Jagat 11'000 km peace march on foot from New Delhi to Geneva (which was interrupted due to Covid -19 in Erevan, Armenia). She has committed herself with both rigor and skill to defending the forest, water and land rights of the poorest of the poor. These three areas constitute the very basis of the survival of farmers. Take one of the three away, especially land or water, and the result will usually be fatal. Nirmala was born close to the Indian state of Chattisgarh (center East of the country) and is from the Uraon tribe, the oldest of 6 siblings in a family living off the land (farming). At the end of her high school years, she chose to work on a program of self-delivery of babies in remote areas. Very early she chose to abandon her marital home and husband owing to their confining and patriarchal values. A person with a both cheerful and bold disposition, she emerged over the years as a true grassroots leader. Just in recent years, she helped over 400 families get legal entitlement to land and has filed an additional 1000 requests (which now await the response of the authorities), all since working with Ekta Parishad, a grass roots movement active with Adivasis (tribal groups considered as the original inhabitants of the country).



PAWAR Vijaya Shriram (34)

India

Transforming Sugarcane Workers into Artists of Beauty

This project supports the following SDGs

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"Reviving our traditions allows women artisans to earn with pride and build a better future."

Vijaya belongs to the indigenous nomadic Banjara community of Beed district in Maharashtra. She walked 6 km daily to attend school but had to stop when she married at 16. Determined, she resumed her studies at a local college, becoming the first girl from her community to do so. Deeply connected to the Banjara traditional embroidery, a craft passed from mother to daughter, she noticed most women worked as sugarcane cutters for months under harsh conditions. Vijaya had the idea to open commercial outlets for these beautiful handicrafts, enabling women to earn income for the first time, marking a new era. Participating in exhibitions locally and nationally, she explored large-scale production with modern machines but resisted, knowing it would harm artisans and local culture. Younger women were also drifting away due to high production costs. To save the craft, Vijaya pursued formal technical training and introduced innovative contemporary designs. In 2000, with like-minded colleagues, she launched a movement to revive Banjara arts. After nearly 20 years of struggle, her work now supports around 1,000 women artisans across nearly 100 hamlets, improving their income by creating beauty.



KHAPERDE Subhadra (52)

India

*"What is difficult,
I'll do immediately,
the impossible will take
a little longer"*

Justice from the Ground Up

This project supports the following SDGs



Very few women activists in India have overcome the deep-rooted caste, class, and gender inequalities that Subhadra faced. Born into the lowest caste in a rigid hierarchical system, she endured unimaginable prejudices as Dalits continue to suffer discrimination in every walk of life. Alongside caste bias, she struggled against patriarchal norms and class barriers deeply embedded in rural society. Yet, with unbending determination, clear purpose, and deep compassion, Subhadra became an innovative and creative community leader. Her fight for the oppressed included challenging corruption linked to alcohol bootlegging, which led to her wrongful imprisonment. She has worked with Ekta Parishad to secure tribal land and resource rights in western Madhya Pradesh. She advanced women's reproductive health beyond family planning, addressing severe gynecological issues, funded by crowdfunding. She led a women's movement against alcoholism, mobilized communities for soil and water conservation, opposed chemical-intensive farming, and revived sustainable agricultural practices with indigenous seeds, empowering women in farming decisions. Subhadra continues to promote Adivasi girls' education, believing it essential to dismantle patriarchy and achieve lasting social change.



RAJBHANDARI Kanti (52)

Nepal

A Natural Born Leader

This project supports the following SDGs



*"By standing with women
and protecting our
forests, I help grow a
future rooted in justice
and balance."*

Kanti is a prizewinner among outstanding grassroots leaders who have played an effective role at local, regional, and national levels in two key areas: women's empowerment and sound forest management. In a country where women have long faced deep-rooted oppression, and where forest cover has drastically declined, from 50% to 25% in just a few decades, Kanti's work has been both urgent and transformative.

A teacher by profession, she began as a volunteer in community forest user groups (CFUGs), where her natural leadership, resilience in the face of male opposition, and far-sighted vision quickly stood out. Recognized by HIMAWANTI Nepal, an NGO run by grassroots women, she rose as a key voice in transforming policies and mindsets.

Choosing not to marry, she dedicated her life to the strategic amplification of women's voices. Despite threats and social ostracization, she remained firm in her stand for gender equality.

Kanti is equally skilled at working with rural women and local leaders as she is navigating national political forums. She has become a powerful force for change in Nepalese society.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



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2019





ACHARYA Triveni (54)
India

Rescued from Torture to Empowerment of Rural Communities
This project supports the following SDGs

“Rescuing girls is just the beginning, true change comes when they return home with dignity and strength.”

Mrs. Acharya, a former journalist with a reputed newspaper in Mumbai, assumed the role of President of the Rescue Foundation in 2005, an organization dedicated to combating human trafficking from rural India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and other neighboring countries. Under her fearless leadership, the Foundation rescues trafficked girls from red-light districts, massage parlors, and private residences, providing them with comprehensive rehabilitation and reuniting them with their families in their native places. Her grassroots-level work not only liberates these young women from exploitation and torture but also empowers them to become contributing members of their communities. This effort directly addresses a major issue in India while simultaneously fostering rural development through women’s empowerment, critical in a country where nearly 50% of the population resides in rural areas. Under Mrs. Acharya’s guidance, the Foundation operates in Mumbai, Boisar, Pune, and Delhi, rescuing around 350 girls and rehabilitating and repatriating about 700 girls annually. To date, over 18,000 girls have been rescued and supported. Her protective homes, located in urban areas where trafficking is rampant, serve as beacons of hope. Her remarkable work is recognized by the Government of India.



AKAKPO Adjoa (61)
Togo

A Pioneer with Numerous Talents
This project supports the following SDGs

“When rural women have skills, land, and voice, they can transform families, communities and the future itself.”

Adjoa is a pioneer in the organization of women in her country. In 1990, she founded the “Women’s Association La Colombe” (The Dove) to provide immediate and effective solutions to the many challenges rural women face: food insecurity, poverty, health crises, illiteracy, sexual violence, high school dropout rates among girls, and lack of access to land and credit, leading to financial dependency on men. In 2000, she left the security of her teaching career to fully dedicate herself to this mission. A training center was opened in Vo Koutime, where over 700 girls and young women, many victims of violence and sexual exploitation, have since been trained in fields such as tailoring, hairdressing, cooking, dyeing, and more. Each participant also receives education in literacy, entrepreneurship, and leadership. Alongside this work, traditional village chiefs have been sensitized to women’s rights in land ownership and inheritance. On October 15, 2019, the International Day of Rural Women, Adjoa helped launch a network of women agro-entrepreneurs and a movement of village chiefs’ wives to address gender-based violence and promote agroecology as a response to climate change.



FETGO Bernadette (57)
Cameroon

Empowering Rural Women to Claim their Right to Land
This project supports the following SDGs

“When rural women rise, communities heal, children learn, and peace finds its way back into our villages.”

Mrs. Fetgo Bernadette, a rural woman and mother of nine, was selected as a Cameroon Prize-winner in 2019 by CEFAP-Ladies Circle, the WWSF national prize partner, co-sponsored by WWSF. Deeply rooted in her village, she dedicates her time, beyond her demanding rural work and household responsibilities, to mobilizing women in her community. She brings them together to strengthen their capacities, defend their rights, diversify their income sources, and seek vital information to improve production, add value through processing, and access markets to support their families. Her tireless efforts have made advocacy for rural women’s access to land, the education of girls, and the eradication of early marriage her personal battlefield. Mrs. Fetgo promotes the recognition and support of rural women’s labor and contribution to society. She is a determined and respected leader, heading multiple women’s community groups with approximately 1,500 rural women. Through these networks, she also works actively in peace-building efforts, particularly in the crisis-affected Anglophone regions of Cameroon, ensuring that rural women are not only heard but become key actors in rebuilding their communities.



KABORE Wendlasida Constance (27)
Burkina Faso

Where the Ants Carry the Elephants
This project supports the following SDGs

“Training women to create and lead small enterprises is the key to breaking cycles of poverty and dependence.”

A school holiday spent in her native village was a turning point for Wendlasida Constance. Shocked by the dire conditions faced by rural women, no independent income, poor hygiene, and complete dependence on their husbands, she founded the ALIA Association (Association Libre Afrique) in 2014. With the motto “training is the key to autonomy,” ALIA empowers rural women by providing practical and theoretical skills. Later, she launched the FABI project (Femmes Africaines Belles et Indépendantes), focused on improving hygiene in rural areas where even basic products like soap are often unavailable. Through FABI, women not only gain access to hygiene essentials but also learn to produce and sell them, generating modest but vital income and raising awareness of their rights. ALIA’s training programs cover soap-making, small business management, the use of local medicinal plants, and legal literacy on women’s social and economic rights. These small-scale efforts, though often overlooked, collectively carry massive weight. As a proverb from her region says, “When the mouths of the ants get together, they can carry an elephant,” be it called poverty or underdevelopment.



KASHYAP Shraddha (50)

India

An Epitome of Courage and a True Change-Maker

This project supports the following SDGs

Shraddha Kashyap belongs to the Kurmi community, classified as Other Backward Classes (OBC) in India, where agriculture is the main occupation. Born in a lower middle-class family in Darrabhata Village, Chhattisgarh, Shraddha faced discrimination even within her family but persisted to pursue education. Convincing her parents to let her study beyond the 8th grade was difficult, and she had to move away to complete her bachelor's degree. Her marriage was pre-arranged by her grandfather, but unwilling to surrender her hard-earned identity, she refused to accept a marriage lacking equal partnership. Inspired by social worker Shastri Ji, she chose to become a changemaker for oppressed women. Moving 2,000 km to Madhya Pradesh, she joined Ekta Parishad, fighting for land, water, and forest rights based on Gandhian principles. Shraddha's leadership secured land and equal property rights for many landless people and women. She played key roles in major peaceful marches such as Janadesh 2007 and Jan Satyagrah 2012, while promoting organic farming, seed banks, and climate awareness, representing India at the 2009 Copenhagen Summit. Her journey inspires women to overcome obstacles and claim their rightful place.



LALPARASAROI Munteli (30)

Kenya

The Goddess of the Lions

This project supports the following SDGs

"Through Mama Simba, we protect lions and empower women to break free from old limits and lead with strength."

Over 26 years of prize nominations, few stories match the originality of Munteli's lion conservation work. Africa's lion population has plummeted by 43% in 20 years, down to 20,000, only 2,000 in Kenya, threatening extinction from habitat loss and human-wildlife conflict. Traditionally, lion conservation was a male domain until Munteli and her friend Mparasoroi launched Mama Simba, involving women directly in protecting lions. Married young into the Samburu tribe and widowed, Munteli defied traditions by joining this initiative. With no formal education, she learned literacy, digital skills, and driving, the first Samburu woman to do so. Mama Simba women also created a thriving trade in beaded lion puppets, blending Samburu artistry with conservation income. Now about 20 women actively work to foster peaceful coexistence between cattle herders and lions. Munteli has become a beacon of empowerment, challenging cultural norms and increasing family incomes. Her journey proves the truth in the saying: "our only limits are our belief in the existence of limits."



MOKO Jeanne d'Arc (51)

Cameroon

Committed to Women's Rights and Gender Equality

This project supports the following SDGs

Mrs. MOKO Joan of Arc was selected by CEFAP-Ladies Circle, the WWSF national prize program partner in Cameroon, Co-sponsored by WWSF. She is a resilient rural widow and mother of six orphans, has borne the weight of her family's survival since her husband's passing in 2010. Following his death, 80% of her land was unjustly expropriated, compelling her to become a fierce advocate for rural women's rights. Determined to challenge gender inequalities in land ownership and resource management in Cameroon, she founded the Widows' Club for Rural Development in 2012. This group organizes awareness campaigns, information sessions, and denunciations of injustice, supported by women lawyers who protect and promote their rights. Joan's unwavering dedication prepares rural women to claim their futures while mentoring vulnerable women in her community. She stands as a vital pillar for sustainable development, social progress, and peacebuilding in her village. Her leadership empowers rural women to take control of their destinies and fosters a culture of equality and resilience across generations.



Share one prize

MS.GEETA (39) & MS. KANTA (41)

India

Travelling through Hell to reach High Water

This project supports the following SDGs

Both candidates come from the Harijan community, long marginalized in the Haryana region. Geeta, an excellent student, was pulled out of school to marry and confined within her family home. When her husband lost his job, the family struggled to afford even one meal a day for their children. Kanta, equally brilliant at school, was forced into marriage at just 10 years old. By age 15, she was immersed in endless household chores, cooking, caring for cattle, and working the fields without respite. Despite these harsh realities, Geeta and Kanta refused to be subdued by their circumstances. They joined a village self-help group, underwent training, and became experts in promoting bio-sand filters. These low-cost water filters remove iron, arsenic, and harmful pathogens using natural biological and physical processes. Ideal for poor rural communities battling waterborne diseases, the filters have brought health and hope. From despised outcasts, Geeta and Kanta have risen as respected leaders, driving social and economic progress in their communities and inspiring all around them.



NAIYAN Jebet Kiplagat (42)

Kenya

"Together, we women protect our land, preserve our heritage, and nurture a future resilient to climate change."

A many Talented Leader of Innovative Development

This project supports the following SDGs



Jebet Kiplagat Naiyan has made a profound impact in Kenya by mobilizing women to combat the severe effects of climate change in the Mau forest. As a member of the Olulunga women's group, she supports marginalized communities locally and internationally, focusing on human rights, indigenous rights education, and environmental preservation. She has empowered indigenous people to become climate defenders through initiatives like introducing wood-saving jiko stoves, leading reforestation projects, and harnessing regional biodiversity and traditions. Demonstrating strong leadership, Jebet works within communities where traditional chieftains hold influence. Her involvement in the women's climate defender initiative strengthens grassroots women's access to resources, political participation, and voice in policy-making. A notable project is the "Seed Sisters," which connects women from different climates to exchange resilient seeds for vegetables, beans, medicinal plants, flowers, and trees. Through these efforts, Jebet has become an inspiring figure, encouraging rural women to support one another in facing climate challenges.



NAMAGANDA Ruth (31)

Uganda

Queen of Coffee Producers

This project supports the following SDGs



"When women rise, entire communities flourish. Empowering one woman empowers generations."

Ruth was born in W. Uganda, the only girl among 14 children of a farm family depending on cattle and banana production for its livelihood. After a very brief stint as a storekeeper, Ruth rented land, reclaiming idle fields and transforming them into productive ones. Very soon, she started a number of village savings and loan associations for women, and soon after she joined the Kabinge Coffee Farmers' Cooperative Society (KCFCS) in Bukomansimbi. Later, she was to set up the Babinge Youth Council (2017). Under Ruth's supervision, the youth council set up management services and coffee trading services it now offers to the cooperative. The management services include, amongst others, taking care of the farms of elderly members (as almost everywhere in the world, their proportion in society is increasing) and of widows and landowners. Ruth also carries out female leadership trainings, an absolutely indispensable contribution to African development, especially in areas where husbands usually very vigorously oppose any involvement of their wives outside of the household routine such as e.g. the above-mentioned cooperative activities.

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2018





ARYAL Indira

Nepal

"Through every broadcast, I give voice to the silenced, so no sister ever feels alone again."

Overcoming life's hardest trials to become an Agent of Social Change

This project supports the following SDGs



This outstanding and incredibly courageous woman (40), nominated by Apsara Chapagain, former WWSF prize winner from Nepal (2017), has been passionately active in the field of women's rights. In recent years, she has worked as a radio programmer and now serves as station manager of the rural Radio Lumbini. In a country with limited infrastructure, radio is a vital tool for change. Her programs have empowered rural women to stand up against abuse, launch small businesses, and assume leadership roles. Her impact has been truly transformative.

Born to a mother, Gomati Aryal, who was widowed at ten and blamed for her husband's death, Indira's childhood was marked by hardship. After her mother died of cancer, 12-year-old Indira became a servant in her own home, yet she persevered.

She formed a youth club, a children's club, promoted girls' education, and fought against domestic violence. Her radio program "Talking with Sisters" became widely acclaimed.

Despite health issues and raising a family, she completed her Master's degree and continues to inspire. WWSF proudly honors her courage and determination.



Association of Proactive Rural Women of Aquitania

Colombia

A Group of Rural Women's "Divine Madness" Pays Off

This project supports the following SDGs



"They called us crazy for planting dreams instead of onions, but now, our harvest is dignity and hope."

Aquitania's economy revolves around long onion production, dominating the region but leaving no green spaces for play or relaxation. This monoculture benefits only a few large landowners while harming Lake Tota due to heavy fertilizer and pesticide use. Socially, the well-paid onion sector has fueled male alcoholism, increasing domestic abuse.

When women tried planting vegetables among onion fields, their efforts were dismissed.

In 2011, with support from the Swiss NGO Swissaid, they formally organized ASOMUC, learning administration and receiving expert advice on animal husbandry, technical skills, and social activities. Gradually, husbands agreed to allocate land for greenhouses and gardens.

ASOMUC now commercializes organic products and crafts like soaps and shampoos, and promotes community tourism. Once mocked for their "divine madness," these women have grown more connected to the land, empowered to fight family violence, and inspired to pursue their dreams. They are transforming a community once focused on profit at nature's expense into one that values health, peace, and sustainable living.

Asociación de Mujeres Defensores de Vida

Honduras



The Courage of Fighting for Women

This project supports the following SDGs



"We are standing with every woman silenced by fear, until justice speaks louder than violence."

AMDV is a pioneering organization working under harsh and dangerous conditions in one of the most unequal, violent, and corrupt countries in the world, where 17% of the population lives in extreme poverty. Women, especially in rural areas, suffer daily in what ranks as the most violent country for women, with femicide levels shockingly high and an impunity rate over 90%.

AMDV was among the first national organizations to take on women's rights, with a bold two-fold strategy: influencing public policy while building eight grassroots networks to train women to fight violence and claim their rights. Their work touches four key SDGs, including poverty reduction, food security, health, and gender equality.

Through rotating funds, sustainable farming, improved stoves, and policy advocacy, they have greatly improved conditions for women and families.

Despite relentless obstacles, threats, and an often-hostile environment, AMDV's courageous and tireless team has managed to bring real, lasting change, transforming hundreds of lives and laying the groundwork for a more just future.



AZIZI Ziba (35)

Iran

A Powerful Role Model for Women's Emancipation

This project supports the following SDGs



"In every girl's right to learn, I see the power to change generations, this is why I teach."

The Laureate is a dedicated teacher recognized for her tireless leadership in promoting education in rural areas, especially for girls. In a region where child marriage remains widespread, she has been a powerful voice for change. Since 2014, Ziba has worked with Imam Ali's Popular Student Relief Society (IAPSRs), distributing school supplies to dozens of rural schools and overseeing the construction of restrooms, critical for girls' dignity and safety.

She has prevented 30 cases of child marriage, each requiring hours of patient negotiation with families. Beyond education, she has empowered destitute women by teaching them the traditional Balouch weaving craft, "Sousan-Douzi," and marketing it under the brand "Noora," creating income for women heads of households. Ziba also founded a learning center, Khane-Elm ("a place of hope"), in one of the most impoverished areas of the province of Sistan and Baluchistan. It offers education to children with no prior schooling and promotes gender equality in learning. Ziba is more than a teacher, she is a role model and changemaker in a culture where women still struggle for their rightful place.



BIRUBALA Rabha (69)
India

A Courageous Opponent of Witchhunting
This project supports the following SDGs

"They called it tradition, I called it injustice. I will not stop until no woman is hunted again."

Although this candidate has already received national acclaim, her nomination is more than merited, as it sheds light on a deadly issue still affecting countless rural women in the Global South: sorcery accusations and witch hunting. Despite all her honors, she still earns her living as a day labourer. Since 1995, this petite but immensely courageous woman has fearlessly fought witch hunting alone, often facing life-threatening attacks, social isolation, and hostility. In tribal and Adivasi communities, over 100 million people in India, the practice remains deeply rooted. In Assam, it is often linked to the lack of healthcare; when healing fails, vulnerable individuals, unmarried women, widows, or the elderly, are branded as witches and subjected to torture or death. Birubala, orphaned at six and married at 16, began her crusade after her son was falsely accused of witchcraft. Since then, she has travelled tirelessly from village to village, raising awareness and saving lives, personally rescuing 35 women. In 2012, supporters launched Mission Birubala, which has now saved over 100 lives. Her fearless activism deserves international recognition and support to end this barbaric practice.



CHAPPAZ Marie-Thérèse Fully (49)
Switzerland

Passion and Creativity create Miracles
This project supports the following SDGs

"Respecting the earth is not a choice, it's the soul of every drop I craft by hand."

Marie-Thérèse Chappaz, from Fully in the Valais, perfectly embodies the three core values of this prize: creativity, innovation, and courage. Over the past 20 years, she has established herself as a leading figure in Swiss winemaking, earning near-perfect scores from The Wine Advocate. In 1987, at just 18, she inherited her father's vineyard and, alone, began producing wine with a classical approach, initially using standard herbicide-heavy methods. Her transformation came in 1997 after discovering biodynamic cultivation in France. Inspired by Rudolf Steiner's philosophy, she adopted a respectful, soil-centered method, eliminating synthetic chemicals, mulching with straw, and reintroducing horses instead of soil-compacting machinery. On some of the steepest slopes in Switzerland, she now cultivates 26 acres, producing 25 different wines of outstanding quality, using only natural yeasts. Despite widespread skepticism, being a young woman in a male-dominated field, and years of isolation, she persevered. Labeled the "ayatollah" of winegrowing for her radical ideas, she has since become a pioneer in sustainable viticulture. Honoring her work is a tribute to courage and environmental vision in rural life.



MOSQUERA María Adriana (38)
Colombia

Boundless Creativity in Changing Regional Food Customs
This project supports the following SDGs

"With small hands and seeds, we grow big change, right from our garden, right from the heart."

This is unquestionably one of the most creative and innovative nominations received since the prize's inception. Adriana, a rural preschool teacher, created a climate-adapted school garden that has had a transformative impact on her community. Working with preschoolers, she fostered a passion for sustainable agriculture and healthy eating, even changing food habits at home. Despite initial opposition, including from the very institution funding the preschool, Adriana persevered. Her project has three key components: (a) a climate-resilient garden where children learn through a playful, integrated pedagogy, including songs and games about plants and food; (b) a basic climate station where children track weather data to guide planting decisions; (c) a mini-market initiative where students sell their produce, learning the basics of math, accounting, and entrepreneurship. Adriana challenged cultural beliefs that rural life and local food are inferior and helped children and families rediscover pride in growing their own food. Her model is now gaining national attention and may soon be scaled to other regions. She has shown that even the youngest can be powerful agents of change in rural life.



RAQUEC YAQUÍ Elvia Leticia Aldea Cruz de Santiago
Guatemala

A Powerful Promoter of Mayan Women's Rights
This project supports the following SDGs

"Empowering women in our language, culture, and community is the key to lasting change."

Elvia, a woman of Maya Kaqchikel descent, grew up in a small rural community where girls' education was discouraged. At 12, her father pulled her out of school, but she vowed to prove that women, like men, could study and become professionals. While supporting her family and working on the side, she pursued her dream with unwavering determination. Ten years later, she became the first person from her community to graduate from university, with a degree in social work. Elvia began her work empowering Mayan girls through the Population Council, and later found her calling at the Women's Justice Initiative (WJI), where she now serves as Program Director. She designs and implements culturally grounded programs focused on legal access, women's rights education, and leadership development. Through workshops in her native Kaqchikel and community advocacy, she addresses gender-based violence and child marriage. Her earlier work included leading a pioneering project to delay early marriage among Mayan girls. Charismatic and deeply committed, Elvia is a powerful force for SDG 5, empowering rural Indigenous women and ensuring their right to live free from violence.



SAVARIRAJ Pushpa (35) India

“Through organic farming and unity, tribal women reclaim their land, health, and dignity.”

A Pioneer of Organic Cultivation among Tribals

This project supports the following SDGs

Sister Pushpa (35), a member of St. Joseph’s Hill Tribe Development Social Service and Orphanage Society, has been a passionate leader and motivator of Tribal Women’s Self-Help Groups since 2008. As a talented trainer, she has empowered women and girls to take charge of organic vegetable cultivation, a field traditionally dominated by men. With many men moving into other trades or migrating for salaried jobs, Sister Pushpa encouraged women to embrace farming without pesticides or chemicals. Her projects promote vermiculture, compost pits, seed banks, nurseries, and beekeeping, all aimed at affordable, sustainable vegetable production. She also supports marketing efforts, linking tribal women to urban markets like Pondicherry and Chennai, overcoming immense challenges in awareness and market access. By teaching women to challenge male-dominated social norms, she helps them achieve self-sufficiency and fund education for tribal children. Sister Pushpa’s work is vital for the health and economic well-being of some of the most marginalized communities in the sub-continent, making her a deserving nominee for the prize.

VALDEPEÑA RAMIREZ Aurora & CASTELLANCA RUÍZ Teresa Huexca Mexico

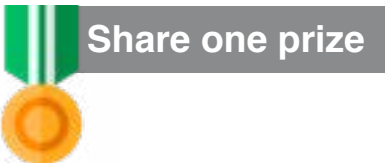


“I’m here, still struggling with my comrades, working to keep our community together and defend it from outside ambitions.”

An Epic Fight against a Gigantic and Destructive Barrage

This project supports the following SDGs

We propose the prize be jointly awarded to two Indigenous women who have played a central role in resisting the imposition of the “Proyecto Integral Morales” (PIM), a massive thermo-electric station that has caused severe environmental degradation, disrupted the local food chain, and fractured the social fabric of their community. Their nomination is supported by ten organizations and individuals, ranging from academic researchers to grassroots movements. These women have not only confronted a powerful corporate-backed project but have also challenged deeply entrenched gender norms, often facing opposition from men within their own families. Both have led vital consciousness-raising efforts, mobilizing their community and enduring harassment and violence for their activism. Aurora (47) has become a respected figure for her work in community health and her efforts to preserve and revive traditional knowledge of medicinal plants, now endangered by the project. Teresa (42) has emerged as a unifying voice, dedicated to healing divisions within her town and defending its natural and cultural heritage through sustained, collective action.



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2017





Self Employment Women Association

India

"As SEWA, we empower women to build economic independence through collective strength, skills, and self-governance."

First Rural Women Movements Award (\$US 10'000)

This project supports the following SDGs

SEWA is a member-based organization of poor, self-employed women workers with 1.9 million members across nine Indian states. Founded in 1972 by Ela Bhatt, a lawyer and visionary from Ahmedabad, Gujarat, SEWA draws inspiration from Gandhian principles of peace and non-violence. Bhatt believed rural women's labor plays a vital role in national peacebuilding and saw poverty as a form of violence. SEWA works with women in the informal sector, those without fixed employer-employee relationships. Its primary goal is to organize these women for full employment and self-reliance. Full employment means work that provides income, food, and social security, including health care, childcare, and shelter. Self-reliance is the ability to make economic decisions and sustain oneself both individually and collectively. SEWA's approach combines struggle and development: fighting social and economic barriers while empowering women through skill-building and collective bargaining. This strategy is realized through unions and cooperatives, connecting the labor, cooperative, and women's movements.

Rural Organizing SEWA's rural organizing is area-specific and demand-driven, with communities leading their own initiatives. It supports rural women to build and manage cooperatives and federations that secure livelihoods based on local needs and resources. Women organize around activities like water conservation, dairy production, craftwork, reforestation, and salt farming. These efforts build collective bargaining power and alternative employment. Village women are trained in the skills needed to run these organizations. Each cooperative is led by a spearhead team, made up of 80% grassroots leaders (aagewans) and 20% SEWA organizers. These barefoot managers receive intensive training in administration, financial management, and technical skills.

SEWA follows an integrated approach that is based on the following beliefs:

- Collective Strength: The poor need organized power to shape programs and governance.
- Capital Formation: Access to savings, credit, insurance builds assets and reduces poverty.
- Social Security: Basic protections help withstand crises and improve well-being.
- Capacity Building: Access to infrastructure, technology, education enables market competition.

SEWA believes that the economic power cannot only be left in the hands of those who have capital or to governments; but workers must also conceive, build and expand their own economic strength by establishing their own economic institutions. To date, SEWA has organized more than 3,200 self-help groups (SHGs), over 110 cooperatives, and more than 15 federations or associations. These micro-enterprises cover 184 income-generating activities. Through this strategy, workers become owners and managers of their trades, marking the first step toward self-governance. Women gain recognition as producers, which builds self-respect and dignity at home and in the community.



WALLEMYR Vanja (58)

Sweden

A Pioneer of Clean Energy

This project supports the following SDGs

"I started Qvinnovindar to show women can lead in wind power and transform our rural future."

At the turn of the millennium, demand for wind power surged in rural Sweden. Vanja, a farmer in Skaraborg, was often the only woman in early clean energy discussions. When uranium mining threats arose locally, she opposed test drillings, believing wind power was key to sustainability. In 2006, Vanja envisioned a women's cooperative for wind energy, an area then dominated by men. In 2007, she founded Qvinnovindar ("Women's Winds"), Sweden's first women-only wind power cooperative, leveraging the region's windy conditions. Initially dismissed and even mocked as a "lady's sewing club," the cooperative faced skepticism from banks and the energy sector. However, by pooling resources and building networks, they gained respect and secured investments. Today, Qvinnovindar stands as a pioneering model, inspiring women's involvement in sustainable energy. Vanja has shared her experience widely, including at the 2012 AWID International Forum, showcasing how one determined woman can transform rural life and advance clean energy, a vital factor for humanity's future.



UUGAN-ERDENE Tugrug (42)

Mongolia

A Powerful Promoter of Women's Rights

This project supports the following SDGs

"I fight for integrity and empower women to transform our communities with strength and hope."

This exceptional leader from Mongolia's Khovd province rose from herds-girl to head an NGO managing large funds. Rejecting corruption, she left a well-paid job to co-found the San Tus Center in a tiny bank room, accepting a 50% pay cut to preserve her integrity. From 2002 to 2017, she advanced women's rights and empowerment, creating NGO networks across three provinces and launching programs for Kazakh minority women, including language media and training against domestic violence. She trained 385 disabled rural women on health and rights, forming 10 clubs to promote healthier lifestyles. Supporting 80 small businesses, mostly women-led, she empowered over 1,200 people. She also organized seminars for 520 herdswomen on health, nutrition, and gender issues. Her child sponsorship program aided 2,000 impoverished families. Committed to culture and environment, she helped preserve indigenous traditions and fight desertification through youth clubs and wildlife protection. Praised for exceptional professionalism and integrity, she consistently exceeds expectations while deeply understanding and uplifting her community.



ELVIA ARANA Ana (57)

Columbia

"I believe true change begins when communities reclaim their voice and care for the land that sustains them."

A Tireless Fighter for a Balanced Environment

This project supports the following SDGs



Ana Elvia Arana, was born in rural Tuluá, Colombia, where her deep connection to nature began early. She learned to read through a national radio literacy program, sparking a lifelong passion for knowledge. At 11, her mother moved to a township so she could attend school. Later, in Cali, Ana worked to support herself before returning to school at 16. There, she discovered ecology and the ties between environment, culture, and community. After university, she worked in environmental civil service before moving back to the countryside, where she built her own home and cultivated a diverse garden. In 1995, she founded the Tropico Foundation, focused on environmental and social protection for vulnerable communities. Despite modest funding, Ana remained committed, training people to document their stories and history from within. With a master's in agroecology from the University of Andalucía, she helped shape Colombia's National System of Protected Areas (SINAP). Through Tropico, she has supported Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities with sustainable agriculture, creating a nationally recognized model for participatory conservation now replicated across the country.



POELINA Anne (60)

Australia

An Exceptional Figure among the First Nations of the World

This project supports the following SDGs



"Caring for Country is not just our right, it's our responsibility, rooted in love, culture, and survival."

Anne Poelina, is a remarkable Aboriginal leader from Western Australia whose life work exemplifies deep cultural commitment, scientific knowledge, and rural advocacy. For over 40 years, this world-traveled Ph.D. has led transformative efforts in indigenous health, education, language preservation, environmental protection, and cultural empowerment, always grounded in her remote Kimberley community. She founded her own NGO to drive change through local action and policy influence, rejecting urban career paths to stay close to her people. Anne is now establishing Mardoowarra College, a residential school for 13–25-year-olds in one of the most socio-economically challenged regions in the world. Her leadership was instrumental in halting the destructive Walmadany gas hub and continues in a long legal battle to protect the Fitzroy River from coal mining. She helped initiate the Fitzroy River Declaration, uniting six First Nations to defend sacred waters. As the first Aboriginal woman to earn a nursing diploma in Western Australia, Anne blends Western and Indigenous knowledge to envision a sustainable, caring society, modeling resilience, wisdom, and community-rooted leadership.



CHAPAGAIN Apsara (45)

Nepal

Promoting Women Through Forestry Management

This project supports the following SDGs



"When women manage forests, they don't just protect trees, they grow communities, justice, and futures for all."

Apsara Chapagain, has played a vital role in making Nepal a global leader in decentralized forest management. With nearly 8 million people involved in Community Forestry User Groups (CFUGs), about one-third of Nepal's forests are now protected under local control. Apsara began her activism as a teenager, helping to form a local CFUG and quickly rising as a national leader. She became the first woman Chairperson of the Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN), overseeing a significant rise in women's representation, now nearly 50%. Community forestry has drastically reversed predictions of forest collapse in Nepal, offering environmental benefits like watershed protection and soil conservation. Women, who are primary forest users, have especially benefited: improved forestry means less time gathering fuelwood and more time for education and leadership. Over 700 CFUGs are run solely by women, and even Dalit women have gained inclusion and voice. Under Apsara's leadership, CFUGs have advanced social services, like ambulance provision and poverty reduction. Despite ongoing challenges, Nepal's model remains a world-renowned success in participatory forest governance.



KUMARI SINGH Choti (20)

India

Empowering the Powerless

This project supports the following SDGs



"Education is our weapon to break the chains of caste and poverty, I believe every child deserves this chance."

Choti, now 20, is an upper-caste young woman who, at just 17, began dedicating herself to the upliftment of one of India's most oppressed communities, the Musahar Dalits of Ratanpur village in Bihar. Working with Amrita SeRve, an NGO inspired by spiritual leader Amma, Choti chose to focus her efforts on the Musahars, so marginalized that the Bihar government labeled them mahadalit, meaning "most oppressed." With adult literacy among Musahar women at just 2%, rampant early marriages, absence of vaccinations, extreme poverty, and barely any hygiene, Choti faced an uphill battle. In 2014, she began tuition classes for children, getting them there meant going door to door and winning over skeptical, indifferent parents. Many of the children hadn't bathed in weeks. So Choti took them to the nearby river and bathed them herself. Slowly, the children, and then their parents, began to change. She helped the women form self-help groups, save money, access health care, and understand vaccination schedules. Today, 108 children are in school. Families now see education as a pathway to dignity. With courage, humility, and grit, Choti helped break the chains of caste, poverty, and self-neglect, redefining what's possible when the young lead with heart and conviction.



NAKAJJIGO Esther (21)

Uganda

A Courageous Opponent of Teenage Pregnancy

This project supports the following SDGs

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Already as a teenager, Esther, 21, from Munyonyo, Uganda, took on an uphill battle against HIV/AIDS in Kalangala district, a place known as “probably Africa’s most complex and difficult place to live.” With rampant HIV/AIDS, poor health services, family breakdowns, and widespread beliefs in witchcraft, Esther showed exceptional courage starting at age 14. After witnessing the tragic death of her schoolmate Sonia, who was denied medical care, Esther mobilized health workers and began community sensitization. She spent her school holidays educating locals on antenatal care, immunization, and adolescent health, focusing especially on girls. Under Esther’s leadership, maternal and infant mortality rates dropped significantly. She founded a Women’s Health Team that carried out outreach, changing harmful myths around sex and contraception. At university, she launched the “Saving Innocence Challenge,” where city girls lived with island girls to inspire and educate them. The program has empowered vulnerable girls, creating 54 small businesses and training over 500 girls to make reusable sanitary pads, reducing reliance on dangerous means to afford hygiene products. Esther’s ongoing vision aims to reach 5,000 island girls by 2020, proving the profound impact one determined individual can make.



ADI VASULEVU MEREWALESI Levu Chute (54)

Fiji

A Versatile Grass-Roots Developer

This project supports the following SDGs

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“Women aren’t victims, they’re leaders. When united, we build peace, resilience, and dignity in our communities.”

Levu Chute, is a remarkable rural woman leader in Fiji, known for uniting women from diverse ethnic backgrounds to promote peace and empowerment. For over 20 years, she has supported women in remote communities to create income-generating projects, blending economic empowerment with peacebuilding. Levu encourages women to analyze poverty and injustice, helping them craft strategies to claim their dignity in deeply patriarchal cultures. Her roles are many: counselor, mediator, radio presenter, negotiator, community enabler, and business mentor. She has championed marginalized rural groups through NGOs, focusing on conflict resolution and traditional methods. Notable achievements include founding the Vunicuicui Multiracial Women’s Forum seed bank and cooperative shop and assisting women’s groups in poultry farming and handicrafts to combat poverty. She also helped improve water security in rural areas. Levu’s most significant contribution is co-creating femLINK’s Women’s Weather Watch (WWW) after the 2004 cyclone, linking women for weather updates and community support. Today, WWW empowers women as leaders and agents of recovery in their communities.



VERMA Manju (41)

India

Overcoming all the Odds

This project supports the following SDGs

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Born in the village of Lawan, near Jaipur, Manju Verma, 41, seemed destined to face hardships. Belonging to the low-caste Regar community of cobblers and untouchables, her family couldn’t afford her education, so at 17 she was married off to a young cobbler. Her husband spent much of his meager income on alcohol and soon began abusing her. With two children and barely enough to survive, Manju started making fans and brooms to earn extra money. After the devastating 1981 floods, she joined a self-help village group (SHG), despite harsh criticism and increased abuse for attending meetings alone. Determined to create a better future, she saved money and attended workshops by a Jaipur NGO, gaining confidence and knowledge. She started mobilizing the women of her community about their rights, capacities, health, and education and worked on their political, social, economic and cultural empowerment. In 2003, she started her own SHG and took her first loan, never looking back. Her status changed from scorned to respected, as she became a leader uplifting women socially, politically, and economically. Today, Manju champions girl child education, ensuring no woman in her community remains unheard or powerless.



AABROO Muqadas (26)

Pakistan

An Exceptional Champion of Women’s Rights

This project supports the following SDGs

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“As a woman, I believe empowering others transforms communities and breaks barriers for generations to come.”

Muqadas Aarbroo, 26, was born in Muzaffargarh, Southern Punjab, where girls were unwelcome and denied education. Thanks to her mother’s strong stand, Muqadas began fighting for women’s rights early on, despite centuries-old customs that restricted women’s freedom and kept many from voting. She understood that changing deep-rooted mindsets would be a long struggle but believed in women’s natural talents and decision-making skills. Joining the Women’s Social Organization – Pakistan (WSO-PK), she formed 2,300 women’s groups focused on income generation and microfinance, lifting many out of poverty. Muqadas introduced branding, packing, and marketing to replace middlemen, allowing women to sell their embroidered clothes directly and earn fair wages. She also brought waste management and low-cost sanitation to the area. Her efforts sparked a community-wide shift: more women now demand voting rights, decision-making power in marriages, and property rights. Muqadas continues to fight for girls’ education and social change, using her leadership and problem-solving skills to tackle tough challenges and empower women across her region.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



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2016



YOTCHOU TZUDJOM Anne Pelagie

Cameroon

Creating Strong Networks and Leadership Among Rural Women

This project supports the following SDGs



"Empowering rural women with resources and technology is the key to transforming communities and ending inequality."

Anne Pelagie, a founding member of Genre en Action (2007) and coordinator of Cefap-Ladies Circle, is an expert in Gender, Development, and Transitional Justice. She firmly believes empowering rural women is key to improving families and communities long-term. Anne identified that gender inequality persists because rural women lack access to vital resources like credit, land, and education. To tackle this, she launched projects focusing on capacity building through ICT to develop microbusinesses and trained rural women leaders to engage in governance and political debate nationally. Her initiatives also improve rural women's quality of life by providing clean water, sanitation, education, and health services. Notably, she helped build shelters for battered women and the first "Hope Home" for vulnerable pregnant adolescents in Cameroon. Anne also supported women in processing and marketing agricultural and fishery products. Despite facing major funding challenges, she raises awareness and gathers resources through international networks. Supported by a dedicated team of 150 volunteers and experts from 10 regions, her creative and courageous leadership has made a significant impact across the country.



OWASHABA Caroline (30)

Uganda

An Entrepreneur for Adding Value and Self Reliance

This project supports the following SDGs



Caroline Owashaba, has launched several initiatives in her community, including the International Day of the Girl Child recognition awards and founding Action for Youth Development Uganda, a youth-led group promoting gender equality, social justice, and sexual reproductive health. She started the Self Reliance Project and Children for Alternative Change (CHACHA), which involves children and mothers in income-generating activities. One key activity uses discarded banana stems and fibers to create products like lampshades, doormats, and earrings. Despite challenges like the high cost of extraction machines and the novelty of this technology, Caroline's innovation has shown rural women how to add value to local resources. Profits from sales help mothers open bank accounts to save for their children's education. Through this, Caroline has empowered women to become independent and inspired thousands to embrace creative income opportunities. She believes overcoming the fear of starting new ventures is essential. Caroline also leads efforts to popularize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in rural Uganda through the Network for African Youth for Development (NAYD).



TREGRAM Chinta Bai (57)

India

"We built this company from the soil up, now women farmers set the price, not the traders."

A Strong Community Leader for Women Farmers

This project supports the following SDGs



Chinta Bai, is a leader of the Ram Rahim Pragati Producer Company Limited (RRPPCL), a major farmer-owned rural economic institution in one of Madhya Pradesh's poorest regions. Born into an indigenous tribal community marked by poverty, landlessness, and bonded labor, Chinta's journey reflects her unbreakable spirit. Married off at 13 to an abusive husband, her decision to leave him led to social exclusion, but she persevered. Her turning point came when she joined a self-help group and began a small goat-rearing business. Today, under her leadership, RRPPCL empowers 2,662 women shareholder farmers, enabling the sale of over 4,000 tons of crops like wheat, maize, and legumes. Chinta fought for RRPPCL's inclusion in the National Commodities Derivatives Exchange, giving marginalized farmers direct, nationwide market access. Despite being illiterate, she mastered technical agricultural market skills typically monopolized by elites. Chinta has inspired countless women to demand fair prices and challenge exploitative systems. Her leadership is rooted in resilience, turning personal hardship into collective empowerment for rural women farmers.



DARARE GONCHE Eva (45)

Kenya

Restoring Women's Right to Life of Dignity

This project supports the following SDGs



"When tradition silences women, I encourage them to weave strength into every basket, and re-claim their place."

Eva Darare Gonche, has had a profound impact on her community by promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. In her conservative society, pre-marital pregnancy is viewed as a crime, often leading to girls being evicted and forced into illegal activities like brewing liquor or prostitution to survive. Eva, determined to break this cycle, courageously mobilized these socially excluded young mothers, despite a culture that defies government interventions on women's rights. She taught them traditional skills like beadwork and basketry using local materials, enabling them to earn a living and regain social acceptance. To support pregnant girls, she persuaded elders to introduce a rule: any man who impregnates a girl must pay her 70 goats to help her build a future. This reduced teenage pregnancies and improved the treatment of children born out of wedlock. Eva's efforts, rooted in courage and cultural understanding, brought dignity and legal livelihoods to hundreds of marginalized women. Her leadership is a powerful example of community-driven change and resilience against deeply ingrained norms.



TREVINO-SAUCEDA Hermila (Mily) (57)

USA

Creating Awareness about Farmworkers' Rights

This project supports the following SDGs



"I turned my pain into purpose, so no farmworker woman feels invisible, unheard, or unprotected again."

Mily Treviño-Sauceda is a leading voice for women farmworkers in the U.S., especially in California, where the movement began. Coming from a farmworker family, she faced economic hardship, frequent moves between the U.S. and Mexico, and limited access to education, her parents prioritized her brother's schooling, leaving her to work in the fields. These experiences shaped her lifelong advocacy. She began speaking out about poor working conditions early on, which cost her jobs but fueled her commitment. Mily has fought against violence toward women, trained police and public officials to better support victims, and helped shape policies that protect women farmworkers. She also campaigns against pesticide use, drawing from her own exposure in the fields to highlight its dangers to people and the environment. Mily creatively raised awareness through skits with other farmworker women that depicted harassment, domestic violence, and unsafe conditions. Her efforts have empowered women to know their rights, seek fair wages, and demand safer workplaces. Her leadership has earned her local and national recognition.



BAI Kesi (48)

India

"Water gave us strength, not just to grow crops, but to grow voices, dignity, and equality."

Fighting Patriarchal Structures of Decision-Making

This project supports the following SDGs



Kesi Bai lives in Bhilwara District, India, a drought-prone region where she has led efforts to restore pastureland and address water scarcity. In a male-dominated society, she mobilized women to protect common resources, despite facing resistance from upper-caste men who accused her of violating tradition and questioned the transparency of her work. Kesi Bai bravely spoke in male-only meetings, challenged caste and gender norms, and invited experts to verify the results of the pastureland restoration, disproving false claims. Her efforts transformed 75 hectares of previously unusable land into a sustainable source of fuel wood and grazing, benefiting lower-caste families dependent on livestock. Her success earned her election as Sarpanch (village head) of Chitamba Panchayat. As a leader, she has promoted gender equality, encouraged women's participation in decision-making, and influenced changes such as increased girls' education and reduced spending on costly death ceremonies. Fourteen years later, her work continues to inspire communities beyond Bhilwara, showing how water management can shift both environmental and social landscapes.



DEVI THARU CHAUDHARY Nirmala (39)

Nepal

Power to the Indigenous Women Wage Laborers

This project supports the following SDGs

Nirmala Devi Tharu Chaudhary has played a transformative role in empowering women in her community. Despite growing up in poverty as the daughter of a bonded laborer and becoming a housemaid at age 10 after her mother’s paralysis, she rose above hardship. Married at 14 and forced into wage labor, she faced stigma and exploitation. With support from an organization, she escaped and began working with Women Acting Together for Change (WATCH), becoming a literacy facilitator and later a Social Mobilizer. Through this, she taught women about health, gardening, and income generation. Courageously, she helped rescue 46 bonded laborer families by secretly organizing women laborers and encouraging them to join literacy classes, which led to collective action for fair wages and freedom. She founded the Talau Cooperative to rear and distribute piglets and lobbied for changes in Nepal’s draft Constitution. Nirmala united 11 women’s groups to push for women’s and Tharu indigenous rights, helping them claim their constitutional, legal, and human rights with confidence and pride.



CARSWELL Peggy (64)

Canada

Steering the Organic Movement in Assam

This project supports the following SDGs

“Empowering farmers with knowledge and soil-friendly tools builds healthier communities, crops, and a more sustainable future.”

Peggy Carswell, a Canadian, has spent 17 years transforming lives in Assam, India, by promoting organic and sustainable farming. In a region known for tea production, many farmers were unknowingly misusing harmful pesticides due to English-only instructions. Peggy brought together small-scale tea growers and taught them how to grow tea and vegetables organically. To address the shortage of skilled trainers in organic farming, she established training centers and three demonstration gardens where farmers could learn hands-on techniques. Her methods include using local seeds, composting, pest management, and crop rotation. Small tea farmers now benefit from pesticide-free practices, such as crushing tea with wooden tools for a unique smoky flavor favored in the West. Peggy’s work has fostered collaboration among Assamese and Canadian farmers, local organizations, and international volunteers. Through workshops, she has also helped growers improve marketing, packaging, and access to tea experts. A major challenge she continues to address is the lack of funding and knowledge-sharing in Assam compared to South India, despite growing interest in organic methods.



GYAWALI Tulsi (50)

Nepal

Empowering Women through Innovation in Waste Management

This project supports the following SDGs

Tulsi Gyawali is a leader and innovator in solid waste management. In her village, garbage was dumped in the open, leading to disease and environmental degradation. Tulsi saw that many believed their responsibility ended once waste was thrown onto the road. She addressed the issue at its root by converting kitchen waste into compost, which she used to grow vegetables, herbs, and ornamental plants. This led to the creation of terrace and rooftop gardens. Tulsi trained rural women and children in composting and rooftop farming, empowering them with practical, sustainable skills. She also found value in non-degradable waste, teaching women to weave plastic wrappers into hats, baskets, and sandals, creating jobs and small incomes. These low-cost innovations have improved the living standards and dignity of rural women. Her composting techniques were later adopted in Bharatpur Sub Metropolitan City and nearby villages. Tulsi built strong networks with NGOs, academic institutions, and government bodies. As a Human Rights activist, she also raises her voice against domestic violence, using her platform to advocate for women’s rights and empowerment.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



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2015



AMUPPA

Peru

Women Unit to Protect their Land from Mining

This project supports the following SDGs



"We protect our land and water, preserving life, dignity, and ancestral wisdom for future generations."

AMUPPA (The Association of Women Protectors of the Wetlands and Watersheds) is a grass-roots organization in the highlands of Peru dedicated to defending rural land from mining threats. Formally established in 2008, its origins trace back to a 2005 peaceful protest where founding members Cleofe Neyra and Elizabeth Cunya, along with 26 others, were kidnapped and held captive for three days. Undeterred, these women continued their fight for land, water, and human rights, showing remarkable courage and resilience.

AMUPPA not only opposes environmentally destructive mining projects, such as the one on the Rio Blanco, but also preserves traditional knowledge by producing and selling medicinal and hygiene products like soap and toothpaste. They share these skills with broader networks, including the Latin-American Union of Women (ULAM). Despite facing criminalization and social exclusion, AMUPPA has promoted capacity-building workshops to strengthen community ties and highlight women's contributions. Pro-agriculture and deeply rooted in local sustainability, the group is also researching high-altitude potato varieties to support food security and climate resilience in their region.



ZAMBRANO Ana Elfa (56)

Colombia

The Importance of Environmental Ethics

This project supports the following SDGs



"Bringing clean water and knowledge empowers women and unites our community for a healthier, stronger future."

Ana Elfa Zambrano is a dedicated rural leader working to defend her community's collective rights. She has empowered women through training, promoted rural culture via reading, music, and dance, and founded a community aqueduct. This aqueduct supplies treated, clean water to 50 families, reducing the time women spend fetching water. Ana Elfa also teaches youth about environmental and historical values, fostering environmental ethics.

Despite facing criticism and opposition from men threatened by her efforts to empower women, she persisted, eventually gaining their support. Beyond her leadership, she supports rural women through empowerment workshops and monthly breakfasts organized with the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare. As the aqueduct's manager, she visits homes to ensure water delivery and bill collection, offering advice and listening to community members.

Ana Elfa's unwavering commitment has improved her village's well-being and strengthened community bonds, making her an indispensable figure for women, families, and the entire village.



DINDOR Anitaben & CHAUHAN Kailashkunvarben

India

"We bring light, food, and knowledge, empowering women to grow, earn, and lead in their communities."

Trained Rural Women are Key for Development

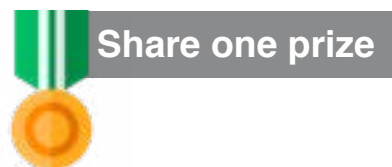
This project supports the following SDGs







Anitaben Dindor and Kailashkunvarben Chauhan, both trained members of SEWA (Self Employed Women's Organisation), have made lasting impacts in rural Gujarat. After receiving training in assembling solar lanterns, Anitaben now trains groups, travels weekly to villages in Dungarpur for assembly and repair, and earns a small wage per lantern. In a district where only 33% of homes have electricity, her work provides vital access to light. She also helped install a hand pump in her village, saving women hours previously spent walking for clean water. Additionally, she learned vermicomposting, uses it on her crops, sells it to others, and teaches fellow women its benefits. Kailashkunvarben, trained in agriculture, educates women across villages on using quality seeds and fertilizers. She secured wheat seeds from the Gujarat government, helping increase yields from two to six tons. She also trains women in growing vegetables and in animal husbandry—teaching proper cattle care to boost milk quality and quantity. Her guidance has led to improved nutrition and income through milk sales, benefiting entire communities.





ALAUZE Emilie (34)

France

A Trailblazer for Biodiversity

This project supports the following SDGs







"Protecting biodiversity and water starts in the vineyard, with shared knowledge, strong partnerships, and sustainable action."

Emilie Alauze is a winegrower in the Hérault region of France. She was nominated by colleagues within a viticulture network for her work in creating and developing tools to help viticulturists in the region effect preservation of biodiversity and the quality of water. Through her work, particularly with the program she created called "Biodiv&Eau" (Bio diversity and water), she has taken steps to coordinate the actions of diverse actors in the interest of biodiversity: viticulturists, local collective organizations, environmental associations, and hunters. She has also instilled agro-ecological infrastructures favorable to biodiversity. Her work also emphasizes the protection of water quality. In addition to this innovative work, part of Emilie's contribution to this rural wine-farming area of France has been to promote and facilitate communication among key players within this agricultural sphere. She serves as Présidente des Jeunes Agriculteurs de l'Hérault and was also elected to La Chambre d'Agriculture d'Hérault. In her leadership capacities, she has done meaningful environmental work, and can be considered a trailblazer for her many accomplishments as a young woman.



SEGURA PINTO Genni Maria (34)

Costa Rica

An Indigenous Leader who Loves her Community

This project supports the following SDGs







"With roots in tradition and eyes on the future, I aim to build bridges through language, culture, and education."

Genni Maria Segura Pinto is a Cabecar indigenous woman from the mountains of Costa Rica, dedicated to empowering her community. As the leader of a women artisans' group, she has helped strengthen their skills and financial independence. Though she didn't attend school as a child, Genni speaks Cabecar, Spanish, and English, using her language skills to translate for visitors and connect her community to essential services like healthcare and education. She also uses this knowledge to promote and protect Cabecar culture, co-designing a visitor program that generates income and cultural awareness. An environmental caretaker, she ensures proper waste management and actively participates in tree planting efforts. At age 27, Genni began formal education, quickly progressed through elementary school, and is now in her second year of high school. She is writing a trilingual book of Cabecar stories and oversees the construction of the Lucas Drummond Education Center, which will welcome visitors and promote indigenous heritage. Genni is a bridge between tradition and progress, deeply committed to cultural preservation and community development.



DJIDEREV Haoua (45)

Cameroon

An Activist for Women's Rights

This project supports the following SDGs







"With compost, courage, and community, we grow more than food, we grow independence and dignity for rural women."

Haoua Djidere is a farmer and community leader recognized for her work in sustainable agriculture, women's empowerment, and rural activism. She began farming in 1999 and quickly united women in her area to form the Jardinière interest group within the Groupement d'Intérêt Communautaire (GIC), which gained legal recognition in 2000. For eight years, she led educational initiatives within the group. In 2008, Haoua founded another group, Daouridal, under which she led women to demand 10 hectares of land from the municipality. Though only granted 4 hectares, located 10 kilometers from the village, Haoua has continued to guide the women in cultivating it. She grows eco-friendly crops like corn and manioc, uses compost, clean water, and repurposed materials to promote domestic farming. Her produce sells for three times less than market prices, making food more accessible. With support from commerce experts, she educates farmers and clients on the benefits of corn cultivation. Haoua is widely respected for her role in defending women's rights, promoting financial independence, and serving as a model of sustainable agricultural leadership.



THAMI LauriMaya (60+)

Nepal

"By breaking silence and stigma, we build dignity, equality, and futures for women and girls in Jumla."

Dismantling Caste-Based Discrimination

This project supports the following SDGs



LauriMaya is a rural woman who lives in the Jumla district, where the human development index is the lowest of any other area in Nepal. Thami is changing oppressive cultural norms in her village, she became a widow 14 years ago, and refused to wear the traditional garb of widows that allows society to stigmatize them. As such, other women are following suit. She has also been working to dismantle the oppressive practice of chhaupadi (where women are moved into isolation and are considered untouchable during menstruation) of child marriage, early marriage, and caste-based discrimination.

Thami has promoted gender equality through her work as a community gender facilitator in women's empowerment and livelihood improvement. She has empowered women and children to claim their rights and has gained a sizeable critical mass of supporters and young activists. She also promotes gender equality through her door-to-door campaign to convince parents to send their children to school, particularly their girl children. As a Woman Health Volunteer, she works with pregnant women to educate them on the reproductive health of mothers and infants, and also educates local couples about basic contraceptive methods.



KWENA Mary (29)

Kenya

Boys and Girls Together for a Cultural Shift

This project supports the following SDGs



"Educating girls and boys together is how we grow a generation that protects rights, health, and equality."

Mary is a dedicated advocate for women's rights and rural empowerment in East Africa. As a Program Associate for the Girls' Advancement Program at Asante Africa Foundation, she has led initiatives on sustainable education, sanitation, health, hygiene, and financial literacy, positively impacting over 4,000 girls in marginalized communities.

Her flagship initiative, the Wezesha Vijana Program, educates rural girls on financial and reproductive health, helping them stay in school, manage menstruation, assert bodily autonomy, and reduce dropouts due to pregnancy. Mary has fostered open family and community dialogue through mother-daughter meetings and girls' clubs, which engage families in rethinking cultural norms and building strong peer support networks. She is also pioneering a new curriculum to include boys in reproductive health and gender-based violence education, aiming to foster supportive behaviors and long-term cultural change. She hopes that educating this generation of both girls and boys will yield a sustainable cultural shift at the community level regarding the practices of childhood marriage and female genital cutting as they become parents and village elders.



RAJAN PALNIYAPPAN Valliammal (45)

India

A Committed Community Leader and Teacher

This project supports the following SDGs



"True change grows from the soil, when women farm, families thrive, and communities root themselves in dignity."

In 2003, Ms. Valliammal Rajan Palniyappan, also known as Valli Krishnaswamy, a lawyer by profession, left Bangalore to address rural hardships driving mass migration to cities, where many became further marginalized.

She founded the Anisha Foundation to train marginalized farmers in organic farming, improve soil health, form women's self-help groups, create income-generating activities for farming and landless women, establish organic kitchen gardens, build seed banks for sustainability, and develop a resource center with demonstration plots. These efforts have reduced cultivation costs, increased crop yields, stabilized incomes, and helped families escape cycles of debt.

Tangible results include:

- 220 farmers now practice organic farming and eat home-grown produce
- 1,500 farmers trained in sustainable methods
- 300+ landless families growing food in kitchen gardens
- 6–7 tons of organic vegetables produced annually
- Strong self-help groups marketing directly to local communities

Valli's work reflects a strong environmental ethic, emphasizing local food systems, native seeds, and chemical-free farming. She left behind a comfortable urban life to empower rural communities in Chamaraajanagar and built partnerships like the volunteer camp with SDIA's Human Force for Social Change.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



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2014



BRAVO Brigitte-Marie (54)

Niger

Women Unit to Protect their Land from Mining

This project supports the following SDGs



"Every child deserves love, safety, and dignity, our mission is to protect, uplift, and never abandon them."

Sister Brigitte-Marie Bravo, born in Carmaux, France, earned a public law license in 1982 and joined the Fraternité Notre-Dame that same year, a traditional Catholic religious order devoted to serving the destitute. After years of teaching and directing a school, she departed for missionary work and, in 1996, founded a Fraternité Notre-Dame community in Niamey, Niger. As head of the mission, she focused on the well-being of women and children by establishing schools, orphanages, and maternity hospitals. Deeply committed to human rights, she contributed to the development of child protection policies across Africa and supports young rural women who, after coming to the city for work, face abuse and unwanted pregnancies.

Her mission provides food, healthcare, psychological support, and maternal education, and encourages mothers to keep their children when possible. In cases of abandonment, she works for family reunification. She also chairs CONAFE (a coalition of NGOs working for children) and represents CONIDE (coalition of Niger NGOs for the Rights of Children) and was appointed to the youth judicial policy committee by the Ministry of Justice. For nearly two decades, she has combined compassion and advocacy to protect and empower the most vulnerable.



ZELIC Danka (56)

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Helping Women Rebuild Community after War

This project supports the following SDGs



"Rebuilding a country begins with women, strong, resilient, and finally recognized as the backbone of every home."

Danka Zelic, born in 1973 in Livno, Bosnia and Herzegovina, was just 17 when war forced her to flee. But unable to watch her country fall apart from afar, she returned amid the chaos to help families communicate across battle lines using amateur radio. After graduating from the Zagreb Police Academy, she joined the Livno police force and later transferred to Bosansko Grahovo, a rural community reeling from war, displacement, and poverty.

There, Danka's compassion turned toward women silently enduring the burden of war and domestic violence. She began offering them food, then connected them to psychological support networks like Li-Woman. In 2000, she founded Udruzenje Gradanki Grahovo, uniting 30 women, Serbs and Croats, in a rare gesture of post-war solidarity.

She left the police in 2002 to lead the NGO full time. Their first projects focused on agriculture, with livestock donated to women in their own names, challenging entrenched norms.

As the only female member of the local agricultural cooperative, Danka continues to ensure women's voices are heard where they were once excluded.



OBALA Eunice (41)

Kenya

"Peace, progress, and prosperity begin when women are heard, included, and empowered to lead their communities."

Resolving Conflicts, Empowering Women in Pastoral Communities

This project supports the following SDGs



Eunice Obala, with a Bachelor's in Leadership and Development Studies, a diploma in Community Development, and a certificate in Social Work, is a Program Manager for a development and resource-sharing initiative among pastoralists in Ileret, a remote region in Kenya's Marsabit District. Under VSF Germany, Eunice leads this project in a region plagued by resource conflict and gender inequality. Aware that community trust was essential, Eunice engaged men in culturally sensitive dialogue to understand conflict dynamics and traditional practices. This fostered their support for women's involvement in the project. Through participatory conflict resolution and inter-community dialogues, her work led to resource-sharing agreements signed and endorsed by both the Kenyan and Ethiopian governments. Women gained seats at negotiation tables and peace committees, and with improved security, they engaged more actively in drought preparedness, savings groups, and income-generating ventures, such as livestock marketing, a butchery, and grinding mills. They also trained in community health services, helping reduce malnutrition and mortality. Eunice's leadership has improved gender dynamics and the overall resilience of pastoralist communities.



HÖNLE Eva (34)

Austria

Weaving Lives Together after decades of Civil War

This project supports the following SDGs



"With creativity and care, we weave resilience, thread by thread, dignity and self-reliance grow stronger."

Eva Hönle founded Lady Lomin in 2007 to support single mothers in rural Lomin, Kajo-Keji County, South Sudan. The program began in the wake of the 2005 peace agreement that ended decades of civil war and set the stage for South Sudan's independence in 2011. Based in Austria, Eva, who works as a teacher and textile artist, visits Lomin twice yearly for 10-week stints, training women in weaving, knitting, tie-dyeing, tailoring, and printing, and helping find markets for their creations. Since then, Lady Lomin workshops have empowered over 20 women, who now increasingly manage the workshops and market their products themselves. They sell goods in Juba and Kampala, earning income to cover food, school fees, and medical needs, while gaining dignity and influence in a male-dominated culture. Eva learned the local Kuku language and prioritized organic cotton yarn to honor tradition and environmental values. She secured funding from Austria and opened a store in Juba to sustain the initiative. Facing challenges like caring for children during workshops, the group plans to open a kindergarten, further integrating Lady Lomin into community life.



ASIPKWE Jean-Christabel (41)

Uganda

Encouraging Rural Women Leaders - A Key to Development

This project supports the following SDGs



"Empowerment begins when communities, especially women, see themselves as agents of change, not just beneficiaries of development."

Jean-Christabel, has been committed to empowering communities, particularly women, since she began working for CEFORD (Community Empowerment for Rural Development) in 2003. Today, she serves as the organization's Executive Director. Operating across several districts in Uganda's West Nile region, CEFORD focuses on sustainable livelihoods, education, governance, community health, and organizational development. It also partners with OXFAM in supporting food security and livelihood emergency programs in South Sudanese refugee camps. Her's work is grounded in the Gender Action Learning System (GALS), a community-led empowerment methodology promoting gender justice. Under her leadership, CEFORD has implemented innovative programs such as child-to-child monitoring clusters, school linkages, children's parliaments, and role model talks. Her initiatives have fostered women's savings groups, adult literacy classes, and improved hygiene practices. As a result, thousands of rural women and youth have experienced greater equality in household labor, increased land ownership for women, reduced alcohol consumption, and stronger investments in children's education. Most recently, she mobilized the Obongi community to help purchase a local ambulance and continues to support South Sudanese refugees through risk reduction and humanitarian aid.



RUIZ HERNANDEZ Juana Alicia (41)

Colombia

Rising from Pain to Healing and Hope one Stitch at a time

This project supports the following SDGs



"We turned sorrow into stitches, each thread a memory, each quilt a step toward healing and justice."

Juana Alicia Ruiz Hernandez had a difficult childhood in San Pablo but found her path in the nearby Mampujan community through church work and marriage to Alexander. In March 2010, paramilitary forces invaded Mampujan, accusing residents of being guerrillas. Although a massacre was averted, the 245 families were forced to flee, losing everything. Resettled in Mampujan Nuevo, Juana emerged as a leader, working with the Asociación para la Vida Digna y Solidaria to help the community buy a farm for livestock and crops. She also became a pillar in "Sembrando Paz," a healing initiative using quilting to help women share their trauma. This led to the formation of Mujeres Tejiendo Sueños y Sabores de Paz, whose 11 tapestries were exhibited in Colombia, Switzerland, Germany, Canada, and the U.S. The women now sell their work, finding both healing and income. Juana also preserves traditions, leads commemorations of their displacement, and advocates for government reparations and land rights. Her strength, creativity, and persistence continue to inspire Mampujan Nuevo's journey from pain to resilience.



ALACÓN María Teresa Urbina (55)
Mexico

"We grew more than food, we cultivated dignity, knowledge, and strength in the heart of our mountains."

Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

This project supports the following SDGs

María Teresa Urbina Alacón coordinates a group of 30 resilient women in La Perla, Veracruz, Mexico. Since 2013, she's led their fight against extreme poverty and isolation through a sustainable agriculture project focused on food security. In this remote mountain village, 93% live in extreme poverty, with poor roads, depleted land, and widespread male migration leaving women to raise children under difficult conditions. Malnourishment and limited opportunities have locked the community in a cycle of poverty. Determined to change this, the women partnered with the Instituto Superior Chesterton and the Instituto Científico Técnico y Educativo to learn agricultural and administrative skills. They built 30 m² greenhouses to grow mushrooms and vegetables, using rainwater for irrigation and organic fertilizer from crop waste. While the primary goal is household nutrition, the women have generated a surplus, selling produce to reinvest in the project. Nearing self-sufficiency, the initiative is improving food access and creating income. A fruit plantation is in the works, and more women are eager to join. Their success is a testament to creative determination and community leadership.



OMIL
Peru

Building a Better Future Through Tradition and Innovation

This project supports the following SDGs

"We chose to name ourselves Indigenous, and in doing so, reclaimed our roots, voices, and future."

Founded in 1998 in Laramate, Ayacucho, Peru, OMIL (Organization of Indigenous Women of Laramate) unites 150 Quechua women and their families to advocate for women's rights, food security, and cultural preservation. A key challenge was the decision to embrace their Indigenous identity, met with resistance and discrimination from their own community and local authorities. Still, OMIL persisted, empowering women as agents of change. Through the project "Productos Orgánicos en su Mesa", OMIL members tackled malnutrition by growing healthy food using traditional Quechua methods. Surpluses are sold at local markets, providing economic independence and better opportunities for their families. OMIL has also launched a rural credit system, funded by a capital donation, offering low-interest loans and business support to its members through a Management Committee. Beyond economic empowerment, OMIL addresses domestic violence, early pregnancies, cultural erosion, and biodiversity loss. By weaving together economic, cultural, and social resilience, OMIL is redefining leadership and self-determination for Quechua women.

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2013





TSIKI Armelina (66)

Lesotho

Changing the Lives of Girls and Young Women Through Education

This project supports the following SDGs

“Educating a girl in rural Lesotho is planting a seed that grows into strength for generations.”

From a young age, Armelina knew she was called to join the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. Now principal of St. Rodrigue High School in rural Lesotho, a school she once attended, she uses her background in education to uplift girls in a deeply patriarchal society. Located three hours from Maseru, the school serves mostly poor families and orphaned girls affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. About half of the 500 students live on campus, many sponsored by the Church, government, or funds raised by Armelina herself. Determined to improve academic standards, Armelina introduced a team-teaching model that leverages the talents of international educators. She expanded the curriculum to include courses like computer training, preparing students for modern careers. In 2002, she introduced inter-school sports competitions and encouraged the formation of clubs for student growth and expression. Through her tireless work, Armelina has transformed St. Rodrigue into a place of hope, education, and empowerment for girls who might otherwise be left behind.



LASSEL Djaouida (48)

Algeria

Leading the way as the First Female Farmer of the Region

This project supports the following SDGs

“Empowering rural women means shifting the future, one voice, one farm, one classroom at a time.”

Djaouida, from Algeria’s Blida Province, rose from modest beginnings to earn a degree in agri-food economy in 1992. Returning to her rural community, she became the region’s first female poultry farmer, raising chickens and turkeys despite the challenges of a conservative, patriarchal society. To support other rural women excluded from agricultural markets, she founded the Lala Nfissa Association (LNA), which offers training on rights, business skills, micro-finance, and gender equality. LNA also engages policymakers to recognize rural women’s contributions and address the obstacles they face. Djaouida carefully balances cultural respect with the need for social change, working to break taboos that limit women’s roles. Her work extends to environmental education and water conservation, and she launched an award for eco-innovations that improve hygiene. Determined to fight illiteracy, she secured funding for 50 school buses for rural students. Now part of Algeria’s delegation to international development meetings, Djaouida collaborates with global institutions while pursuing a PhD focused on women’s associations and empowerment.



JEBBARI AZIZA (35)

Morocco

Committing to Sustainable Development

This project supports the following SDGs

“Our crafts carry culture, and now, they carry hope for women, nature, and future generations.”

Aziza Jebbari is from Figuig, an oasis town in eastern Morocco near the Algerian border. Deeply committed to sustainable development, she became project chief in 2002 for PRODECOM, promoting Mediterranean handcrafts through a UNESCO and EU initiative. Recognizing the economic and cultural value of traditional crafts, Aziza has trained rural women in sustainable techniques, using natural and recycled materials in weaving and pottery. She promotes a participatory approach, earning trust from both women and men, housewives, craftspeople, farmers, and local officials alike. Her initiative, Handicraft Products Preserving Nature, helps women create eco-friendly, income-generating activities that respect natural resources and support fair trade. In 2009, Aziza joined a UNIDO-led desertification and poverty reduction project in Morocco’s High Plateau. There, she championed sustainable land management, including the Vallerani System, an innovative soil-preparation method. By bridging traditional knowledge and environmental sustainability, she has become a driving force in community development.



AGU Eunice Uchechioma (29)

Nigeria

Using Football as an Educational Tool

This project supports the following SDGs

“Football gave me purpose, and now it gives power, pride, and a future to forgotten children.”

Eunice Agu, orphaned and raised by her grandmother, grew up in a poor Nigerian community where girls rarely attended school. Refusing to accept that fate, she paid her own way through school by farming and carrying loads to market, eventually earning a degree in Business Administration and Management. After a brief banking career, she founded the AG Eunice International Football Academy in 2007 to support underprivileged children in Delta and Anambra states. For Eunice, football is more than sport, it’s a tool for education, empowerment, and health. The Academy teaches life skills, promotes gender equality, and provides HIV/AIDS education, helping youth make informed decisions, build support systems, and reduce stigma. It also supports women’s empowerment through agricultural and small business initiatives backed by micro-financing. The Academy has changed lives, especially for girls, who now challenge traditional roles and pursue education and careers. Among its many successes: two girls turned pro, one is in nursing school, and six now attend university. Eunice has proven that with support, dreams can take root, even through football.



POURIER Lori Lea (50)

USA

"Our stories and art are power, lifting Native women out of silence and into cultural, economic strength."

Revitalizing Native American Communities Through the Arts

This project supports the following SDGs



Lori Pourier, an Oglala Lakota woman from the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, has dedicated her life to empowering Native American women and preserving cultural traditions. Growing up with firsthand experience of the invisibility and challenges faced by Indigenous women, she has become a visionary leader, blending arts, culture, business, philanthropy, and activism. Since becoming director of the First Peoples Fund (FPF) in 1998, Lori has transformed it into the first national Native arts foundation to offer working capital and entrepreneurship support for Native artists. Under her leadership, FPF developed three core programs: Artists in Business, Cultural Capital, and the Community Spirit Awards. These initiatives provide grants, training, and professional development to artists at all stages. Over half of FPF's grantees are women, storytellers, beadworkers, basket makers, and others, who pass their traditions on, sustaining cultural identity and community strength. Lori's work has uplifted Native women artists, turning their creativity into livelihoods and raising their visibility across Indian Country and beyond.



ABATORD Monette (48)

Martinique

Advocating for Sustainable Development and Small Farmers

This project supports the following SDGs



"From soil to market, we grow resilience, linking small farmers, tradition, and sustainable innovation."

Monette, daughter of farm laborers, knows the struggles of rural life. Despite early challenges, she earned a degree in dressmaking and, in 2005, took over her family's small farm. Specializing in citrus and food crops like dasheen, yams, and bananas, Monette overcame financial and administrative hurdles to build her agricultural business. She joined the farmers' association "Le Marché Agricole du Nord Atlantique" (MANA), serving as secretary general and later vice president. Committed to sustainable farming, she promotes local products and crafts, supports short distribution chains, and strengthens solidarity among producers. Under her leadership, MANA launched initiatives like "Pooling Means for More Efficient Marketing," connecting farmers directly with consumers and revitalizing open markets. Her technical approach includes soil analysis to prevent pollution and improve yield, and she encourages strong farm management practices. Monette is now developing a tourism-based sales strategy to diversify products and attract more customers. Recognized for her impact, she became the third vice president of the Martinique Chamber of Agriculture, an impressive achievement in a traditionally male-dominated field.



Reverend Mai KI (38)

Myanmar

Seeing Equal Worth in Every Individual

This project supports the following SDGs



"Empower a woman, and you uplift generations, especially where silence and poverty once held them back."

Mai Ki, born to illiterate parents in a poor village in Chin State, Myanmar, pursued education against all odds, eventually earning a Master's in Theology in India. As the first female minister of the Mara Evangelical Church, she returned home to transform rural life, especially for women, children, and people with disabilities. In 2006, she founded the Rural Women Empowerment Program, promoting family development through self-help groups that support income generation, infrastructure, and education. Her work now spans 15 villages, with 36 borrowing groups supporting women and families. Undeterred by male resistance, Rev. Ki rallied over 70 churches to support women's leadership. In 2009, she launched the Shalom Unit to empower "differently able friends," fostering inclusion and dignity through self-help initiatives. A committed environmental advocate, she also introduced women to sustainable farming, food security, animal husbandry, healthcare, and disaster relief skills. Her training in traditional weaving enables income generation during hard times. Reverend Ki's work is a powerful model of inclusion, sustainability, and grassroots leadership.



MALE CISSÉ Seynabou (60)

Senegal

Creating Lasting Peace

This project supports the following SDGs



"When women join hands, they rebuild peace, restore lands, and reclaim hope for their communities."

In 1999, Seynabou Male Cissé helped launch USOFORAL ("Let's join hands"), a women's peace organization in Casamance, southern Senegal, a region deeply affected by violent separatist conflict since 1982. Seynabou believes rural women's leadership is key to achieving economic justice, gender equity, and lasting peace locally and beyond. USOFORAL trains women in research, advocacy, and grassroots organizing, empowering them to rebuild communities after years of displacement and violence. Many women had fled their villages during the conflict and lacked the experience or time to organize effectively upon returning. Under Seynabou's capable coordination, rural women have taken center stage in peace-building. In Enampor, their mobilization protected the village from violence and landmines, creating a safe environment for women's creativity. In displaced villages like Toubacouta, women reclaimed their lands and resumed farming, encouraging others to return. USOFORAL-supported communities are now models of stability and social cohesion, showing how women's leadership fosters peace and recovery in post-conflict settings.



UJIĆ Sladjana (43)

Bosnia and Herzegovina

"I believe, I can, I want, I do, changing lives through women's empowerment and community action."

Creating a New Paradigm for Rural Women

This project supports the following SDGs



Sladjana grew up in Gucevo village, Bosnia and Herzegovina, raised by grandparents in a household dominated by an aggressive grandfather. Feeling like an outsider, she initially conformed to patriarchal norms, abandoning her promising education for marriage and farm work. Her daughter's embarrassment at school sparked Sladjana's resolve to change her life and community. In 2005, she founded the SNOP Women's Association, which now serves multiple municipalities and challenges gender roles limiting rural women's education, careers, property rights, and decision-making.

Through SNOP, Sladjana has led 15 projects to uplift rural women and communities, including repairing a school, creating a community meeting space, organizing dialogues with policymakers, building a water supply system, and purchasing greenhouses to boost women's incomes. She also started a weaving workshop to revive traditional crafts and promote rural tourism.

Once an outsider, Sladjana earned respect and leadership roles, including Minister for Rural Development in the Bosnia and Herzegovina Women's Alternative Government (2012).

Her motto: "I believe, I can, I want, I do."



MAJUMDAR Suchismita (50)

India

Rehabilitating the Disabled in Rural Communities

This project supports the following SDGs



"Disability is not inability, empowerment and opportunity unlock potential for all in every community."

Suchismita Majumdar, who lives with a locomotor disability caused by polio, has dedicated her life to empowering disabled people in rural Assam, India. Her own experience drives her passion for self-advocacy and understanding the needs of disabled individuals.

In 1997, she founded Swabalambi, a community-based organization that promotes the rights of the physically and mentally challenged. The group offers medical assessments, corrective surgeries, health camps, family counseling, and special education services. Swabalambi also organizes self-help groups for parents and runs programs for early intervention and prevention of disabilities.

Suchismita established training centers where disabled youth learn prevocational and vocational skills, including crafts, weaving, tailoring, and embroidery. These programs help disabled individuals earn incomes and become family breadwinners. She has also arranged marriages for disabled people, fostering companionship and social inclusion.

Through her innovative and compassionate work, Suchismita shows that people with disabilities can lead meaningful, productive lives and contribute fully to their communities.

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2012





MUTHINA Bendettah (50)

Kenya

"Education and health empower women and girls to build stronger, healthier communities and brighter futures."

Always Searching for new Opportunities to Empower Women

This project supports the following SDGs



Since the 1990s, Bendettah Muthina has been empowering women and girls in rural Kenya through education on hygiene, health, and women's rights. In 2008, she founded new Project Africa chapters in Lunga Lunga, Godo, and Perani villages, expanding access to health and education services. Partnering with a University of Wisconsin professor, she helped establish a Mobile Clinic in 2010, providing healthcare to remote communities. She also launched the Nikumbuke Permanent Health Post to serve more people with lessons on nutrition, breastfeeding, hygiene, HIV awareness, family planning, and malaria prevention.

Bendettah developed long-term health campaigns, including malaria rapid testing, insecticide-treated net distribution, and malaria street theater. She also supports water projects, micro-finance, and an English literacy campaign connecting rural girls with U.S. students.

Understanding the importance of education, Bendettah started literacy and business classes for women and tailoring classes for at-risk girls who dropped out of school. Her mentorship program "The Stars" encourages girls aged 6 to 17, helping increase primary school completion from 50% to 85%.



SAHU Bhan (39)

India

From barely Educated Young Girl to Inspiring Activist

This project supports the following SDGs



"Access to information is power, everyone deserves to know their rights and hold leaders accountable."

Bhan has faced many hardships but remains determined to improve the lives of rural and poor communities in India. As a paid volunteer with an NGO, she traveled miles on her bicycle, often carrying her youngest child, to inform illiterate villagers about government programs for poverty elimination and rural employment.

In 2009, Bhan founded Jurmil Morcha, a women's group made up of tribal and Dalit women, to address neglected issues such as unpaid compensation, forced migration, human trafficking, crop failures, healthcare gaps, and environmental damage caused by mining. She organizes rallies, hunger strikes, and petitions to raise awareness and demand justice.

Bhan is also a civilian journalist who reports on abuses often overlooked by mainstream media. One notable exposé led to over 1,000 workers receiving unpaid wages. To reach illiterate villagers, she uses mobile phones to share audio news reports, allowing remote communities to stay informed about local and regional government affairs. Bhan's innovative activism and fearless reporting have made her a vital voice for marginalized people in Chhattisgarh.



MUSUGANI NYANGOMA Jacqueline (48)

Congo

Empowering Women and Lobbying for the Right to Dignity

This project supports the following SDGs



"Justice for women is essential for peace and development in our communities and our nation."

Jacqueline Musugani Nyangoma, a mother of seven from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is a committed grassroots women's rights leader in South Kivu. As secretary general of IFESIDI (Initiatives for Women in Difficult Situations for Integrated Development), she advocates for rural women who suffer from rape and violence, representing them at national, regional, and international forums. Her advocacy has contributed to the prosecution of perpetrators in RDC courts. Since 2002, Jacqueline has empowered women by educating them about their rights and helping them regain dignity through social and economic empowerment. She encourages women to launch small businesses selling food and goods, and advises on sustainable farming practices such as soybean cultivation, which benefits both health and the environment.

Her leadership earned her a seat on the administrative council of the Network of Women's Organizations in Francophone Africa (ROFAF) in 2010. Despite threats forcing her and her family to live undercover, Jacqueline continues to support her female resource center in Kamituga, tirelessly working to restore dignity and justice to women in her community.



LUCIO Matilde (64)

Argentina

A Compassionate Leader, dedicated to the Indigenous Cause

This project supports the following SDGs



"Our land and language are the roots of our identity and the foundation of our future."

Matilde Lucio is an indigenous Guarani leader from the South American Chaco Region, who has dedicated her life to protecting indigenous rights, culture, and land. Though she left school early to work in the fields, Matilde's leadership has been pivotal in the fight for Guarani recognition and sustainable development.

In 1995, she founded the Guarani Assembly (APG), leading a long legal struggle that resulted in the community regaining 4,100 hectares of ancestral land, critical for preserving their culture, food security, and environmental sustainability. Under her guidance, bilingual education was introduced, enabling Guarani youth to learn their native language and embrace their identity.

Matilde also promotes Guarani culture through children's picture books and a community radio program focused on indigenous rights. Recognizing the heavy burdens on indigenous women, many left alone due to male migration, she advocates for their empowerment by encouraging them to form development organizations and assert their rights to housing, health care, and education. Thanks to her efforts, indigenous women in the region are more organized and vocal, challenging exclusion and discrimination.



NAGJI GADHVI Mehtaben (52)
India

From Poverty to Prosperity to Leadership
This project supports the following SDGs

“Empowerment begins when women find their voice and unite to improve their lives and communities.”

Mehtaben Gadhvi was married at 14 to a violent husband and gave birth to seven children. Isolated and voiceless in her early life, she transformed after joining SEWA (Self-employed Women's Association). Through training and involvement, Mehtaben grew confident to speak publicly about village issues, advocate for women, and lead community initiatives. She helped 700–800 women take out insurance, organized 2,500 women leaders in Gujarat, and supported women in accessing and repaying loans. Learning about climate change mitigation through SEWA, Mehtaben led water conservation efforts, including constructing 85 rainwater-harvesting tanks, promoting solar lanterns, and encouraging eco-friendly cook stoves. She personally distributed 125 solar lanterns at subsidized rates, improving energy access. In addition to environmental work, Mehtaben runs a successful milk business and decoration enterprise. Her leadership empowered her community, raising incomes and improving lives. Her dedication earned her a seat on the Kutch Craft District Association executive committee. Mehtaben's journey inspires rural women to break barriers and build better futures.



CUNNINGHAM Rose (60)
Nicaragua

Intergenerational Dialogue for Eliminating Violence against Women
This project supports the following SDGs

“Empowering Indigenous women means reviving traditions, growing food, and sowing justice for future generations.”

Rose, an Indigenous leader from Nicaragua's Miskito community, founded Wangki Tangni to address the urgent and long-term needs of her displaced people. Combining humanitarian aid with sustainable development, Rose created culturally rooted programs to empower Indigenous communities through self-governance, biodiversity protection, and the preservation of Miskito traditions. Wangki Tangni runs diverse initiatives including a women's center, sewing collective, and the Harvesting Hope project, which began in 2003 with 20 women and has since grown to nearly 1,000. Focused on organic farming and food security, this program improves women's health, strengthens income generation, and fosters human rights awareness. All initiatives integrate Indigenous values like respect for nature and bartering systems. Rose uniquely links gender justice with cultural revival. Through farmer markets and agricultural training, Wangki Tangni raises awareness of violence against women. Intergenerational dialogues reinforce traditional stories that honor women's strength and emphasize that gender-based violence contradicts Miskito values. Rose's work is both a cultural and social movement, reviving identity while promoting equity and empowerment.



SARUKHANYAN Nune (49)
Armenia

Working with Farmers as Equal Partners
This project supports the following SDGs

“Empowering women farmers strengthens families, communities, and the future of sustainable agriculture in Armenia.”

Nune, raised in a traditional Armenian village, recognized early gender inequalities that she later found to be widespread across Armenia. Committed to raising women's status, she became president of Green Lane Agricultural Assistance NGO in 2004, which serves over 500 members—80% women. An expert and advisor in organic agriculture, Nune has authored 25 academic articles, 37 popular science articles, and 4 books, and developed new varieties of beans and peas. Working in 10 regions, Nune has helped establish and strengthen more than 30 women's groups, offering technical support and capacity building. She has led numerous agricultural development projects, including a recent initiative to promote women-owned businesses by networking existing women's groups for joint branding, marketing, and outreach. Currently advising over 1,200 farmers, Nune's work has improved the lives of more than 900 women and youth, raising the socio-economic status of their families and rural communities. Her efforts demonstrate how agricultural expertise combined with women's empowerment fosters sustainable rural development.



VANNARY San (33)
Cambodia

Preserving Tradition, while increasing Village Sustainability
This project supports the following SDGs

“When we plant seeds of knowledge and hope, whole communities learn to grow and thrive together.”

San, a Cambodian mother of three, has dedicated her life to grassroots activism and sustainable development. Despite her young age, she brings over a decade of experience in gender advocacy, public health, and food security to her work across rural Cambodia. Formerly with Helen Keller International and ActionAid, Vannary has implemented impactful projects including 15 herbal gardens in 7 provinces and 10 women's self-help health centers. Passionate about organic farming and permaculture, Vannary champions community-based, eco-friendly solutions to food insecurity, addressing Cambodia's water crisis by designing systems that harness rainy season surpluses and sustain crops through drought. Her work promotes local resilience against the effects of globalization and privatization on agriculture. Beyond farming, Vannary is reviving Cambodia's silk industry through a mulberry tree initiative and leads Lotus Silk, a tailoring and handicraft business that employs nine vulnerable women. Her community-led “train the trainer” model ensures sustainability and empowers others to pass on skills and knowledge. Vannary's holistic approach blends advocacy, entrepreneurship, and ecological design to foster lasting, people-powered change.



ADERDOUR Zahra (46)

Morocco

"Even when the doors are closed to women, I knock until they open for health, education, and dignity."

Outspoken in Directing Attention to Women's Rights

This project supports the following SDGs



Zahra is a pioneering women's rights advocate and trained nurse specializing in midwifery in rural Morocco. Working in Tighmi, a conservative town in the Tiznit province where women were once forbidden to leave home, Zahra slowly built trust in the community. She now provides critical healthcare services to women and children, teaching hygiene, disease prevention, and HIV/AIDS awareness, and has led training for birth attendants. Since 2009, she has also served in the Tighmi Rural Community Program, where she has led development projects including the construction of a well in a village where 90% of the population is female, installation of school toilets for 100 children, and bringing electricity to underserved areas. In 2009, Zahra founded Association for Peace, the first women's group in Tighmi, offering Arabic literacy to over 60 women. Despite threats from over 100 men opposed to her work, Zahra has remained steadfast. Through her courage, she has transformed the lives of countless women, children, and families in her region.



GURYNA Tatsiana (64)

Belarus

Developing Rural Regions Affected by Chernobyl

This project supports the following SDGs



"Even in contaminated soil, we can grow new life, if we sow it with knowledge, courage, and community."

Tatsiana has devoted her life to revitalizing communities affected by the Chernobyl disaster in Belarus. Beginning as a chemistry and biology teacher, she later worked in local education administration before the 1986 nuclear accident transformed her path. Defying expert warnings, Tatsiana stayed in the contaminated region to support women and families. As a biologist, she developed methods to grow radiation-free vegetables in polluted soil and actively shared this life-saving knowledge. She co-founded the Local Fund for Rural Development and led numerous projects improving food security, health, and livelihoods, especially for rural women. In 2007, she co-created Revitalization-Agro, followed by Selchanka in 2010, a women's NGO focused on leadership, business participation, and psychosocial support. With backing from international partners like UNDP and the U.S. Embassy, Tatsiana has empowered thousands through workshops, counseling, and sustainable development programs. Today, as director of "Renaissance-Agro," she continues to champion rural advancement, organizing over 50 trainings and aiding 500+ villagers annually through education, employment, and agricultural innovation.

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2017





MUNGA Betty (55)

Kenya

Solidarity, the Key to Success

This project supports the following SDGs

Since 2006, Betty Munga has worked alone as a Program Officer for Kenya's Self Help Groups Approach Program, empowering women economically, socially, and politically. In Mtwapa village, she organized 108 groups of 20 members each, where women pooled their savings to create common funds. This allowed members to borrow loans to start or grow businesses. The groups also foster social empowerment by supporting one another to build homes, pay school fees, cover health costs, and contribute to community projects. They openly discuss critical issues like domestic violence and land cultivation. Beyond helping members, these groups improve the wider community by building school toilets and cleaning water dams. Betty continues forming new groups, strengthening weak ones, and collaborating with local authorities. Her dedication shows that meaningful change is possible even for women facing the toughest challenges.



TALL WADE Ndeye Seynabou (61)

Senegal

Leader for the Advancement of Rural Communities

This project supports the following SDGs

Born in a village, Ndeye Seynabou was raised by her grandmother with love, inspiring her to support poor women and children in rural areas. Married with five children, she focuses on developing women's capacities and increasing their visibility in marginalized communities. Before founding the Association Sénégalaise Femmes Enfants Environnement (AFEE) in 1995, active in the semi-desert Fatick region, she worked six years at the Senegalese Ministry of Information managing rural education radio programs. Through AFEE, Mrs. Tall Wade promotes sustainable development to prevent rural exodus, local leadership, and community capacity building. AFEE organizes missions to assess needs and monitor projects including child care spaces, millet grinders, cereal banks, solidarity funds, village shops, and local cereal transformation employing 28 people (mostly women). They also promote cattle raising, women's literacy, girls' education, school supplies, and health promotion. Health initiatives include building a health shelter, HIV/AIDS prevention, and awareness on malnutrition and early pregnancies. AFEE's creative work greatly benefits poor women and children, and Mrs. Tall Wade is honored as a 2011 WWSF prizewinner.



SASU Lydia (65)

Ghana

An Advocate for Women's Skills and Rights

This project supports the following SDGs

"Providing rural women with skills and confidence transforms communities and uplifts entire generations."

Lydia has devoted her life to improving rural women farmers' lives in Ghana. Born into a farming family, she witnessed her mother's struggles and co-founded the Development Action Association (DAA) in 1977. Operating in 50 communities, with 98% women beneficiaries, the DAA has developed projects including a nursery, a primary school, and financial and empowerment training for rural women. Lydia focused on improving literacy and bookkeeping, especially in the fishing industry, helping women track debts and finances. Within six months, about 1,000 women learned to keep accurate records, enabling them to manage grains, vegetables, and livestock better. She also led training sessions to teach women how to communicate effectively with policymakers, successfully motivating women to lobby for fishing law enforcement. Lydia's work transformed perceptions of women as valuable contributors to agriculture. For example, one woman expanded her livestock business from 5 to 400 pigs within three years due to Lydia's training. Lydia's leadership profoundly impacts rural communities, showing how one person's dedication can create lasting change.



LANGAZANA Nokwanda (32)

South Africa

Boosting the "Wild Coast Communities"

This project supports the following SDGs

"When we defend our land and educate our youth, we plant the seeds of true freedom and resilience."

Since finishing high school, Nokwanda has been an activist for the Wild Coast communities of South Africa. After being forcibly removed from her home due to a commercial development project, Nokwanda committed herself to defending her community. In 2003, she joined CoConnected, a land and tourism initiative of the South African alliance of Slum Dwellers. Quickly rising to Program Manager, she expanded the network to 13 communities. In 2006, she relaunched it as the Alliance of Rural Communities (ARC), now reaching around 5,000 people across Bizana, Port St. John's, and Coffee Bay. ARC works to mobilize rural communities around their own resources, raising environmental awareness and implementing income-generating projects. Its newest focus is green education, reaching 11 schools through workshops on recycling and small-scale nurseries, helping youth reconnect with the land and see its value. Through training and holistic support, ARC strengthens the voice of marginalized groups and promotes community-led sustainability. Nokwanda's work is a model of resilience, empowerment, and grassroots transformation in South Africa's rural landscapes.



SUBEDI Prativa (58)

Nepal

"We created WACN so rural women could rise with dignity, strength, and their own economic power."

From the Forest to the University, To the Rural Communities

This project supports the following SDGs



Growing up in a rural village surrounded by forests, Prativa has dedicated her life to improving the living standards of those in need.

In 1990, she founded the Women Awareness Centre Nepal (WACN) to empower rural women and restore their dignity. Encouraged by her progressive father, Prativa pursued education and earned a Master's in Economics. Her passion to help the poor led her to challenge traditional gender roles in Nepal. She authored four books highlighting the harsh realities women face, aiming to raise awareness about gender and development.

Through WACN, she created economic opportunities for thousands of women via training in sustainable agriculture. Her efforts led to the formation of 41 women's cooperatives, with 200–1,200 members each, and helped 25,000 women join informal savings and credit groups.

Prativa's work has enabled rural women to gain economic independence and self-confidence, empowering them to become equal partners in development. She continues to drive innovative solutions for socio-economic progress, inspiring hope for young girls and future generations.



KOSIMOVA Rano (52)

Tajikistan

Transforming Rural Girls into Economic Actors

This project supports the following SDGs



"Through Parastor, we equip women with skills and confidence to build their futures and uplift communities."

Rano became the chief executive of the NGO Parastor in 1996, driven by a passion to empower rural women through education, health, and economic opportunities. With a university degree herself, she wanted other women to access the same tools to become vital members of their communities. With support from Save the Children (UK), Rano opened a sewing shop for 60 girls, giving them valuable skills. Parastor evolved into a permanent training center offering courses in embroidery, animal husbandry, and business development to help women build long-term livelihoods. Beyond the center, Rano launched community-based projects to address social issues, improve sanitation in schools, and encourage local participation in decision-making.

Her determination has had a lasting impact on rural women's lives.

Thanks to her efforts, 45 women were trained in guesthouse entrepreneurship, three sewing workshops were established, and 15 young women gained employment. These initiatives have brought hope and financial independence to women and their families, demonstrating Rano's unwavering commitment to rural development.



SCHMIDT Romy

Switzerland

A Creativity CountryWoman and Writer about Farm Life

This project supports the following SDGs



"Farming with heart and creativity, I share our mountain's bounty and stories to inspire and connect."

Celebrating the WWSF 20th anniversary, we honor Romy Schmidt, a creative Swiss farmwoman from Bergün near the Albula Pass. Thirty years ago, Romy married Swiss farmer Marco and embraced mountain life with humor and enthusiasm. Together, they manage their medium-sized farm while Romy fulfills many roles, mother, wife, grandmother, and caretaker.

Seeing the village's tourism potential, Romy began producing meat specialties and sweet products sold in her farm's "self-service" shop. She offers hot drinks and sandwiches daily and sells many goods online through her website www.bioberguen.ch. Her range includes liquors, preserves, dried meats, yoghurts, and cheeses.

Besides farming, Romy is passionate about writing. She regularly contributes charming and insightful articles to Die Landfrau, reflecting on farm and family life. Her joyous style inspires readers and is also shared on her website.

Romy's dedication, creativity, and positive spirit in rural life earned her the WWSF award in 2011, celebrated on the International Day of Rural Women.



BUTH Saman (32)

Cambodia

Empowering Mothers to Save Lives

This project supports the following SDGs



"Empowering women through skills, health, and education helps them build strong, independent futures for their families."

Saman Buth, who endured great personal losses during the Pol Pot years, has dedicated her life to improving others' futures. In 1999, she founded the Children and Life Association (CLA) in Cambodia to uplift poor communities. Starting in just seven villages, her programs have expanded to over 169 villages in Prey Veng Province.

Saman empowers rural women through mother-to-mother groups, child protection networks, and financial training, helping them manage home finances and participate in micro-finance self-help groups. She also trains women in sustainable farming techniques, promoting food security and independence. To support girls who migrated to cities, Saman established a vocational training center offering handicraft skills and mentoring. This center also aids women with environmental conservation, animal breeding, cash crop cultivation, budgeting, and small business management. Healthcare is vital to her work, with programs focusing on maternal health, hygiene, nutrition, and child health education.

By providing education, healthcare, and small loans, Saman has enabled women to increase their earnings and gain social and economic empowerment.



ABDYLDAEVA Shaiyrbubu (61) Kyrgyzstan

"Through Umai Ene, women gain strength, income, and voice to transform their lives and communities."

"Women can do Everything"

This project supports the following SDGs



Shaiyrbubu is the founder of Umai Ene, a Kyrgyzstani NGO supporting rural women. Raised in the village of Kyzyl-Oktyabr, she pursued higher education and became a teacher, driven by her philosophy: "Be a mother, not a step-mother, for everybody." She began projects benefiting her community, encouraging women's active participation. Since its creation nearly 14 years ago, Umai Ene has helped women draft business plans and connect with NGOs. From 2006 to 2009, it renovated the Agricultural Machinery Service Centre, supporting 315 families in overcoming extreme poverty. A survey revealed milk sales as a key issue. Shaiyrbubu led the development of a permanent milk collection station serving 1,500 families, doubling their income and creating eight new jobs for women in milk processing. Her initiative challenged traditional gender roles, empowering rural women economically and socially, increasing their participation in decision-making. As she says, "Women can do everything!" Her work continues to transform the lives of rural women across Kyrgyzstan.



AMRUTAL PARMAR Urmilaben (42) India

Using Knowledge as a Weapon to Break Down Barriers

This project supports the following SDGs



"Through training and unity, we women transform our farms, empower our families, and strengthen our communities."

Urmilaben began farming after marriage under tough economic conditions. Meeting SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association), she attended training in midwifery, agriculture, savings, and community development, gaining knowledge and confidence. She established savings and credit groups, earning respect and becoming an executive committee member of SEWA. This role allows her to participate in decision-making affecting agriculture workers locally and beyond. She also ensured her children received proper education. Urmilaben's agricultural training helped her family and community by teaching techniques like soil testing and certified seed use. Inspired by her, around 500 farmers from nearby villages have undergone similar training. She collaborated with government offices to link farmers with schemes like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, leading by example when women hesitated. Since then, 150-200 women joined the program. Urmilaben helped create nearly 200 self-help groups, empowering farmers with collective bargaining and knowledge sharing. Her courage and dedication have improved livelihoods, spreading sustainable employment and income growth in her community.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



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2010





Laureate **GOND Narmada Baldeva, India**, from the Adivasi community receiving the WWSF Prize





Prize Award Ceremony in New Delhi, India



MERCY Anna (56)

India

Turning a Village into an Aquarium

This project supports the following SDGs

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Anna, a university teacher in Kerala, India, pioneered a unique project to improve village life in Kumbala by developing ornamental fish breeding technology. She successfully bred 15 species in the Ghats region, the first in India to do so, and trained rural women in the process. With government funding, Anna offered five-day training sessions covering aquarium building, fish breeding, and fish food production. By 2009, 300 people had completed the training. Many women started breeding fish in home ponds or terraces, while others built glass tanks. Most participants now earn around 4,000–5,000 Rupees monthly from selling fish, aquariums, plants, and fish food. Shops selling related products have boosted local incomes. Beyond finances, women report health improvements, such as reduced hypertension and asthma, and domestic violence has declined. Notably, more families now send their daughters to school. Ongoing follow-ups ensure project success. Globally, ornamental fish breeding is a multi-billion-dollar industry, and India's potential in this sector is promising.



AWINO Dorothy (47)

Kenya

Land Rights for Women: A Development "Must"

This project supports the following SDGs

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In Kenya, women provide 80% of agricultural labor and earn 60% of agricultural income, yet only 5% own land. Traditional beliefs deem women untrustworthy, blocking their inheritance rights and hindering development. After being deceived and disinherited, Dorothy left her home with her toddler. In 2003, she co-founded "The Road Marks International," a community organization in Nyanza province addressing disinheritance of women and vulnerable children among the Luo tribe. Dorothy's efforts led to major changes: the Elder's Council of the Luo committed to protecting women's rights and helped some reclaim ancestral lands. Her cultural knowledge and commitment earned her a place on the Elder's Council, where she coordinates programs, a rare role for women in her culture. Dorothy believes poverty and harmful traditions block women's and children's rights. Thanks to her project, violations of these rights have significantly decreased, fostering positive change in her community.



FOMUMBOD Anne Stella

Cameroon

A Unique Charter for Widows

This project supports the following SDGs

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In North West Cameroon, rural women produce 60% of the region's agricultural output but lack proper resources and benefits. Anne Stella established innovative programs to support them. She founded the "Fund for the Mobilisation of Women" to provide microcredit, enabling women to acquire land and farming goods. Through her organization, InterFaith Vision Foundation Cameroon (IVF Cam), she united 50 widow groups, gaining recognition from bodies like UNDP and improving their market access. By providing tools and seeds, productivity rose from 30 to 120 kilograms per month. Anne Stella's HIV/AIDS awareness programs educated women and girls about risks and parental responsibilities. She facilitated microcredit access for 40 more women's groups, including HIV/AIDS victims. She also launched literacy programs, training on property rights, and helped organize 43 communities' widows to challenge unfair customs. Anne Stella brought traditional leaders together to reconcile customs with women's rights. Her most notable achievement is the "Metta Charter on Widowhood," a groundbreaking law improving widows' status in Cameroon.



KETEHOUNDJÉ Juliette (37)

Benin

An innovative Approach to Microfinancing

This project supports the following SDGs

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Juliette from Allohoukodota, Benin, overcame poverty and illiteracy to become a respected community leader. Dedicated and dynamic, she focuses on eradicating famine and poverty by empowering rural women through the innovative microfinancing system, the "African Women Food Farmer Initiative" (AWFFI). Starting with just 20 women, Juliette expanded the group to 3,000 members organized into 150 autonomous women's groups. These groups meet twice a month, enforcing punctuality and harmony, with a strong culture of saving—each member deposits 200 CFA francs (~\$0.40) per meeting. Remarkably, the microcredit scheme boasts a 100% repayment rate. Their savings enable full repayment of loans borrowed from AWFFI. The success of Juliette's approach has inspired plans to implement it in other regions. She also aims to start scholarships for girls' education and is committed to learning literacy herself to run in local elections, supported by a community that values her honesty and hard work.



KIKUCHI Konomi (44)

Chile

"With every step and every tree, we plant hope, for the Earth, and for each other."

Walking, Walking... To Protect the Environment

This project supports the following SDGs

Since childhood, Konomi has been driven by a love of exploration, opening paths for other women along the way. After the suicide of her first husband, she chose to transform her grief into something meaningful for others. With her second husband, Paul Coleman, she walked 1,000 km across China, Korea, and Japan, planting trees and spreading messages on the environment. Her march drew wide attention, especially in China, where the media amplified her voice and encouraged international support. She slept outdoors in freezing temperatures, endured hunger and physical pain, yet pressed forward with a smile and unwavering courage. Her online community, "Marching across the planet, planting trees," grew to thousands of members. She later walked another 3,300 km over 11 months from Hong Kong to Tianjin, joined by supporters from Britain, New Zealand, Japan, and China. In Shandong, she was deeply moved by the severe water pollution affecting families. She organized environmental protests and offered sustainable solutions. Today, she lives in remote Patagonia, Chile, building sustainable homes and sharing alternative economic models in earthquake-affected villages.



GOND Narmada Baldeva (60)

India

A Gandhian Adivasi Warrior changes a whole Religion

This project supports the following SDGs



"I walk beside those who rise in peace, proving that non-violence can reclaim dignity, land, and rights."

Narmada, a remarkable rural tribal woman from the Adivasi community, rose from being an illiterate laborer earning barely 20–35 Rupees (55-90 US cents) a day to becoming a regional leader restoring pride to the oppressed. Forced out of her forest home, she joined a training by 'Ekta Parishad', a Gandhian movement promoting non-violent resistance. There, she learned that poverty was not destiny, but the result of unjust systems that could be changed. A few years later, she led 200 destitute families to occupy unused land. Despite police repression, they held firm, non-violently. This was her first step as a community leader. She helped create the village of Chilghat, where she was elected to the panchayat and brought significant reforms. In 2007, she helped organize a 30-day march of 25,000 landless farmers to New Delhi, leading to the creation of the National Commission for Agrarian Reform and changes in forest laws. In 2012, she campaigned for Jan Satyagraha, a non-violent march of 100,000 people demanding the implementation of land rights. Narmada defies every limit imposed by birth, culture, or gender. For over a decade, Aziza has empowered rural communities in Figui, combining economic opportunity with ecological preservation.



RATANASITHY Nuansy (44)

Laos

From Dependency to a Partnership of Equals

This project supports the following SDGs



"By weaving tradition with innovation, we empower women to create pride, independence, and sustainable futures."

Nuansy, director of "The Ngeum Cotton Group," has transformed the lives of women in her village. When her husband had to leave for work, leaving her to care for their small children alone, she chose not to give in to hardship. Though trained in medicine, she bravely entered a new field—cotton cloth production. She discovered a niche market for a rare Asian brown cotton, which could help women fight poverty. With creativity and modest capital, she launched a small factory employing 50 women. Eleven young women were sent for four months of training in Vientiane to master advanced weaving techniques and design. Their skills grew, and so did their voices, women's opinions began to count. This village industry not only boosted livelihoods, it made North Laos less dependent on Thailand's industrial output, helping preserve the cultural identity of Lao weaving. Cotton sales restored dignity to both women and men, who now work as equal, independent partners. Nuansy is a model of courage and creativity for youth across her region.



BAYSAL Nurcan (35)

Turkey

Happiness is Part of Development

This project supports the following SDGs



"True development listens deeply, empowering dreams, rebuilding lives, and creating hope beyond just numbers and income."

Nurcan, once a teaching assistant at a top university, chose to leave her promising academic career to fight for the underprivileged in her hometown, Diyarbakir. She successfully convinced the Ozyegin family, leading philanthropists, to support a project that grew into the nationwide 'Ozyegin Foundation Rural Livelihoods program'—one of Turkey's most ambitious poverty and inequity initiatives. This program uniquely links economic development with empowerment and social mobilization. Its vision goes beyond income and infrastructure, aiming to "rebuild lives and living spaces" by listening deeply to people's true needs, desires, and dreams. For Nurcan, painting workshops for children are as vital as animal husbandry, because rebuilding relations, empowering women, and preserving culture are essential. The program values qualitative progress equally or more than quantitative results. Within one year, measurable gains were made through an integrated design focused on social capacity, livelihoods, basic rights, and a human rights framework. Most importantly, it embodies genuine participation (often mentioned but rarely practiced in the field of development).



BUKKAWAR Pratibha Rajesh (39)

India

"Empowering women with skills and ownership transforms poverty into pride and creates lasting community change."

Revolution in Daryapur

This project supports the following SDGs



Born in poverty in Daryapur near Amravati, Pratibha understood the vital importance of food for survival. In 2005, she founded Trinetra Mahila Gruh Udyog (Third Eye Women's Cottage Industry), starting with five rural women making traditional local dishes.

This grew rapidly to employ 750 illiterate women living below the poverty line, all working from home. Pratibha shared her Research and Development knowledge, enabling these women to become stakeholders and participate in policy decisions. She expanded training beyond food processing to areas like catering, garment manufacturing, and printing, opening new economic opportunities. After achieving self-sustainability, she innovated by producing local specialties such as tamarind chocolates, ambadi jam, and spices, reaching national markets. As Founder President of the Indian Women's Development Organization, she promotes skill-building and employment. Pratibha also formed the Amravati District Self-Help Groups Association, uniting 1,000 SHGs from marginalized minorities, breaking social barriers. Her broad work empowers rural women, the handicapped, and the most disadvantaged, making her a remarkable force for social change.



Bai SAHARIYA Santosh (30)

India

Fighting Harmful Traditional Practices

This project supports the following SDGs



"I fight so no girl walks barefoot in silence, every step forward is a step toward justice."

Santosh, from the vulnerable Saharoya tribal community, lost her husband young and chose to dedicate her life to fighting poverty, discrimination, and harmful traditions affecting women. Married at 15 with two children, she courageously stood against a local rule forcing women to walk barefoot. Refusing to pay the 50 Rupee fine, she helped abolish this practice and inspired others to follow.

She introduced penalties for violence against women, gaining respect among her peers. As a volunteer with the 'Swachh Pariyojna' village group, she promoted hygiene and ensured women were vaccinated against STDs, a right previously reserved only for men. Infected cases among women dropped significantly. Elected to the Gram Panchayat (village council), she resisted corruption and became a powerful voice for widows, single women, the poor, and the handicapped. She advocates for girls' education and led efforts to ban alcohol shops to reduce domestic violence. With bold determination, she integrated more women into local governance and took initiatives to combat deforestation. Santosh's work is transforming lives at the grass-roots, especially for women and tribal communities.



PEKEUR Wendy Jasmine (31)

South Africa

A Trade Union for Those Who Feed the Nation

This project supports the following SDGs



"I stand with women who feed the nation, demanding dignity, safety, and justice in every field."

Wendy, General Secretary of 'Sikhula Sonke', a South African trade union for rural women farmers, found her purpose early. Raised on her grandparents' farm in Western Cape, she witnessed domestic violence from the age of six due to her father's alcoholism. At 18, she joined "Woman and Violence," a campaign to seek justice for a murdered woman. Wendy chose to fight for farm workers because she had lived their reality, earning the lowest wages, producing food for the nation while barely surviving. She speaks out against domestic abuse and the discrimination women face, such as being denied protective gear when working with pesticides.

After her studies, she volunteered with "Women of Farm Projects," gaining the skills to co-found "Sikhula Sonke," a women-led union. The union has launched projects for child protection, transport for isolated farms, and the fight for fair wages and stable jobs.

One key success has been securing rights for divorced and single women.

Wendy dreams of men signing a pledge to end violence, holding firm on gender justice without compromise.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



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2009



Anita Raghoval



RAGHAV Anita

India

Obstacles Show Our Strength



This project supports the following SDGs



"I started with stitching, hoping it could become a thread that ties women to strength and independence."

Coming from a conservative rural background in Northern India, Anita Raghoval has become a powerful force for women's empowerment within a deeply patriarchal society. In a culture where women are kept in 'Purdah', the practice of preventing women from being seen by men, denied even life's simplest freedoms, Anita has worked tirelessly to break these barriers. Through Self-Help Groups, forming a Federation, organizing protests against the village council, and mobilizing her community around environmental issues, she has created platforms for women to raise their voices. With support from Dr. Kiran Bedi's Navjyoti India Foundation, her talents were nurtured, sharpening her skills and helping her realize her vision. Her protests against female feticide have saved lives, and her humble stitching centre, Anita Handwork, has grown into an export house employing women from her village. Passionate about the environment, she has mobilized SHG women to join the Watershed Management project, promoting water conservation and planting 1000 trees to green their village. Anita's strength, creativity, and vision make her a true role model, an agent of change and resilience with the power to transform rural women's lives.



NGOZI REGINALD Assumpta (33)

Nigeria

A Pioneer in the Fight against AIDS



This project supports the following SDGs



"I work to provide care and support, helping women with HIV/AIDS find strength and dignity."

Assumpta, founder of 'Womankind Nigeria for Women Living with HIV/AIDS', has become a fearless voice for the rights and dignity of those living with HIV/AIDS. In a society where discrimination is widespread and medical support is scarce, especially in rural areas, Assumpta stood up publicly, risking her safety to speak out in newspapers, on radio, and on television. She challenged the dangerous belief that HIV/AIDS can be seen on a person's face and began dismantling ignorance and stigma rooted in a male-dominated culture. Nigerian women face heightened vulnerability due to female genital mutilation, wife inheritance, early marriage, and gender inequality. Through Womankind Nigeria, founded in 2005, she supports around 200 women each month with psychological care, life-saving antiretroviral drugs, palliative care, treated nets, water purifiers, nutrition supplements, and skills training. She also works on prevention, mother-to-child transmission, and testing outreach in rural areas. Assumpta previously served with the Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (NEPWHAN) as national treasurer and mobilization officer. Her courage, compassion, and tireless activism are saving lives and changing minds across Nigeria.



OUEDRAOGO-KANSSOLÉ Catherine (47)
Burkina Faso

"I work with my community to support education, income, and caring for our environment."

A Tireless Creative Innovator

This project supports the following SDGs

Catherine from Réo is a high-level mobilizer of exceptional integrity, wholly dedicated to uplifting the poorest in Burkina Faso's East-Center Quada region. Equally at ease with men and women, she has inspired widespread community participation, achieving remarkable results quickly. One of her key innovations is the introduction of liquid soap production, a novel technique in the area. After just nine months, sales increased sixteenfold, providing women with a reliable income. Catherine's environmental efforts include building anti-erosion sites, promoting organic waste composting, and protecting clearings with straw spreading. She has made a profound impact on girls' education in a country where boys traditionally take precedence; now, more girls attend school than boys. Despite daily hardships, Catherine rises early to reach villages before tending her fields, never yielding to challenges. Her approach is rooted in listening, transparency, close relationships, knowledge-sharing, and full community integration. In Burkina Faso, where life expectancy is 48 years and only 29% of primary-age children attend school, her work stands as a beacon of hope and progress.



Hlengiwe "LEO" MCHUNU (43)
South Africa

Fighting the Silent Killer HIV/AIDS

This project supports the following SDGs

"I focus on small steps, caring for orphans and building hope through community support and dignity."

Hlengiwe 'Leo', known as 'Mama Africa' in her village of Qudeni, began her journey after losing nearly all of her eight siblings to AIDS. One day, she saw two young AIDS orphans sitting alone by an empty food pot, frightened and neglected. Moved, Leo returned home, gathered clean clothes and a washbasin, and began caring for them. Many would have walked away, but Leo's compassion sparked the Imizamo Chèche project, meaning "we are trying." Using her limited resources, she started caring for over 350 orphans, providing food, job training for caregivers and older orphans, and opening a daycare and kitchen in converted classrooms. Leo organized the community to allow orphaned children back to school without fees or uniforms. She also launched income projects for grandmothers and girls, such as quilting and beadwork, secured land for community gardens, and began workshops addressing alcoholism among elders. Despite disasters like tornadoes and wildfires, Imizamo continues to support Qudeni's vulnerable. Leo dreams of building fences for gardens and a daycare hospice, while encouraging AIDS treatment at local clinics.



Khabar LAHARIYA (Rural Newspaper)
India

"New Wave" Began with Eight Rural Women Journalists

This project supports the following SDGs

"We strive to bring rural women's voices to light, sharing truth and hope through our newspaper."

In the Bundelkhand region of India, eight rural women started Khabar Lahariya (meaning 'New Waves'), a newspaper written in the local Bundeli dialect. Challenging a patriarchal media landscape that ignores women's voices, these women manage everything, from investigative journalism to distribution. Launched seven years ago in Chitrakoot with support from the feminist organization Nirantar, the paper has since expanded to Banda district, reaching about 35,000 readers across 300 villages. Khabar Lahariya serves as a powerful symbol of women's empowerment in rural India, promoting literacy and preserving the local language. The paper has earned a reputation as a fearless watchdog exposing corruption and greed, with female journalists courageously reporting truths often avoided by men. It plays a vital role in combating violence against women in a region troubled by banditry, highlighting women's struggles and challenging traditional stereotypes. The women's commitment is evident in their willingness to walk up to six hours to reach isolated villages. Through their work, they advance women's rights, press freedom, and the dismantling of patriarchal norms in their communities.



GBLIA Madeleine
Ivory Coast

Facing Adversity with Bare Hands

This project supports the following SDGs

"With small steps and shared hands, we're rebuilding hope through the land that once lost everything."

At the turn of the century, Ivory Coast endured a devastating civil war, ravaging one of sub-Saharan Africa's most prosperous regions. As often happens in such conflicts, civilians, especially women and children, suffered deeply. In the mountainous Man region, members of the Grace Cooperative of Women of Ivory Coast lost everything. Husbands died defending villages, children were abducted as soldiers, and many women fled. By 2004, survivors began regrouping near the capital, Yamoussoukro. Today, the cooperative spans over 700 villages across Danamé, Man, and Bankouma. Under the determined leadership of President Madeleine Gblia, it supports women in reviving or reshaping their income-generating activities. Around Yamoussoukro, they've built a small agricultural and livestock center that helps meet basic food needs through intensive farming methods. Beyond survival, these resilient women launched an ambitious plan to rebuild their war-torn homeland. Despite the overwhelming challenge, they persevere, embodying the spirit of African women who, through sheer will, continue to hold the continent together.



LOPES DE OLIVEIRA Maria Lucia (43)

Brazil

"We planted knowledge where there was silence, and now, women are growing futures with their own hands."

Feminism as a Tool for Development

This project supports the following SDGs



For generations, Brazil's North Eastern region has been marked by deep poverty and the submissive role of women. The work of Maria Lucia, a educator, suggests these two issues are closely linked. Since 1996, she has worked with *Cunhã Coletivo Feminista*, a pioneering feminist organization. In 2003, she launched an initiative in Paraiba State to raise awareness and foster social organization among women agricultural laborers.

The project, "Sowing Gender in the Remote Semi-Desert Regions," is groundbreaking: it applies a feminist lens to sustainable development in a region where no women's organizations previously existed. It was the first time a feminist group undertook systematic, education-based work across a state 2.3 times the size of France.

The program empowers rural women through education in human rights, citizenship, and economic autonomy, especially via agriculture on land once deemed infertile. With a holistic focus on development, rights, health, and the environment, the project transformed women into community leaders, shifting long-standing gender norms in areas once reserved for men.



Mother Petra MACLIING (77)

Philippines

Protecting Indigenous Land Culture

This project supports the following SDGs



"We protect the land because it protects us, our food, our culture, and the future of our people."

Over a lifetime of activism, 77-year-old Mother Petra Macliing has remained steadfast in her belief that Indigenous identity and survival are inseparable from land protection. Honored with the title "Mother" by her tribe, she embodies the vital role rural women play in defending both culture and nature. Widowed and mother of eight, she sustained her family through sustainable farming on ancestral land. She pioneered natural farming methods using traditional waste products like rice husks and pig manure, yielding thriving rice paddies. As neighbors observed her success, many began abandoning chemical fertilizers.

But protecting the Cordilleras region means more than farming. In the 1970s, she joined Kalinga and Bontoc leaders in resisting the Chico Dams project, which threatened mass displacement. In the 1980s, when gold prospectors arrived, she and fellow Indigenous women used collective resistance, removing tools, invoking cultural taboos, and holding peaceful dialogue, to drive them off. A founding member of the Cordillera Peoples' Alliance (CPA) and of the Kalinga-Bontoc Peace Pact Holders Association (KBPPHA), Mother Petra is a symbol of grassroots leadership in the struggle for Indigenous rights, sovereignty, and sustainable living.



KAYIRERE Odette

Rwanda

Quiet Strength in the Midst of Tempest

This project supports the following SDGs



"From our deepest grief, we built strength, together, we are rewriting the future for Rwanda's widows and orphans."

The physical and emotional devastation of the 1994 genocide, which claimed almost her entire family, including her husband, compelled Odette to co-found the Widows Association of the Agahozo Genocide (AVEGA), now representing over 20,000 widows. Despite her own trauma, she quickly formed small support groups and eventually established the regional AVEGA branch, becoming its first coordinator. With the demands growing, Odette left her teaching job to fully dedicate herself to helping genocide survivors, focusing on healthcare, housing, and livelihood support. Today, AVEGA's Eastern Region serves over 20,000 widows and orphans, 90% involved in agriculture or livestock. Many are still homeless, disabled, or living in severe poverty. Odette's leadership brought psychosocial counseling, home rehabilitation, income-generating initiatives, health centers, AIDS awareness, violence prevention, access to justice, orphan education support, and environmental protection.

These efforts align with Rwanda's pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals, especially gender equality. The government has enacted progressive laws and constitutional reforms, including a 30% quota for women in decision-making roles, affirming Odette's work and vision for justice and empowerment.



CHULTEM Otgonbayar (54)

Mongolia

Following in a Mother's Footsteps

This project supports the following SDGs



"We carry our mothers' strength, village by village, we build futures with knowledge, work, and shared purpose."

After earning a law degree from Irkutsk State University and serving in Mongolia's Great State Khural, Otgonbayar seemed destined for urban political life. Instead, she returned to her rural roots, inspired by her mother, a longtime advocate for rural women, to found the Foundation for Empowerment of Rural Women in 1994.

For over 15 years, Chultem has led the Foundation in educating Mongolian rural women about their legal rights and providing skills to improve existing livelihoods or create new ones. Entirely volunteer-run, the Foundation has launched over 40 rural projects and supported 26,000 women and their families. It now operates 20 branch offices across Mongolia, reaching 200 villages. Chultem created a national forum through which nomadic rural women connect, market their products, and access urban buyers. Her team has trained over 3,000 women in milk processing and machinery use, taught green food cultivation in the Gobi Desert, and launched a microcredit initiative that enables 186 low-income women to co-run businesses like cafés, bakeries, and barber shops, fostering economic independence and community collaboration.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



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2008



BULI Amulya Sahoo (27)

India

A Driving Force in Community Change

This project supports the following SDGs



"Through unity and courage, we're rewriting our story, stronger, free, and hopeful for our children."

After finishing high school in 1996, Amulya committed her life to empowering women in Kisinda, a small tribal village in Orissa, one of India's poorest states. The area struggles with widespread illiteracy and has long been affected by the illegal Maoist Naxalite movement, fueled by extreme poverty, 48% of the population lives below the poverty line. Orissa also has the world's lowest doctor-to-population ratio.

Trained in microcredit and self-help group formation, Amulya returned to her village determined to spark change. Despite harsh conditions, the women have transformed dramatically. With increased self-confidence from improved financial stability, they refuse abuse and invest in their children's education and health.

Amulya has established 603 self-help groups, overcoming strong opposition. Remarkably, she engaged in dialogue with Naxalite leaders, who now support her empowerment efforts. She even gained national TV attention. Women say, "Our own Amulya is a precious gift from God, inspiring us to rise for our children and ourselves."

Association of Women Nurses to assist women and children victims of rape with HIV/AIDS - AFIA FEV

DR Congo



"The Lack of Means is Already a Means" (Senegalese Proverb)

This project supports the following SDGs



In recent years, the Kivu region of DR Congo witnessed one of the worst human catastrophes since World War II, with an estimated 3.5 to 5.5 million deaths largely ignored by the world. Rebel insurgents systematically targeted women, who suffered horrific sexual violence in front of their families and were often mutilated and infected with AIDS. In African communities, raped women frequently face rejection.

Moved by this tragedy, nurse Beatrice Kabemba-Bapemacho and four fellow nurses founded an association providing small microcredit loans (\$20) to women, contingent on undergoing HIV testing. Women who test positive are referred to organizations like Doctors Without Borders for treatment, though loans are given regardless of test results.

The women borrowers form groups where they share experiences and participate in "living values" education, learning that repaying loans demonstrates integrity and love, allowing others to benefit from revolving credit. The founders started the initiative with just \$20 each from their modest incomes. Despite minimal external funding, they persist, and some women have begun returning to their villages empowered.

Balij Women's Union of Farming Groups (BAWUFAG)

Cameroon



Translation as a Tool for Development

This project supports the following SDGs



Azoadam Rebecca B. Juga, founder of BAWUFAG, comes from Bali in the Mezam Division of North West Cameroon. Moved by the struggles of rural women, she took on the mission to raise awareness and empower them in her community.

BAWUFAG has made a remarkable impact through training in food processing, adult literacy, micro-credit, civil and human rights. For the first time, single women and widows can claim land and production rights. They also receive training on soil fertility management and food preservation. A standout initiative is the translation of the international Magazine on Low External Input and Sustainable Agriculture into Mungaka, the local language. Distributed as pamphlets and audio recordings, it brought vital knowledge to illiterate women, blending indigenous wisdom with new techniques. This spurred innovations such as diversified farming, cultivating beans, maize, cassava, and pineapple on the same plot.

Environmental awareness has grown: women now rotate crops, use cover crops, and avoid burning soil. Political consciousness is rising too, as women gain the confidence to speak publicly and assert their rights.



KHOSA Bongisiwe (34)

South Africa

A Rural Eco-Warrior Protects Nature with Passion, Perseverance

This project supports the following SDGs



"Rural Eco-Warriors helped me speak up for nature, and encourage other women to do the same."

One of 14 children abandoned by their father at age 10, Bongi from rural KwaZulu-Natal was determined to finish school. She worked in a local store before and after school, later becoming a domestic worker, then joining a tourist crocodile farm, where caring for orphaned animals awakened her passion for the environment. Realizing animals and habitats had no voice, she trained as an environmental community officer with the Rural Eco-Warriors, becoming the only woman in her group and a role model in her community.

Respected even by local chiefs, she was invited to male-only meetings on environmental issues, breaking gender barriers. Bongi has since led numerous community-led environmental projects. When the local river, used for drinking water, became polluted, she taught women to wash clothes in buckets and safely dispose of wastewater. She trained teachers on environmental protection, promoted Zulu dancing to preserve culture, and started a Fever Tree nursery to promote sustainable bark harvesting for traditional medicine. Her work reflects deep determination, creativity, and a profound commitment to both nature and community.

East Mountain Quilters

Costa Rica



Quilting for a New Quality of Life

This project supports the following SDGs



Quilting has transformed the lives of women in Rancho Redondo, a small mountain pueblo in Costa Rica, many of whom live in abusive households with minimal resources.

Thanks to Carolyn Underwood, an American living in the area, around 50 women began quilting lessons in May 2004. Despite suspicion from husbands and the burden of daily chores, some waking at 3 a.m., they met weekly, sometimes more, for 17 months.

Only five months later, they were invited to exhibit at Costa Rica's 'International Week of Coffee,' becoming the first quilters ever showcased. Their success skyrocketed, and by 2008, they were invited to the prestigious International Quilt Market in Houston, USA.

Beyond recognition, the most powerful impact has been personal. Formerly uneducated and marginalized, these women now stand together against abuse and injustice, an unprecedented shift in their community. They've formed a board of directors, manage international sales, and contribute to local nonprofit causes. Their confidence, collaboration, and economic independence have uplifted not just their own lives, but the entire community.

Fancy Community Help Group (FCHG)

St. Vincent (South Caribbean)



Indigenous Community Banking for All

This project supports the following SDGs



Fancy is a remote northern community in St. Vincent with 240 women and 170 men across 140 households. Isolated and disadvantaged, the women created an inclusive, self-reliant rural development model that also encourages men's participation. Central to their efforts are income-generating activities and an indigenous banking system, developed in the absence of a local bank.

The Fancy Community Help Group (FCHG) began in 1997 when local churches and clubs united. Starting with 22 women, they chose pig rearing as a low-risk venture requiring minimal capital. As the pigs reproduced, they were distributed first to the most vulnerable, then alphabetically. Once household food needs were met, pigs were sold externally, generating income that funded community improvements, like preschool electricity and food hampers for elders. Later, the group created a revolving loan scheme, independently conceived and similar to the Grameen Bank. It provides emergency aid, funds education, healthcare, and farming.

Through this work, women have gained confidence, leadership skills, and are now committed to training the poorest, ensuring no woman is left behind.



Group of Women Lace Makers
Portugal (Azores)

When Busy Fingers Generate Prosperity
This project supports the following SDGs

After a volcanic eruption drastically reduced arable land on Pico Island, residents had to find new ways to survive. While many men turned to whale hunting, it was traditional lace-making that enabled the women, and their community, to thrive. In the early 20th century, the Lemos daughters, a family from the United States, taught Pico's women to use a special needle (farpa) and fine cotton thread, replacing the wool they had traditionally used. From then on, all girls aged 8–10 were taught lace-making. Starting in 1922, Rosa Garcia began selling the lace on nearby Faial Island, at the renowned Peter Café, where it reached buyers from Portugal, the U.S., and South America. Each lace-maker specialized in one task, passing the work hand to hand, a beautiful model of community cooperation. Payment was based on thread used, and women often sacrificed sleep to increase production. This initiative provided access to healthcare, education, and better housing. Today, Pico lace remains a vital income source and a certified cultural product featured in international exhibitions and museums.



BEGUM Shad (29)
Pakistan

Unflinching Warrior for Women's Rights
This project supports the following SDGs

The Dir region in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province is among the world's most conservative regarding women's rights. Taliban influence has grown, with clerics pushing for Sharia law and threatening street action. "Honor killings" are rising, and women face systemic discrimination, barred from inheritance, forced into child marriages, and excluded from decision-making. In this hostile environment, Shad Begum, daughter of a liberal NGO worker, founded a women's organization at just 15. At 22, despite threats, defamation, and fierce opposition, she was elected local councillor as an independent, thanks to her integrity and determination. By age 26, 127 women were elected at the local and district levels, in part due to her advocacy. Today, she leads Anjuman Behbood-e-Khawateen (ABKT), Dir's first registered NGO. ABKT offers micro-credit, girls' primary education, health services, and women's capacity building. Ten women's organizations have since emerged in the district, and over 1,000 girls have accessed informal education through ABKT. Shad's relentless work continues to challenge norms and empower women in Dir.



HAKIM-ALI Leila
Afghanistan

Goat Herder Brings Light to Rural Homes
This project supports the following SDGs

Afghanistan, with 32 million people, has endured decades of conflict. In its rural villages, electricity remains a luxury, nights are lit by candles and lanterns. But in the village of Patoo, Leila Hakim-Ali changed that. Born and raised in Ghazni, Leila trained as a Community Health Worker, hoping to improve life for her family and community. During a training session, she learned about hydroelectric power and wondered why her water-rich village didn't have it. As a goat herder familiar with the terrain, she had a waterfall in mind. She began the project with her children, clearing a path to the site. Realizing the scale of the task, she reached out to the community. Her husband doubted others would support it, but Leila persisted. She rallied village leaders and neighbors, and soon, the whole community was involved. Each family contributed US\$ 200 and labor. Through vision and determination, Leila helped her village harness hydroelectric power—bringing light where there once was only darkness.



CHITONGO Shorai (37)
Zimbabwe

A Firm no to Domestic Violence
This project supports the following SDGs

Studies show that the home is often the main site of violence, especially in Africa, where many rural women are unaware of their rights. Shorai's story of brutal abuse by her husband, including rape and beatings, sparked national outrage after it was published in a major Zimbabwean newspaper. Her case became pivotal in the campaign for the Domestic Violence Act. Living in rural Mutasa, she encountered disturbing cases of domestic abuse, some ending in the murder of women, and was deeply moved by the fate of children who witnessed such horror. In response, Shorai founded Ray of Hope, a grassroots network for women survivors of domestic violence. Now with over 2,000 members, the group runs 10 community-based income projects for women and children. She educates communities on the links between HIV/AIDS and domestic violence, promoting safe sex and agency for women. She has also reinstated or retained in school dozens of children victims of domestic violence. To address the resistance of men who prevented their women family members from attending Ray of Hope meetings (which they called "gatherings of marriage destroyers and prostitutes"), she successfully invited men to her workshops, calling in male presenters to give the talks.



Sister Placida MOSHA (64)

Tanzania

"Sustainability means dignity, our school grows its future with our own hands, brick by brick."

Building with Bricks and Creativity

This project supports the following SDGs



One of twelve children born to a farming family near Mt. Kilimanjaro, Sister Placida fulfilled her dream of building a fully self-reliant vocational training school. Unlike many projects that rely on foreign donors, hers is sustainable by design. She introduced drip irrigation, improving nutrition and reducing water use, then built a fishpond to feed students and sell surplus for income. Next, she acquired an interlocking brick mould, reducing construction costs with cement-free bricks. These bricks are also sold locally, meeting a high demand as owning a house is a key life goal for many African families.

The school grows maize, runs its own maize mill, and raises pigs, using their manure to fertilize gardens and maintain the fishpond. Importantly, many students are physically disabled, making the school's impact even more profound. Fully certified by the Vocational Education Training Authority of Tanzania, Sister Placida's school is a beacon of innovation and sustainability, and at 64, she remains a dynamic force in regional development.



MOHAMED ATTAYEB Zahra

Niger

Fighting Ignorance and Getting Girls to School

This project supports the following SDGs



"With TIDAWT, we educate girls and empower nomads, because no one should be left behind in the desert."

Though she never attended school, Zahra Mohamed Attayeb can read, write, and navigate the Internet. Raised in a Touareg nomad camp in northern Niger, her childhood experiences inspired her to create an association to educate nomad children and restore the environment. Forced into exile several times due to insecurity and her activism, Zahra returned in 1995 and has since worked tirelessly for her community's development.

In 1997, she founded TIDAWT, a non-political organization promoting local and sustainable development, especially through girls' education. Zahra has been instrumental in mobilizing nomad women, raising awareness about their role in national development. TIDAWT also focuses on cultural preservation, training, and information sharing.

To address economic hardship, Zahra supports women's artisan cooperatives whose product sales fund community needs. Contributions from association members have enabled the construction of water pumps and grinding mills. TIDAWT also prioritizes trainer capacity-building and community health care.

Zahra's enduring commitment since 1997 makes her a powerful force against the poverty undermining nomadic stability.



HEWAPATHIRA Thushari (38)

Sri Lanka

New Breakthroughs in Micro-Finance Lending

This project supports the following SDGs



"At SEWA Finance, we turn trust into opportunity, where even the excluded shape their own economic future."

Thushari, the dynamic CEO of Sewa Finance, is pioneering innovative microfinance approaches that link personal economic progress to the borrower's own initiative. Regular training on credit culture and saving discipline is central to empowering clients. Sewa Finance was established to meet the capital needs of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) supported by the Sewa Lanka Foundation, one of Sri Lanka's largest development NGOs. The goal: help CBOs move from relief to self-sufficiency and sustainable development.

A standout achievement is Sewa's outreach to Muslim women, who traditionally avoid interest-based financial activities. By creating culturally appropriate financial models, the organization has opened new economic avenues for them. Sewa Finance has also successfully entered the plantation sector, where some of Sri Lanka's poorest live. Once reluctant borrowers now engage in income-generating activities like gardening, retail shops, and barber salons. This shift has sparked a new financial culture, redirecting spending from harmful habits to constructive investments. Hewapathira's leadership offers bold new models for inclusive financial empowerment.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



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2007



"Capuchinhas" Women's Group

Portugal

Reinventing a Traditional Craft



This project supports the following SDGs



"We didn't wait for change, we wove it ourselves, stitch by stitch, here in Campo Benfeito."

Twenty years ago, a group of women set out to save Campo Benfeito, an isolated Portuguese village on the verge of extinction due to economic decline. In 1985, they took a sewing course to revive the traditional capucha, a durable wool coat worn by women, and began producing them professionally. Soon realizing that capuchas alone wouldn't sustain their community, the women, now known as the Capuchinhas, trained in management, budgeting, and marketing, and modernized their products with the help of a fashion designer. Over eight years, they expanded their line to include coats, skirts, blouses, and sweaters now sold in Lisbon and Oporto. Staying true to tradition, they work with local materials, use plant-based dyes, and apply ecological techniques taught by the village elders. Keeping the traditional knowledge of the past, they are now able to produce a summer and a winter collection every two years. Their efforts have revitalized Campo Benfeito: families stayed, local knowledge was preserved, and for the first time in 20 years, children are back in school. The Capuchinhas not only revived an art, they restored a village through entrepreneurship, sustainability, and collective action.



Agnes KARTIMAI (47)

Liberia

Advocate for Rural Women's Rights



This project supports the following SDGs



"In a place where silence once ruled, we've learned to speak, to lead, and to seek justice together."

Agnes leads Zorzor District Women Care Inc. (ZODWOCA), one of rural Liberia's most dynamic women's organizations. In a country where women suffered deeply during the civil war, especially from rape and exclusion, ZODWOCA mobilizes rural women to know their rights and engage politically. Since 2004, the organization has held workshops on democracy, education, human rights, gender-based violence, and legal access. These efforts have helped women avoid traditional all-male "bush courts" and pursue justice through formal systems. In 2005, Agnes encouraged 18 women to run for local chieftaincy positions in their villages and four of them won. ZODWOCA also addresses HIV/AIDS prevention and peacebuilding, and reaches wider audiences through local drama troupes, a quarterly newsletter, and visual materials (posters, flyers, calendars) for non-literate women. As a result, Zorzor District has seen a decline in domestic violence, a rise in rape reporting, and more women asserting their inheritance rights. While Liberia has passed supportive legislation, it is organizations like ZODWOCA, under Agnes's leadership, that ensure real change reaches rural women.

Agrotouristic Women's Cooperative of Mesotopos

Greece



"We brought our memories to life, now they nourish our families, our village, and our future."

Reviving Customs to Fight Unemployment

This project supports the following SDGs



In December 1998, 25 women founded the Agrotouristic Women's Cooperative of Mesotopos in southwest Lesbos to turn traditional knowledge into professional economic activity. Trained in nutrition, health, and small business skills, they began producing and promoting local delicacies, preserved sweets, jams, liqueurs, pasta, reviving flavors long held in memory. Their creativity helped position Mesotopos as a tourist destination, with a local shop and catering services for up to 600 people, including music and dance options. Now numbering 36 members, the cooperative provides income for dozens of families in a village of 1,050, and boosts the local economy by sourcing raw materials from local producers. Some members' children have even returned to the village, inspired by the cooperative's dynamic activities and promise for the future. The initiative has made a notable impact: socially, by empowering women; economically, by reducing unemployment; and environmentally, by valuing local resources and cultural identity. Their ambition is to serve as a model for rural business and social development.

Association pour la Promotion des Femmes de Gaoua (APFG)

Burkina Faso



Courage in Transforming Traditionnal Practices Promoting Women's Right

This project supports the following SDGs



"We didn't reject our traditions, we transformed them, so our daughters can grow up whole and proud."

The Association for the Promotion of Women from Gaoua (APFG) began as a group of mothers improving school conditions for their children. Their success expanded the group's mission, and today over 400 women are involved in economic and social empowerment. APFG supports income-generating activities like soap and cream making, beer production, groundnut processing, pork rearing, and a local restaurant. Through microcredit, women are organized into mutual support groups that ensure repayment. Environmentally, APFG promotes improved stoves, solar cookers, and tree planting to address deforestation. But its most innovative initiative is its culturally sensitive campaign against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). At a regional meeting with 420 attendees, including 48 FGM practitioners, 30 practitioners publicly renounced the practice, gaining support from the association. APFG's standout approach replaces the harmful ritual with a symbolic simulation, preserving cultural form while protecting girls' health and rights. This is a compelling example of how APFG uses culture and regional traditions to find ways for transformation of rituals and social practices in general.

CALAMANI de QUISPE Amalia (37)

Bolivia



Valuing Ancestral Products

This project supports the following SDGs



"We turned what was once rejected into pride, work, and hope for families in our mountains."

Amalia has lived her whole life in the rural community of Llachuani, where she received primary and secondary education and earned a technical degree. Married with six children, all students, she has devoted countless hours to improving her community's economy. In 1998, Amalia founded Alpaquita Andina, an economic unit focused on commercializing charqui, a traditional dried alpaca and llama meat rich in protein and low in fat. Once considered a second-rate food and even banned in the 1970s, charqui has been revalued thanks to the efforts of producers like Amalia. It is now accepted in urban markets. Amalia was asked to train other women to use modern and hygienic techniques to produce charqui and to use solar energy to dry the meat. Her enthusiasm was acknowledged and she is known as a woman leader against poverty. Today, Amalia is responsible for the sales in Alpaquita Andina, where she sells charqui and other products derived from alpaca wool in La Paz markets. Her innovative activity generate selfemployment in the community and prevented migration. Amalia promotes the utilization of natural resources, mixing ancestral and modern techniques, thereby raising the income of poor families in this cold region of Bolivia.

Cameroon Young Jurists Legal Resource Center (CYJULERC)

Cameroon



"We offered women a new path, one that feeds their families, honors their dignity, and protects their future."

Giving Women Hope for the Future

This project supports the following SDGs



CYJULERC, a unique Cameroonian women's organization made up of professional jurists, works to improve the lives of rural women and children through courageous and strategic long-term initiatives. Their impact reaches from local communities to national policy, including ministries and parliament. One major initiative is the "Ten Year Campaign for the Eradication of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)". Despite the World Health Organization (WHO) data showing 20% of women in Cameroon undergo FGM, the issue was long neglected. CYJULERC launched grassroots awareness campaigns, gathered testimonies from victims and practitioners, and presented them to female MPs, many of whom were moved to tears. They also submitted a draft law against FGM, still pending in parliament (as of 2007). In a powerful intersection of economic empowerment and environmental protection, CYJULERC introduced snail farming, offering a sustainable protein source, an income alternative for former FGM practitioners, and a contribution to forest conservation. Due to high demand, the initiative now supports a broader group of women, improving household nutrition and income while addressing harmful traditional practices.



DELARONDE-COLOMBE Diana (39)

Canada

"When we grow and store our own food, we grow our strength as a community."

Assuring Food Security to her Community

This project supports the following SDGs



Diana, an Indigenous woman from Wabowden, Manitoba, is deeply engaged in her community's life, from education and recreation to spiritual guidance. Married with four children, she serves as a Community Animator for the Bayline Regional Roundtable (BRRT), a coalition of northern Manitoba communities linked by rail and united to address shared challenges. Diana has shown inspiring leadership in local food security efforts, including the creation of community gardens, the Northern Freezer Initiative, and promoting the Manitoba Food Charter. Due to high transport costs, many remote Indigenous communities struggle to access affordable, nutritious food. Unlike other regions where food charters are led by municipalities, northern communities collectively created a provincial food charter to voice their specific needs. Diana created community gardens where youth learned gardening skills as a step toward lasting sustainability. She also initiated a pilot project in a northern isolated community accessible only by air and by road for a short time during the winter months. Freezers were purchased and distributed to residents who wish to enter into a short-term repayment plan. Diana supports food security agencies by sharing resources and experience, embodying the values of sustainability and community empowerment.



ONEKO Joyce (54)

Kenya

Empowering Rural Women

This project supports the following SDGs



"When women connect, they rise, together, stronger, and ready to lead their communities into the future."

Since 1998, Joyce has led Mama na Dada Africa (MnDA), an NGO focused on empowering grassroots women. Through MnDA, she has developed "Modeling Opportunity" templates to address local needs in economic development, childcare, healthcare, education, and recreation, offering both practical solutions and new learning in rural communities. MnDA emphasizes self-sustainability while prioritizing women and girls. One impactful initiative is a Demonstration Farm, where the community learned to grow traditional crops like sweet potatoes, cassava, sorghum, and pumpkins, replacing reliance on introduced crops like corn. The program also included goat-rearing to improve local protein intake. In 2006, Joyce organized the Grassroots African Women's Conference in Kenya, bringing together over 500 women from East Africa and beyond. Overcoming major logistical and funding hurdles, she coordinated transport for rural women from Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. The event became a powerful experience for participants, many of whom had never connected with others facing similar challenges. The conference left women empowered, equipped with new tools, and ready to take on leadership roles in their own communities.



ALVES Maria Isabel (44)

Cape Verde

When "Rebels" Become inovators

This project supports the following SDGs



"By honoring tradition, we build bridges that connect the Rabelados to the world and preserve their spirit."

Maria Isabel, known as Misa, spent her early years with her grandmother in a remote village on Santiago Island, Cape Verde, before moving to Switzerland at age 11. Despite the move, her connection to her rural roots never faded. In 1996, at age 34, she returned to Cape Verde, drawn by a desire to meet the Rabelados, a "rebel" community that had withdrawn into the mountains in the 1960s to preserve their spiritual and cultural identity, resisting colonial religious impositions and modern life. Initially met with skepticism from both locals and the Rabelados themselves, Misa earned their trust through respect and patience. However, respecting their way of life and beliefs, she gradually gained their confidence and began working with them on various development projects based on their traditional art. This approach has led to a range of improvements, from infrastructure to healthcare. She promoted their weaving tradition and bamboo houses (funkus) and also developed painting, drawing, sculpture, sewing and ceramics. Through this culturally respectful approach, the Rabelados have gradually opened their village to visitors, sharing their unique heritage. After a decade of engagement, Misa now envisions global exchanges that connect this community to the wider world while protecting their traditions.



KIYAPYAP Mercy (27)

Kenya

Camels and Bees for Sustainable Development

This project supports the following SDGs



"Through beekeeping, women find new ways to care for their families and heal our land."

Mercy was born into poverty in Kenya's Pokot region. After losing her father at age six and enduring Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) at eleven, she persevered to pursue education despite living in a community with 90% illiteracy. By raising vegetables, goats, and hens, she funded her schooling and later returned home to advocate for women's rights and community change. Mercy leads the "Cabesi" project, training 1,000 mostly women farmers in beekeeping and silk production. The project encourages camel rearing, as camels are better adapted to drought, have a lighter environmental impact, and produce more milk than cattle. Traditionally, men were the sole honey producers using destructive methods involving fire. The project introduced modern bee boxes, allowing safe honey harvesting, increased production, and enabled women to become beekeepers, promoting gender equality. Mercy also champions girls' education, women's rights, and the fight against FGM. Respected as a community role model, traditional leaders seek her guidance on social issues.



SANDOVAL ELISEÑO Paula (84)

Mexico

"We came together with what little we had to bring water, health, and care to our community."

A Long Life Dedicated to her Community

This project supports the following SDGs



Paula, born in 1922 in La Cebolleta, Montemorelos Municipality, Nuevo León, had to leave school early and only learned to write her name. As a young wife, she moved to the community of La Unión, where she worked tirelessly to help feed and support her family. In the 1970s, when local women decided to organize to improve their living conditions, they chose Paula as President of the new Communal Women's League. The beginning was difficult, but Paula persisted. Under her leadership, the women raised funds for the installation of electricity and clean drinking water, two vital needs. They also opened a grocery store, offered cooking classes, and advocated successfully for the establishment of a health center. Having learned the ancestral practice of midwifery, Paula later trained with a municipal doctor and received certification, allowing her to provide basic medication and medical assistance in six communities. She was instrumental during malaria outbreaks and often supported medical staff. Now 84, Paula is still active, assisting pregnant women and continuing to support community initiatives with passion, humility, and deep commitment.



SILVA Rupa Manel (49)

Sri Lanka

A Bank y Women, for Women

This project supports the following SDGs



"With small savings, we built more than a bank, we built dignity, security, and a future for women."

Rupa was born into a farming family in Bandarawela, Sri Lanka. After her father's death at 16, she completed high school but couldn't continue her studies due to financial hardship. Married at 19, she moved to Colombo in 1978. Facing unemployment, Rupa founded the first women's bank group in the area, encouraging women to save regularly, even as little as Rs.5 (\$0.12), to build loan capital. Groups of 5–15 women chose a leader familiar with members' lives, responsible for distributing loans wisely. In 1989, the Women's Bank (Sri Lanka's Women's Development Service Cooperative Society) was officially formed, growing to 18 districts and 37,000 members, with total deposits of \$6 million. By 1994, Rupa had expanded the network into rural areas where most women had never worked outside the home. The initiative transformed lives: mud homes became brick houses, women learned to read and write, and for the first time, many could imagine retirement pensions based on their savings. Rupa calls it "a bank made of our hopes and dreams," offering rural women social and financial security.



FRANZEN Veronica (45)

Argentina

A scientific Approach for the Rural Area

This project supports the following SDGs



"With science and creativity, students are learning to care for their land and their future."

In 1992, after earning her education degree, Veronica became a teacher in a rural community. Adjusting to rural life without a phone or car brought sacrifice and loneliness, but over time, her bond with nature and the community transformed her deeply. Her three children joined her in rural schools, while her husband continued working in town. For the past five years, she has taught at Guillermo Hudson School in Pozo de Chaja and offers adult literacy classes in the evenings. When she arrived, the school had just reopened after a four-year closure. Today, it has 45 students and is a valued part of the community. Veronica even delivers 40 liters of water daily to meet the school's needs. She insists on the importance of educating rural children to rural science. Her students were honored many times for their projects presented at science fairs, including the production of natural hand and face lotion, regional foods like pickles and escabeches, and the development of natural glue, insecticide, and mosquito repellent. Her class was honored as "Women of Science" at the International Book Fair in 2004. Through creativity, science, and care for nature, Veronica has improved the quality of rural life and inspired her students.



Women Farmers Network

Germany

An Internet Network for Rural Women Worldwide

This project supports the following SDGs



"Through BT, I found knowledge, friendship, and the courage to speak about things we rarely talked about."

What do women farmers around the world want? For many, the answer begins with BT, an online network that has become an essential space for connection and empowerment. BT began with a simple idea: a German farmer near Passau dreamed of an online platform where women like her could connect. What started as a discussion forum grew into a full association with clear goals, using the internet to enhance education, technological support, cultural exchange, agricultural practices, and the preservation of traditional knowledge. Since its launch in December 2001, the BT website has received over 1.5 million visitors, becoming a space of solidarity among women farmers. As E.A. from B* shares: "If we didn't have BT, something big would be missing. I've made real friendships and gained special knowledge." For E.S. from N*, living in mountain isolation, BT is a lifeline, offering information, dialogue, and a space to discuss even taboo topics like AIDS or family conflict. Thanks to BT, women farmers are no longer alone.

**Names chosen by the publisher.*

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



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2006



MUGWENDERE Angeline (26)

Zimbabwe

Women's Education, the Tiger in the Tank of Development



This project supports the following SDGs



"I was given a chance to learn, now I try to help other girls find their voice and path forward."

Angeline grew up in deep poverty in rural Zimbabwe, often going hungry and facing social prejudice. Despite this, with support from the UK-based CAMFED (Cambridge Female Education Trust), she completed her education with excellence and became the driving force behind CAMA, an organisation empowering rural girls and women. Since 1998, when Angeline helped establish CAMA in Zimbabwe, the network has grown rapidly across Africa. Under her leadership, CAMA launched the innovative Seed Money Scheme, promoted legal literacy, and trained members in community health outreach, reaching over 70,000 people in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Ghana, and Tanzania. In 2005 alone, CAMA trained 5,215 young women in economic skills, supported 870 small businesses, and prepared over 3,000 in leadership and advocacy. Campaigns against sexual abuse, in partnership with police, courts, and elders, reached 40,000 people and contributed to changes in local bylaws. By 2003, CAMA had 2,000 members and growing. Angeline, the first woman in her area to drive a car, is now a powerful role model and a passionate force for change in Kianjai and beyond.



BANDA Eleni (52)

Zambia

Justice for All through Paralegal Training



This project supports the following SDGs



"I just wanted women to understand their rights, now they're helping others do the same in every village."

In many African countries, statutory law coexists with customary law, which often dominates due to illiteracy, lack of awareness, and weak enforcement. This legal gap has particularly harmed women, who face deeply rooted traditions and limited legal protection. Eleni has been a prominent advocate for women's and children's rights since the mid-1970s. In 1991, she founded the Chiparamba Area Women's Development Association, uniting local women's groups under one umbrella to coordinate development efforts and share experiences. Building on this success, the Eastern Province Women's Development Association (EPWDA) was launched in 1996. Since 2001, EPWDA has pioneered the training of paralegals, community members taught the basics of law and human rights, who then return to educate others in their villages. As a result, rural women are gaining legal knowledge and confidence, even teaching local chiefs and headmen. One major impact has been the reduction in property grabbing, a traditional custom where relatives of a deceased husband claim all his property, leaving his widow and children with nothing but a few pots and pans.



KOLI Gauriben Raysinghbhai (39)

India

Water is life!

This project supports the following SDGs

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Water scarcity is a growing challenge in many parts of the world, including the village of Bharada in Gujarat, India. When the State Water Supply and Sewerage Board asked SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) to repair pipelines, a job traditionally done by men, the men warned the women, "We will die of thirst if you undertake this job." Led by Gauriben, the SEWA women completed a seven-month training program, mastering skills like repairing iron and PVC pipelines, chlorinating water, operating valves and motors, and managing water tank stocks. The start was difficult. After an earthquake damaged pipelines, the women maintained water supply despite obstacles, even when a village leader repeatedly sabotaged the pipes to prove they couldn't handle the work. Undeterred, the women repaired every break until the leader gave up. SEWA also educates villagers on hygienic water use and conservation. This has reduced waterborne diseases and encouraged careful water use. Today, Gauriben is a respected local leader, symbolizing women's strength and community trust.



REN Hongxia (40)

China

Greening Treeless Mountains

This project supports the following SDGs

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"I started with a barren mountain, now it gives back to the people who once had nothing from it."

In the early 2000s, the Chinese government issued a policy accelerating the development of deserted mountains, especially encouraging civil servants to take up the challenge of reforestation and developing these areas. Hongxia, deeply familiar with rural life, became the first female civil servant to take on such a challenge, contracting to reforest 313 hectares of barren mountain in a remote area lacking roads, electricity, or clean water. She began by organizing villagers to build a 17 km road, a pump station, and 42 wells. Then, with the help of 200 young people, she planted over a million trees, now totaling 1.19 million. The land includes 253 hectares of ecological forest (i.e. trees planted essentially to stabilize and regenerate the landscape) and 60 hectares of fruit trees such as peach, apricot, walnut, and pear. Despite setbacks like a devastating drought in 2000–2001, Hongxia persisted. Today, the once-barren mountain thrives with greenery and income-generating activity. Her work not only restored the land but also empowered local women. Inspired by her example, many women have started their own businesses in transport and agricultural processing, lifting incomes and aspirations across the region.



MULOWSKI Josiane (53)

France

Preserving Menaced Horses

This project supports the following SDGs

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"Saving the Percheron is about more than horses, it's about passing on care, respect, and responsibility for the land."

According to the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), up to 2,200 domestic animal breeds could vanish within 20 years, 1,000 have already disappeared. On their 113-hectare farm, Josiane and her husband Guy practice integrated agriculture, a more accessible form of sustainable farming. Josiane specializes in raising the endangered French Percheron horse, a historic breed dating back to the 8th century and now one of 14 threatened French breeds. To support this work, Josiane transformed their farm into a "discovery farm," welcoming children, retirees, the disabled, and the general public. She pursued specialized training in human relations and safety to ensure a meaningful, inclusive experience. "Horses are a great way to meet people and raise environmental awareness," she says. The couple's eco-friendly practices include replanting nearly seven miles of hedges, intercropping, sustainable fertilization, and adapting buildings. Since 2005, they've produced their own rapeseed-based motor fuel, selling the by-product as cattle feed, an initiative that now seems visionary amid rising fuel prices. The Mulowskys remind their community that "the future is in our hands," and it starts at home.

Liberia Crisis Center for Abused Women and Children (LCC)

Liberia

The Right to Dignity

This project supports the following SDGs

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"Every survivor's story matters, our work is to listen, support, and help rebuild lives."

LCC is a Liberian non-profit founded in 1989 to address rising violence, especially rape and sexual abuse against women. Its founder, Beverly Goll-Yekeson (36), a survivor of sexual assault, was driven by her own experience to create a safe and empowering space for victims. A dedicated wife, mother, and environmental planner, Beverly continues to advocate for the rights of women and children in Liberia. During Liberia's 14-year civil war, around 60–70% of females in refugee camps suffered sexual violence. In response, LCC began offering holistic services in rural and urban areas, safe shelter, a 24-hour crisis line, counseling, legal and police support, transportation, and accompaniment to hospitals and courts. The center also promotes economic independence through business training and provides essentials like food and hygiene items. LCC raises awareness through workshops, campaigns, video screenings, and alert teams in 25 communities through Liberia. Despite challenges like stigma, impunity, and public apathy, the LCC continues to give voice to survivors and push for justice and prevention.



XIANG Lijuan (30)

China

"Starting a kindergarten here wasn't easy, but every child deserves a chance to grow and thrive."

A Kindergarten for Rural Children

This project supports the following SDGs



In many rural areas, kindergartens are rare, especially in developing countries. Lijuan, from Dong Yue Xiang Ping Qiao village in Sichuan Province, decided to change that. After working successfully in a city kindergarten, she returned home determined to open one for rural children. Facing huge challenges, caring for an elderly mother and a toddler, lacking classrooms, teachers, equipment, and funds, she relied on sheer will and vision. Lijuan negotiated with local schools, government, banks, and city kindergartens. Eventually, she secured a 60,000 yuan (about US\$7,500) loan, enabling her to launch Sunflower Kindergarten in 2002 with professional staff and proper equipment. Her leadership fostered a nurturing atmosphere where teachers acted as loving caregivers. Within three years, the kindergarten's success earned her a larger loan to expand into a more professional facility, improving the environment and furthering her dream: rural children deserve the best start in life.



"Mama" Margaretha SAKO (54)

Indonesia

Together we are Strong

This project supports the following SDGs



"Together, we took small steps, now our village grows stronger and our land healthier."

Margaretha, known as Mama Margaretha, founded the Saku Maju Group in Manumean Village, East Nusa Tenggara Province. The group has become a community development model inspiring other regions. After finishing junior high, Margaretha worked with her family and husband using slash-and-burn farming, a harmful method involving cutting and burning trees to plant crops for a few years before moving on. After learning about agroforestry from a local NGO, she resolved to introduce sustainable agriculture to her village. Starting the group in 1994 was challenging. Women were shy, rarely spoke to outsiders, and had little say in decisions. Yet, Margaretha's perseverance united seven women to form Saku Maju ("enjoy moving forward"). The group developed new farming techniques and opened a village food kiosk. Eventually, three more groups formed, uniting into the Lopotani Manumean Lestari network to promote sustainable development. Visitors from East Timor, the Philippines, Australia, and Indonesia have studied their work. Impressed by women's roles, a local government gifted a solar power plant. Agroforestry has significantly boosted family incomes.



AKWALU Margaret Ntuti (65)

Kenya

Educate a Girl and you Educate a Nation

This project supports the following SDGs



"Changing minds takes patience, each small step helps our community grow stronger and wiser."

Margaret, known as Mama Ruth, leads the Kieni Gia Nkoro Women's Group in rural Kianjai. She has driven major community development, especially by teaching modern agriculture and persuading reluctant farmers to grow cash crops like coffee. This transformed local farming, boosting income, employment, and education. Margaret's own farm produces top yields thanks to her expertise. She promotes good hygiene and volunteers with the Kenya Family Planning Association, campaigning against harmful practices like female circumcision and encouraging smaller families. Among her accomplishments: organizing women's saving plans based on monthly produce sales; promoting personal hygiene through home visits; introducing kitchen gardening; and starting educational meetings teaching reading, knitting, sewing, and more. She helped build the Kianjai women's boarding primary school and currently guides a conference centre's construction. Margaret is an inspiration, known for bold initiatives. In 1960, she was the first woman in her rural area to drive a car, breaking barriers and becoming a role model for girls and women in Kianjai.



GONZALEZ de CARTAGENA María Brigada (52)

Colombia

Non-Violence Subdues Terror

This project supports the following SDGs



"Peace grows quietly when we care for the land and stand together, despite the challenges."

Maria is a mother, artist, farmer, and educator, and a leading figure in the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartado, Colombia. Since 1996, this community has chosen non-violence and self-sufficiency amid the country's long civil war. Despite losing her 15-year-old daughter to violence in 2005, Maria continues to champion peace and sustainable living. The community is about 80% self-sufficient in food, thanks to farmers like Maria. She also teaches at the local school and helps organize the Farmer's University, where rural people meet to discuss environmental protection and sustainable business in a war zone. Maria established a medicinal herb garden to provide natural remedies, and the community maintains an alcohol-free policy, which helps reduce family violence. As an artist, Maria's paintings have gained international attention, speaking powerfully for peace. In a male-dominated culture, she fought to gain respect and inspire her community to keep striving for peace and sustainability despite great dangers.



LINIBI Maria (51)

Papua New Guinea

Innovation for Development

This project supports the following SDGs

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Maria is a prominent role model for women farmers in Papua New Guinea, where rural women play a vital role yet often remain overshadowed by their spouses. A skilled businesswoman, Maria and her husband developed their farm, and she uses her experience to inspire and train other women farmers.

Despite the challenges of living in a developing country with limited services and infrastructure, Maria's determination has led to remarkable achievements. Born in 1955, she left a public service career in 1990 to focus on farming. She introduced new crops to the Markham Valley and trained 500 farmers in rice, vegetables, onions, watermelon, and more.

Together with her husband, Maria successfully introduced the African yam to the region. She also organizes women farmers and has pioneered the production of plant-based organic products, including oil and medicated soap, helping to diversify and strengthen the local agricultural economy.



KOUKOU Rufine (67)

Benin

Promoting Women's Rights

This project supports the following SDGs

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Rufine, trained as a secretary, was forced to leave her job at 52. Passionate about women's rights, she founded a cooperative producing quality soap from local organic materials like palm and coconut oil, sesame seeds, and neem. Early on, the cooperative faced setbacks when its palm oil supplier, upset after losing a fair prize to them, cut off supplies. Undeterred, Rufine mobilized village women to produce independently.

Though limited by machinery, production grew impressively from 4.5 tons in 1996 to 34 tons by 2005. The cooperative diversified into four soap types: toilet soap, healing soaps for skin and fatigue, antiseptic soaps, beauty soaps targeting dehydration and wrinkles, and laundry soaps. These high-quality organic products made an immediate impact. About 80% of production is exported to Europe and Africa.

The cooperative employs 24 people and partners with 13 women's producer groups. Rufine's efforts created jobs, promoted organic and environmentally safe goods, lowered medical costs through "health line" products, and blended tradition with modern development, strengthening cultural roots in a changing world.



PREKPALAJ Marta (39)

Kosovo

Learning from Living and Building with the People

This project supports the following SDGs

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Lao Tzu wrote: "Go to the people, love them, live with them, learn from them. Start with what they know, build with what they have, and with the best leaders. When the work is done, the people will say: we did this ourselves"

Marta's life embodies this perfectly. Born in 1967 in the remote Has region near Albania, she defied cultural norms to attend secondary school, a two-hour walk forbidden for girls. At 23, she joined a literacy campaign and soon co-founded Motrat Qiriazi, an association for women's education, becoming the region's first woman school director in 1995.

In this patriarchal culture, Marta began by holding separate meetings for women, helping them find their voices before bringing the whole community together. Uniquely, she included men, knowing gender equality needs their support. Marta worked across ethnic divides, even collaborating with Serbian and Roma women during the civil war. Despite great risks under the oppressive Milosevic regime, she established secondary schools, libraries, paved roads, and community centres, transforming Kosovo's rural landscape.



SCHWIENBACHER Waltraud (62)

Italy

An Explosion of Creativity

This project supports the following SDGs

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Meeting Waltraud from St. Walburg in Ultental (South Tirol) is to meet a woman full of ideas and determination. Deeply committed to preserving traditional values, arts, and crafts, she promotes living in harmony with nature while ensuring economic viability for mountain farmers.

Her goal is to support "our valley itself, the people of the valley, the quality of life which cannot be expressed in money, and insuring the farming way of life and its survival."

A major achievement is her winter school, founded 12 years ago with 20 students, which teaches traditional handicrafts, working with natural materials, and environmentally balanced economy practices. Now, it welcomes nearly 470 students from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, with locals making up just a quarter.

Waltraud also created a Summer Academy offering nature-focused courses. Her newest innovation is turning sheep dung into potash for making glass art, reviving a Venetian tradition in her region.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



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2005

Highlights from the 2005 award ceremonies



Laureate Christine Agnélé Mensah receiving the Prize from WWSF President, E. Pradervand



Local Prize Award Ceremony in Togo, 2005, honoring laureate Mme Christine Agnélé Mensah in the presence of invited VIP Togo guests and the WWSF President, E. Pradervand



MNSAH Agnélé Delali Christine (47)

Togo

Educational Sketches for Development

This project supports the following SDGs



"Breaking traditions isn't easy, but every girl deserves freedom and a chance to learn."

Christine was born in 1958 in Tohoun, South-West Togo, belonging to the Adja tribe. Trained as a teacher, she quickly recognized how key elements of local culture created tremendous obstacles to women's advancement. Among these are forced marriages, the young girl's submission to fetishistic practices, forced marriage of widow's to the husband's brother, lack of communication between parents and children, etc. Believing education was crucial, she faced the challenge of communicating these ideas in a largely semi-literate society. To reach her community effectively, Christine founded a theater group that conveyed messages about women's empowerment and development. This group soon evolved into an NGO, greatly expanding its impact. Her efforts led to notable changes: more girls attending school and fewer forced marriages in the region. Among the customs she has challenged are forced marriages, where in the Adja culture, girls can be given to creditors to clear debts. A father may then give her to one of his sons or even marry her himself, regardless of his advanced age. Another practice is sending girls to fetish convents, where they risk losing their virginity under the control of the convent master. In a highly traditional, male dominated society, it needs courage, intelligence and perseverance to fight such practices.



Association IDL Jeunesse Deguena

Mali

Preventing Ills of Rural Exodus

This project supports the following SDGs



"With micro-credit and training, we build a future here, no need to leave home for hope."

Deguena, a small village in Mali's Mopti Circle, relies on rice farming, livestock, fishing, and wild fruit gathering. To curb the exodus of youth to cities, the Swiss Idées'Elles Woman's Association (IDL), with local NGO Prométhée, launched an innovative micro-credit program for girls and young women. This credit enables them to buy and sell local products like rice, baobab and tamarind leaves, groundnuts, and spices in nearby village markets. They also raise sheep and cattle for sale and participate in pond fishing. A recent evaluation revealed that the girls involved can now dress decently, purchase at least one lamb (whose offspring are sold to generate ongoing income), and begin preparing their dowries. None of the dozens of participating girls had migrated to the city, expressing that their needs are fully met locally. IDL plans to add training in literacy, family planning, AIDS prevention, sowing, and dressmaking. As the saying goes, "Necessity is the mother of invention," and grassroots groups worldwide increasingly find that creativity, intention, motivation, and commitment are even more crucial than money.



BURZYNSKA Barbara (60)

Poland

"When villagers lead the change, it's not just development, it's ownership, pride, and a future reclaimed."

Grassroots Democracy: from Political Slogans to Functioning Reality

This project supports the following SDGs



Barbara, an agricultural engineer and rural development specialist in Poland's Pomorskie Voivodeship, faced rural challenges firsthand: high unemployment, growing inequality, weak infrastructure, and deep mistrust in politics. Study trips to France and Ireland shaped her conviction that development plans should be village-based rather than organized by "gminas" (communes). This inspired the Pomeranian Village Renewal Program, which Barbara was tasked to design and implement. The program trains village representatives in leadership, conflict resolution, strategic planning, and fundraising. Villagers then create a Local Development Plan and take ownership of its implementation. The initiative balances material improvements, community centers, parks, playgrounds, sports facilities, with immaterial elements such as preserving traditions, cultural heritage, and promoting civic life. The results have been profound: not only are physical spaces revitalized, but villagers also experience renewed community spirit, stronger identity, increased participation in public life, and a sense of control over their futures. Barbara's initiative demonstrates that lasting rural development is rooted in empowering people to shape their own environment, starting at the village level.



Jagran Jan Vikas Samiti INSTITUTE

India

Empowering Traditional Rural Healers

This project supports the following SDGs



"True change begins when everyone's voice is heard and we work together as one community."

WWSF is for the first time awarding an Institute with its Prize: The Jagran Jan Vikas Samiti (JJVS) Institute, co-founded in 1986 by Bhanwar Dhabhai and Ganesh Purohit which empowers traditional healers, called gunis, to strengthen and preserve their vital medical knowledge. Sparked by a devastating three-year drought near Udaipur (Rajasthan), Bhanwar began exploring alternatives to costly and inaccessible health systems. She uncovered a vast network of gunis, skilled in plant-based healing and committed to treating people across caste lines, often for free. With community support, JJVS began identifying and organizing these healers, aiming to revitalize and formalize their practices as a reliable, affordable healthcare option. Since its founding, the Institute has located over 1,100 gunis across tribal regions who treat ailments with no harmful side effects. JJVS now works to strengthen their skills and visibility by:

- Broadening and documenting plant-based knowledge & Hosting workshops and health camps
- Creating medicinal gardens and seed banks
- Enhancing diagnostics and treatment methods
- Developing new remedies from Ayurvedic and traditional practices



KHANT Dhuliben (45)

India

A Grass Roots Engineer Beats the Pros

This project supports the following SDGs



"We didn't wait for experts, by learning and working together, we brought clean water back to our villages."

Water access is a critical issue in rural India, especially for rain-dependent farming families like Dhuliben's. A 45-year-old semi-literate farm labourer, Dhuliben became a powerful advocate for water security. After just three days of training in water management and pump repair, she mobilised 14 women from her village and a nearby one. Together, they repaired 10 broken hand pumps and successfully oiled 200 others—declared beyond repair by technicians. Facing sarcasm from men and resistance to women's involvement in technical work, Dhuliben persevered. A grassroots leader with SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association), she is also active in community savings initiatives. Her work has brought access to clean drinking water to hundreds and continues to inspire change. Tireless and determined, she travels from village to village with a clear vision: that every community, no matter how remote, should have access to safe water, a basic human right still denied to over a billion people.



Dure-e-SHAHWAR (35)

Pakistan

Establishing Women's Self-Help Groups

This project supports the following SDGs



"Empowering a woman through education can silence centuries of injustice, one voice, one right at a time."

After a long grassroots career with the Rural Women Welfare Organisation, Dure-eshahwar launched her own initiative, "Hand to Woman," in 2004 to empower rural women in Pakistan. In less than a year, she personally motivated over 900 girls to enroll in literacy classes by going door-to-door. She also designed an innovative curriculum that integrates women's rights through the lens of religion, law, and gender development. Her work includes the establishment of a computer training center for underprivileged girls and women in Sanghar district (Sindh), as well as organizing capacity-building programs on conflict prevention and resolution for women's self-help groups. A fearless advocate against violence, Dure-eshahwar has long opposed the brutal tradition of "Karo Kari" (honor killing), where women, even victims of rape, are murdered by male relatives for perceived dishonor. In Sindh alone, some 500 such cases are reported yearly, though many go unrecorded. Though now illegal, the practice persists, and it is courageous activists like Dure-eshahwar who continue the fight to fully eradicate it from Pakistani society.



URBINA Elba Rivera (41) Nicaragua

"If we truly want change, we must educate the whole family, not just train farmers, but teach generations."

Biological Agriculture for the Poorest

This project supports the following SDGs

Born into a poor campesino family in Nicaragua, Elba faced an interrupted education, missing several years of school. But her passion for learning led her back to primary school at 16, eventually turning her into an educator herself. Her belief in education as a tool for development became her life's driving force.

At just 20, she co-founded La Esperanzita, Nicaragua's first organic agriculture center. In 1998, she helped establish Sano y Silva, the first peasant association for ecological culture and production in the Atlantic coastal regions, creating a curriculum to certify organic farmers. As the key pedagogical figure in both organizations, she emphasized that the small farmer's reality must shape development approaches, most projects fail because they train farmers but do not truly educate them or include women and children in the process.

Elba champions learning-by-doing, insisting that doing means action, not just observation. She believes education must start early, as adult rigidity limits transformation. In 2001, she founded eeJAC, Escuela experimental Jan Amos Comenius, an accredited, Montessori-inspired school focused on experiential learning in her region.



ESSEM Association Mali

Healing Ills of Rural Exodus

This project supports the following SDGs

"These girls deserve more than rescue, they deserve dignity, education, and the right to choose their path."

Among the most vulnerable rural-urban migrants are young girls, sometimes only 10 or 11, sent to the city by families with hopes of reducing household burdens or earning a little money. In Mopti, Mali, the grassroots women's organization ESSEM, supported by the innovative local NGO Prométhée, is dedicated to helping these girls survive city life and prepare for a return to their villages. Though town-based in the Mossinkoré district, ESSEM's nomination marks a first for the prize due to its unique focus: education for young rural girl migrants. These girls are often exploited as modern slaves, underfed, unpaid, beaten, sexually abused, or abandoned if pregnant. With no legal protection effectively enforced, many end up on the streets or in prostitution. ESSEM offers evening courses across five training centers, teaching basic rights, health and hygiene, AIDS prevention, literacy, and how to manage or prevent unwanted pregnancies. Basic healthcare is also provided.

Their goal: to empower these girls not only to survive urban hardships but also to return home with dignity and knowledge. It's a powerful response to an often invisible crisis.



IBRAIMOVA Elmira Sultanovna (43) Kyrgyzstan

Commitment, Integrity Challenge Nepotism

This project supports the following SDGs

"I've seen what happens when you trust people to lead. They rise, together, with purpose and pride."

Elmira, former ambassador to the UN, now leads the Village Investment Project, which supports development across Kyrgyzstan's 470 rural communities by empowering local people with skills and resources. Despite pressure from powerful figures seeking money and influence, Elmira consistently refuses, showing remarkable physical and emotional courage, often at the cost of personal isolation. With a small team of local experts, she tirelessly visits communities to explain the project goals and gather input. Her sincerity, patience, listening ability, and negotiation skills have been instrumental in making this revolutionary, community-driven initiative a success.

Decisions are made locally, not by outside experts. Each community must contribute at least 25% to project costs, a target they often exceed, averaging 40%. The project began with 50 communities in 2003 and grew to 205 in just 21 months, a testament to Elmira's commitment and leadership. She has personally visited each participating village, ensuring inclusivity and trust. Her impact is so profound that many Kyrgyz women have named their daughters after her, honoring her as a model public servant and change-maker.



OPANGA-NDJOWO Esther D.R. Congo

Good Survival First

This project supports the following SDGs

"Every seed planted, every road repaired, was a step toward dignity led by rural women's resolve."

In one of Africa's richest countries, abundant in minerals, agriculture, and water, poverty and collapse followed years of catastrophic mismanagement and civil war. Entire sections of administration vanished, and infrastructure like schools, roads, and hospitals deteriorated. In this context of daily survival, CODEFER (Coordination for the Development of Rural Women) was founded in 1993 by the dynamic Esther Opanga Ndjowo. Active in rural areas and on the outskirts of Kinshasa, CODEFER works closely with communities to identify development needs and define actions together. Esther, then in her fifties, traveled through remote areas, often atop trucks, with no transport of her own, showing extraordinary commitment and courage.

CODEFER's achievements include:

- Technical and practical support for rural and semi-urban women farmers
- Promotion of vegetable farming, which saved lives during crises
- Repairs and improvements to rural roads
- Organizing collective sales of women's produce to shield them from exploitation
- Establishing a local market for agricultural products
- School reconstruction



HEREDEA Geta (36)

Romania

Building Hope with Hands and Hammer

This project supports the following SDGs



"I couldn't change my body, but I could change my future. So I built it, brick by brick."

Geta, from the poorest family in the village of Mizies, was born with one leg shorter than the other, causing chronic pain and difficulty. She, her husband, and two sons lived in a 25 m² shack without running water, bathroom, or toilet. Pitied and isolated, Geta one day decided: enough is enough. She walked 4 km to the Habitat for Humanity office in Beius to ask how to become a homeowner. Through Habitat's "sweat equity" model, which requires families to help build their own homes, the Heredeas built a new house. Then, remarkably, they donated their land so two other families could do the same. Geta began baking traditional Romanian kozonak sweetbread for international volunteers and helped build additional homes with them, her family, and friends. Her house, now with running water, became a social hub: neighbors do laundry there, children come to study. In partnership with Habitat and Whirlpool, her advocacy helped 25 more families become homeowners. Since 2003, Geta has turned personal hardship into collective uplift, reshaping her village through sheer determination and kindness.



GRIGORYAN Mariam (49)

Armenia

Business to Encourage Rural Traditions

This project supports the following SDGs



"I turned wool and tradition into hope, jobs, and a future for hundreds of Armenian women."

In 1999, during a devastated economy, blockade, and earthquake, Mariam, with no business or manufacturing background, founded a company in Stepanavan producing high-quality sheep wool yarn and unique handmade Armenian rugs. In a largely agricultural rural town, her initiative provided employment for dozens of women. Using the prized Balbas-Merino wool, today sourced from 200–300 sheep raisers, and pure natural dyes collected by 100–150 plant gatherers, Mariam's venture combined tradition with opportunity. Despite being trained in literature and having no prior experience, Mariam's vision, courage, and determination pushed her into the world of business in her forties. Her company now processes alpine sheep wool and produces chemical-free yarn and handmade rugs rooted in Armenian heritage. With plans to expand into finer thread production for the textile, knitwear, and garment industries, she aims to employ up to 200 people. Her work supports not only artisans and women but also stimulates growth in small sheep farms across the region and beyond.



OMURZAKOVA Mairam (57)

Kyrgyzstan

Nomadic Tourism and Sustainable Development

This project supports the following SDGs



"I've seen what happens when you trust people to lead. They rise, together, with purpose and pride."

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan faced severe economic decline, de-industrialization, and mass emigration. In this harsh context, Mairam began organizing families in the mountainous Naryn region to create "nomadic tourism," a first for the country, and revive the nearly lost tradition of carpet weaving among women. She later founded two NGOs: Shepherd's Life, promoting pastoral tourism, and Altyn Kol, reviving traditional felt carpet production. What began in 1997 with just six families now involves over 100, hosting tourists from more than 20 countries in yurtas or their homes, and offering horseback riding, trekking, and cultural experiences. Average income per member rose from \$72 in 1997 to \$185 in 2003. Altyn Kol's growth is equally impressive: from 10 members in 1997 to 300 women by 2004, producing high-quality carpets. These women, previously without income sources, collectively earned \$41,500 in 2004, compared to just \$2,900 in 1997. Altogether, these efforts have created around 2,000 jobs. Mairam's grassroots work has transformed lives, culture, and the local economy in one of Central Asia's most remote regions.



SHADEED Maryim (36)

Palestine

Empowering Rural Woman

This project supports the following SDGs



"Through the Allar Women's Center, I try to open quiet doors for women whose futures were paused."

Maryim, from a modest background, had her studies interrupted by the first Palestinian Intifada in the late 1980s. After high school, she worked in factories to fund her university education. In 2001, she began volunteering in national and local organizations and joined her local municipality. Her dedication led her to the Allar Rural Women's Development Center, where she became its first women's coordinator in 2004, a role she has embraced with creativity, drive, and commitment. Under Maryim's leadership, the Center now offers educational programs for women whose studies were disrupted, computer training, mother-child activities, community lectures, health check-ups, and income-generating initiatives for women. She has raised the Center's profile, turning it into a hub for NGOs, workshops, and seminars open to both men and women. One of her key battles is against rigid gender stereotypes deeply rooted in her society. As a skilled manager and planner, Maryim continuously finds practical, impactful solutions and brings innovative ideas to expand the Center's reach in Allar/Tulkarim.



BARIYA Revaben (46)
India

Grassroots Forester Shows the Way
This project supports the following SDGs

"I couldn't change my body, but I could change my future. So I built it, brick by brick."

Being a woman in India is never easy. Revaben, from Bangapura village in Gujarat, took on responsibility early, caring for her younger brothers. Married at 12, she balanced house and field work. After returning to her father's home with her young son due to a dispute, and then losing her father, she again became the family's main support. When Revaben learned about SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association), she immediately saw its potential. She began by organizing a women's savings group, then joined a forestry campaign, recognizing its environmental and economic value for farmers. After completing basic forestry training, she traveled with a team from village to village, selling saplings and spreading awareness through songs, posters, and rallies. With profits, she set up a revolving fund to help women launch nursery ventures. Now skilled in local market demands, she grows medicinal plants and fruits like mangoes and lemons. As a campaign leader, she empowers other women with training in nursery raising, vermin composting, and mushroom cultivation. "SEWA is my inspiration and mentor," she repeats often of the organisation which gave her her initial training and became a springboard for her later activities.



THARU Sohorati (60)
Nepal

Empowering Women to Fight for Justice
This project supports the following SDGs

"With WATCH's support, I help women find their voice and build a life beyond hardship."

Sohorati, began organizing the poorest women of her rural Tharu and Musehar communities in her late forties. Most were landless, illiterate, and exploited by a local landlord. When the Nepali NGO WATCH (Women Acting Together for Change) became active in her region, she formed her first women's group and became its chairperson. She launched literacy classes, helped poor children access fee reductions or scholarships, and organized landless laborers, mostly women, into a boycott that forced the landlord to negotiate. As a result, wages more than doubled, working hours were reduced to eight, and snacks were provided. She also encouraged bonded laborers to stand up for their rights. Despite threats, she educated them, set up literacy classes for their wives, and helped 39 families gain freedom, the housing, and independent livelihoods. In recognition of her fearless activism, Sohorati was elected Chairperson of the Women's Awareness Support Group, a federation of 151 women's groups, in 1999 and again in 2004. Her journey proves that it's never too late to lead change, regardless of literacy or background.



NANDO Sutisnawaty (35)
Indonesia

At the Heart of the Tsunami
This project supports the following SDGs

"With RARE's support, I guide communities to protect nature and rebuild hope after disaster."

Tisna exemplifies creativity, courage, and compassionate leadership in sustainable development in Indonesia's Aceh region, hardest hit by the 2004 tsunami. Working with RARE, a US-based nonprofit, she leads an innovative conservation education campaign centered on the Sumatran elephant, fostering strong community participation. A standout achievement is her outreach to local religious leaders, collaborating with imams of various mosques to spread environmental awareness. Despite losing family, friends, and much of her community, Tisna quickly shifted to organizing humanitarian aid and rebuilding education, establishing 12 emergency schools after the disaster. She skillfully integrated conservation into the emergency school curriculum, adapting her campaign to emphasize forest protection's role in preventing natural disasters. Through fresh approaches and tangible support, Tisna restores hope and resilience in communities devastated both physically and emotionally, proving how compassion and innovation can drive lasting change.



KARKI Tara Aryal (32)
Nepal

Reporting for Change and Dignity
This project supports the following SDGs

"Through journalism and community work, I try to give voice to the women no one listens to."

Tara Aryal, working for the past 10 years as a social worker and journalist for a national weekly "Jana Dharana", focuses on the hidden issues of women at the grassroots. Married at 16 with little education, she challenged conservative, patriarchal norms within her family and society. Determined to change her future and help others, she began working to raise awareness on human rights, literacy, education, law, politics, and income-generating skills among illiterate and marginalized rural women. Through her hard-hitting, factual reporting, Tara has helped fight superstition and systemic discrimination. Among the many policy changes Tara catalyzed in her country, one can list the government's decision to give widow allowance (monthly Rs 100) to all widow women, and not only to those over 60 as was previously the case. This decision was included in the 10th Five-Year Plan of the country after Tara's reporting on the situation. The government also decided, that women can get a passport without the signature of male realtions and travel to foreign countries without the permission of husbands. Despite challenges for women journalists in Nepal's patriarchal media landscape, Tara continues to spotlight the injustices rural and widowed women face. Her voice has become a powerful tool for transformation and equity.



SHUXIU Wang (42)

China

"I returned home to give back, one greenhouse, one job, one chance at dignity at a time."

Self-Made Millionaire Returns to Her Village Roots

This project supports the following SDGs



Born in Mancheng County, Hebei province, Wang was adopted by poor peasants and received only one year of schooling. She worked in the fields from a young age and became a construction laborer in Beijing at 15. After completing her apprenticeship, she became a successful entrepreneur, building homes and apartments, and by 31, she was a millionaire. Instead of settling into comfort, Wang returned to her home village, shocked by the deep poverty and environmental degradation. Facing opposition, she leased bulldozers, employed 70 peasants, and invested \$66,000 of her own money to level land and build 20 greenhouses. Just before harvest, a storm destroyed everything. Undeterred, she rebuilt, this time with 50 greenhouses and 13 acres of date trees. Wang also helped 40 households build their own greenhouses, allowing them to multiply their income tenfold. She now provides steady jobs for dozens of women, and many more temporary ones. Though she knows true prosperity is still distant, she believes deeply in progress, and that education holds the key.



BING Zheng (37)

China

A Strong Rope is Made From Many Strands

This project supports the following SDGs



"Through folk dance and shared learning, we found a way to grow stronger, together, as a village."

Zheng, chair of the Peasants Association of Zaizi village, Shanxi Province, began her journey as a teacher occasionally assisting her husband at the local Center for Science and Technology. She soon realized how little practical knowledge farmers had, many overused fertilizers out of superstition. In response, she invited professors to train them; one impromptu winter session on a road drew 400 farmers and lasted four hours. This powerful moment pushed Zheng to leave her secure job and dedicate herself to grassroots education, despite family resistance and financial hardship. An early project to organize women to raise chickens failed due to low-quality feed, reinforcing her belief that women's lack of organization was the root issue. Zheng caught on to the idea of teaching a popular traditional rural folk dance, yangge. Very soon, this became a huge success which she used to organize rural women into debate groups, so as to help change fixed mindsets. Soon, the farmers households were organizing to clear the garbage in the villages, and improve village roads. Women started getting together to weave and make arts and crafts, households pooled their resources, even forming small companies. Now there are 3800 members from 35 villages in the Association, learning to take their fate into their own hands.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



[Click here to go back to the summary](#)

2003





All Women Farmers Club

India

When Women Drive Tractors

This project supports the following SDGs

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In more than 50 villages of Thanjavur District, Tamil Nadu, women were traditionally excluded from public events and development programs. Illupakorai village was no exception, until Mrs. G. Reeta, a former schoolteacher and mother of two, chose to challenge this norm. After resigning to support her husband on the farm, Reeta grew frustrated by the deep-rooted discrimination against women and girls. Despite opposition from men and conservative women, she formed a farm women's group. Their determination caught the attention of the Center for Ecology and Research (CER), which, with support from the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD), helped establish the All Women Farmers Club in Illupakorai. Beginning with 20 members, the Club aimed to build confidence, introduce modern farming techniques, and promote financial inclusion through banking activities. Monthly meetings evolved into a platform for village development and women's empowerment. Today, the village hosts 20 self-help groups with 20–25 members each, proof that collective strength can break longstanding barriers.



BIO YAU BIO NIGAN Amina (39)

Benin

Good Products at Low Prices

This project supports the following SDGs

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"I wanted to show that our traditions can nourish both dignity and livelihoods."

Amina, from Gomparu, has directed the Bio Nigan project in Parakou since 1994. Formerly a secretary, she left her job to preserve traditional biological resources by creating a micro-enterprise that transforms local fruits, vegetables, spices, and roots into syrups, jams, and cosmetics. With no formal training in agro-food production, Amina faced criticism, lack of funding, and scarce materials, but persisted. Her production methods are entirely traditional and organic, avoiding preservatives and artificial coloring. She uses various parts of plants to promote sustainable resource use. Her products are sold at fair prices, making them accessible to low-income communities, especially in rural areas. Today, Bio Nigan products are appreciated across Benin and neighboring countries like Togo, Burkina Faso, and Niger. In a society where women are often relegated to secondary roles, especially in Northern Benin's conservative context, Amina's courage and perseverance helped her build an admired enterprise, one that enables the poor to access high-quality, natural products while celebrating local knowledge and resources.

Association of Austrian Mountain Farmers

Austria

A Play on Rural Life: Cabaret "MISTSTÜCKE"

This project supports the following SDGs

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In 1998, during an educational seminar, eight Austrian women farmers had the bold idea to create a "Cabaret" to humorously portray their lives and raise awareness about agrarian issues. Drawing from personal experiences, they wrote and studied 50 sketches that reflected the contradictory roles women farmers face, juggling farm work, childcare, household duties, and shifting agricultural policies. Their first performance, made up of these scenes, took place that same year. Despite long hours away from their farms, they continued performing, using humor to address topics such as generational conflicts, identity, tourism, and the emotional toll of structural changes in agriculture. By February 2003, the group had performed 40 times, gaining growing recognition for their creative, educational activism. Their work sheds light on the realities of rural women through sharp wit and heartfelt storytelling. The original eight, Maria Gansch, Maria Vogt, Monika Gruber, Evi Katzensteiner-Barth, Christine Gattringer, Helga Krickjil-Stricker, Annemarie Pühringer-Rainer, Annemarie Steyrl, along with new member Gusti Leitner, are supported by art supervisor Beate Leyrer and administrator Monika Mlinar.



CARMONA Aurora (64)

Colombia

The Power of Forgiveness

This project supports the following SDGs

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"With our Association, we chose peace, planting seeds of healing where war once ruled our land."

Aurora lives in the mountainous region of northern Antioquia, Colombia, once under guerrilla control and later plagued by paramilitary violence. After losing her son to the conflict at age 20, Aurora chose a path of peace. In 1991, she founded the "Association of Canon del Porce Women: Awakening to Progress" to support war widows and orphans through a process rooted in respect for life, non-violence, and care for the environment. She launched projects including family and community gardens to promote food self-sufficiency, a guava cooperative that funds school materials through surplus sales, and a fish breeding pond. These are paired with environmental education on recycling and organic waste treatment, and training programs for women in family planning. Despite repeated threats from authorities and armed actors wary of empowering farmers, Aurora continues to lead. Today, the Association includes over 400 members, 40 committees, and 33 coordinators, reaching more than 20,000 people across 10 rural districts. Her work is a courageous stand for peace, sustainability, and community dignity.



MAKONI Betty (32)
Zimbabwe

The Village of Hope
This project supports the following SDGs

"Together with our community, we built a place where girls grow strong and lead change."

While teaching English in Harare, Betty discovered that many of her girl students had been victims of sexual abuse. She formed a support group where they could share their experiences and seek justice. The idea quickly spread, and by 1999, 166 clubs with over 3,000 girls had united to form the Girls Child Network, offering legal aid and organizing public actions, including a 200-km march demanding justice. Realizing the urgent need for empowering the rural girl in the face of sustained abuse. Betty decided in 2001 to build a "safe village" in a rural area that would serve as an information dissemination centre as well as a service- and relief centre. The Rusape Girls Empowerment Village was inaugurated in August 2002 after gaining support and land from local chiefs. Located on the Chitsotso rock, the village includes a counseling room, study and computer centers, a mini-clinic, homes for girls, and a Women as Role Models museum. Local people and girls were involved in the project design and activities that reflect their needs. The village re-emphasizes the dignity of the girl child and thus facilitates their socio-economic development by giving them free space to walk, and the opportunity to work for the development of their communities. Betty has changed the lives of over 2,000 sexually abused girls, and sensitized the whole country.



JARGAL Byatshandaa (45)
Mongolia

Combating Malnutrition
This project supports the following SDGs

"I started the Mongolian Women Farmers Association to help families grow their own food and build better lives."

Byatshandaa knows the struggles of poverty well. After her mother died when she was sixteen, she took on the care of her five younger siblings and her own four children, sewing late into the night to support them. Despite these hardships, she earned a Master's degree in Agronomy from the University in Hovt. With the traditional Mongolian diet consisting mainly of meat, most Mongolians have no experience of vegetable growing. Convinced that an effective way to combat poverty and malnutrition is to teach rural families to feed themselves, Byatshandaa founded in 1999 the Mongolian Women Farmers Association (MFWA) to promote vegetable growing and small-scale farming in Mongolia. She began with a small plot for a training farm, then secured six more hectares from the governor to create a community garden. Each year, 400 poor families receive individual plots and training in vegetable growing. Byatshandaa also runs a soup kitchen feeding about 35 people daily, mostly women and children. Her work extends to health, nutrition, life skills, and income-generating handicrafts. She supports children's vocational farming courses, hosts a weekly program on National Mongolian TV about small-scale farming, and has written two books. With help from 15 local and 1 international volunteer, she tirelessly works to improve rural lives.



MORALES LLERENA Dina Emilia (57)
Peru

**An Indigenous Leader
"Ricchari warmi"
("Wake-up woman" in quechua)**
This project supports the following SDGs

"My goal is to empower women through practical skills that improve health and livelihoods in our community."

Dina, an indigenous woman from Andahuaylas, Apurimac province, comes from a family of 10 without water or electricity. Witnessing the discrimination and marginalization of her community, she began organizing at age 20, leading the local Infrastructure and Works Committee to improve access to sanitary services. Dedicated to her people's development, Dina has been active in multiple local associations, focusing especially on the rights of marginalized women and housewives. In 1973, she launched the region's first community radio. Later, in 1985, she earned a social sciences grant to study in Moscow. Returning to Peru, Dina transformed her home into a sewing workshop, literacy center, a popular restaurant, where 50 housewives cook daily for 160 women and children, and established quail breeding to provide jobs to migrant women fleeing violence in cities. Quail breeding was not part of the local culture and Dina had to teach herself how to do it before teaching it to others. Today, several women have an income from quail breeding and villagers have access to a good protein source at a fair prize.



NKORO Eugénie Nouale (42)
Cameroon

Defending Pygmies' Rights
This project supports the following SDGs

"Protecting our land and traditions starts with women having tools, voice, and dignity to act."

Eugénie Nouale, is a Bakola pygmy woman from Nkouonguio, South Cameroon. Pygmies (as many indigenous peoples in the world) are torn between preserving their traditional culture, including their deep connection to the forest on one hand, and adapting to the values of a modern consumer society on the other. In addition, they suffer from being rejected and marginalized and are often used as cheap labour. Eugénie promotes integrated development through agriculture, cattle breeding, and the use of indigenous traditional medicine. She encourages women to adopt sustainable, diversified farming practices as deforestation continues to threaten their traditional way of life. A traditional healer herself, she is dedicated to passing on indigenous knowledge to the youth, using only local plants. Eugénie Nouale Nkoro organised awareness raising activities for pygmy women to obtain identity cards allowing them to vote, and encouraged them to get actively involved by putting their names on voting lists for visibility, and to be heard. She also acts as negotiator in land conflicts with the neighbouring Bantu tribe to ensure space for Pygmies. Eugenie had to overcome many obstacles in fighting for Pygmies' rights and had to face blackmail. She is a true leader and role model.



MILANÉS GARCÍA Francisca Eugenia (37)

Cuba

"With small steps and shared hands, we grew food where there was once only garbage."

From Garbage Dump to Organic Agriculture

This project supports the following SDGs

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Francisca Eugenia, from Granma province, was inspired by Cuba's National movement of urban agriculture which aims at encouraging fruit and vegetable consumption. In response, she took on the challenge of transforming a 246 m² illegal waste dump into an organic farm. Despite skepticism from locals, she began clearing the site with her husband and a group of volunteers. Soil analysis conducted by experts from her former agricultural employer confirmed the land's suitability. With determination, Francisca began cultivating and selling produce locally, using a "Byci-charge," a bicycle with a trailer, typically used by men due to its physical demands, for eco-friendly deliveries. Francisca also sensitised villagers during exhibitions and fares on the necessity of consuming more fruit and vegetables, and created circles of interest for pupils at the village school. Thanks to her creativity and hard work, some 600 women and children and 66 elderly receive each day Francisca's organic fruits and vegetables. Waste is now collected by the local administration and disposed of in specifically equipped areas.



HASSANE Hadjara (40)

Niger

"I protect the palmyrah so it can keep feeding, healing, and sheltering those who depend on it."

Don't Kill the "Mother of Trees"

This project supports the following SDGs

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Hadjara, from M'Botche village, comes from a family of traditional healers with deep knowledge of local plants. Her passion for trees led her to become a warden in a nearby natural reserve, home to hundreds of palmyrah trees (*Borassus aethiopum* Mart). This towering species, vital to rural life, provides food, materials for crafts and shelter, as well as medicinal resources, earning it the name "mother of trees" among locals. But over-exploitation now threatens its survival. Three times a week, Hadjara patrols the reserve, walking for hours, at dawn and again from late afternoon until dark, to stop poachers and shepherds whose animals damage young shoots and flowers. It demands a lot of courage to keep up this rhythm, walking hours across woods and convince the guilty of the damage they cause to this "mother of trees" (as the local call it) and to themselves. She also amends repeated offenders and conducts them to the village chief. Because of her staunchness and efficiency, Hadjara represents the pride of village women and is listened to in men's closed circles. She is now responsible for training all wardens in Parakou in neighboring Benin.



BARAZÉ Haoua (50)

Niger

Standing Up for Girls' Schooling

This project supports the following SDGs

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"When a girl stays in school, a whole community learns to hope differently."

Haoua, from the Karakara Province, married a rich trader and discovered material wealth on one side and the hell of confinement on the other. She escaped her golden cage when her husband died in a plane crash. Traumatized by the event, Haoua found some joy in life again by teaching school. She also got involved in politics and was elected Deputy in 1993 and 1994. Sick of political games and the machismo of men politicians, she decided to serve the women's and girls' cause by fighting for girls' schooling. She travels to villages convincing parents to send their daughters to school and allow them to complete their studies. She also has to convince the teachers and the girls of the importance of educating girls. Haoua doesn't hesitate to fight when necessary and lodged complaints against parents who, attracted by material goods, wanted to take their daughters out of school to marry them off. Haoua carries out these activities some times alone and at other times with local organisations she helped create. She is President of the Taémakon Ilimin Mata Association (ATIM), and, thanks to her, girl's school enrolment rates are up 50% in the 26 schools which are part of the education program implemented by ATIM. A number of development partners seek Haoua's advice and support.



AWAN Khalida Bibi (39)

Pakistan

"With thread and seeds, I found a way for women to grow hope from their own knowledge."

Creating a Local Seed Bank

This project supports the following SDGs

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Khalida Bibi from Takya village (North West Province of Pakistan) married at 17 and has six children. To increase the family income she created flower sketches to decorate clothes and bed covers. In 1996, she benefited from a development program which empowered her to apply for credit to buy three sewing machines in order to open a small vocational center in her own home. So far, Khalida has trained 40 women. She is also very active in biodiversity conservation and her great knowledge of indigenous seeds made her popular in the village. She can evaluate seed quality and water requirements by only holding them in her hands. Her household became a village seed bank with more than 70 kinds of seeds from different crops. She grows both indigenous and hybrid seeds to test their productivity and conserve only the best quality that she then distributes to other women farmers in the village. Khalida is now an example in her village where women see that they can benefit from their indigenous knowledge and that even an illiterate woman can generate income and improve family living conditions.



S. RAJSEKHAR Leela (42)

India

Educating Tribal Women and Children

This project supports the following SDGs



"We built homes, taught skills, and stayed, because change begins when people believe their village is worth it."

Leela joined the Intercultural Cooperation Foundation (ICF) India in 1991 as a secretary, supporting its mission of rural development, women's empowerment, and education. She has played a pivotal role in Amboth Tanda, a Lambada tribal village 60 km southeast of Hyderabad. When she arrived, only 3% of women were literate, the average family had 6.74 children, and rural exodus was high due to lack of housing and job prospects. Leela's first step was to curb rural exodus. She mobilized the community, especially women, to join a self-help housing project, leading to the construction of 100 eco-friendly mud houses. Leela then addressed family planning by educating parents on the importance of having fewer children, but in better health. In 1992, ICF started a part-time school in Amboth Tanda but initially parents were reluctant to send their children to school as they did not understand the importance of education, which deprived them of valuable help on farms and households. In 1993, a regular primary school was established and today 690 children are enrolled. Leela also conducted vocational training classes in embroidery, handicrafts, masonry, etc. to open up job opportunities to village youth. Thanks to her vision and persistence, Amboth Tanda has become a model for rural development and community-led change.



MARTINEZ DE KRONG Lilian (39)

Paraguay

Mobilising Housewives for a Better Life

This project supports the following SDGs



"Together, we turned simple skills into hope and strength for our families and community."

Lilian, a mother of four from the rural community of Obligado, now lives in Natalio, where she volunteers to uplift local women. In 2001, she organized housewives to improve living conditions, education, and the environment, founding the "Souls of Houses" Association (Amas de Casa), uniting 425 women across 17 committees. Each group focuses on specific activities such as fruit and vegetable cultivation, natural soap and shampoo production, and jam making. This collective strength led Lilian to create the first milk producers' association in Natalio, which now supplies milk daily to seven schools, reaching 1,310 children. The Association also organizes information days on critical themes for women (sex education, breast cancer, etc.) and gives training workshops to rural women on cloth production, sewing, silk painting, food, and recycling. On their way to success, Lilian and association members had to face and overcome criticism and sarcasm of community members, and men in particular, who didn't believe (or didn't want to) in housewives' potential. The "Ama de Casa" showed them they needed to revive their stand.



ROMERO RAMOS Luz Margarita (38)

Peru

Natural Medecine Available to All

This project supports the following SDGs



"From plants and perseverance, we built a way to care for our people and ourselves."

Luz Margarita grew up in a very poor family. Her parents didn't have the chance to have any education and their life was precarious. But Luz Margarita was thirsty for learning and decided to continue her secondary studies by migrating to the city of Arequipa without any financial assistance or help from her family. Today, Luz Margarita is married and is mother of two. She lives in the Cotahuasi province, located at 2'500 meters altitude. 99 per cent of the Cotahuasi people live in extreme poverty. For several years, Luz Margarita dedicated all her spare time volunteering in different grassroots women's organisations. In 2001, she founded the Association of Cotahuasi Women (Asociación distrital de mujeres de Cotahuasi - ADIMUC) that regroups more than 10 grassroots organisations. Its objective is to form groups of women wanting to dedicate their spare time to handicraft activities for income generation. Luz Margarita, having learnt from her mother the use of medicinal plants since she was a child, decided to use her knowledge and skills for the well-being of the community (many women and children could not afford to buy medicines) and created the "Llankac Warmi" committee, an organisation where women collect and traditionally transform medicinal plants into oil extracts, healing pomades and other derived products that they sell on local markets.



PONCE HANCCO Marcelina (32)

Peru

Fighting for Indigenous Women and Children's Rights

This project supports the following SDGs



"We lost so much, but by standing together, we found strength to speak, defend, and rebuild."

Marcelina is an indigenous woman from the "Alpaqueras" tribe. At the age of 9, with her mother seriously ill, Marcelina had to assume the tasks of a housewife in addition to helping her father in the fields. Terrorism (which raged in the region for many years) later killed her father and her husband. More than 5000 people have been assassinated between 1980 and 1993, leaving behind widows and orphans. Despite being emotionally destroyed by these events, Marcelina decided to organise orphans and widows to help claim their rights, and organised women victims of social violence to have their voices heard. Marcelina also courageously fights against mining companies that contaminate community fields, making them useless for farming and killing livestock. She created the first association of indigenous women in the region (l'Asociación Mujeres Alpaqueras Indigenas de la Region - AMAR" (meaning "to love" in Spanish) to enable them to defend their rights as well as those of other women in the region. In March 2003, Marcelina organised the first congress of Alpaqueras Indigenous Women from the Puno's region.



BENAVIDES Marta (57)

El Salvador

Creating a Culture of Peace

This project supports the following SDGs



"We plant peace and knowledge in the soil, so our communities can grow with dignity and care."

Marta, works on social transformation through culture in rural and urban areas and has been forced to exile because of her commitment to peace and justice due to her work for and with indigenous communities. Since the signing of the Peace Accords, Marta worked directly with rural peasant cooperatives settled on land mortgaged as part of land reform. She organized trainings for adults and youth on soil management, water quality, organic farming, conflict resolution, etc. She also educated campesinos on legal and monetary arrangements regarding settlements. In 1998, on a small farm North of San Salvador, Marta led the construction of a demonstration permaculture farm in collaboration with local communities and the University of El Salvador. The farm is now an education center for schools, teachers and families on ecology and sound agricultural practices including community building, education for a culture of peace and conflict resolution. Nearly 400 people received training. In the small community of Nahuizalco, Marta developed an ecological house where youth and adult training sessions are held on ecological sustainability, water quality, organic farming, etc. 700 people have been trained to date. Her commitment to peace and justice has meant years of personal sacrifice, including money, career advances and personal possessions.



CHOKRI Mbirika (74)

Tunisia

A Biological Brooder

This project supports the following SDGs



"I used what I had dung, eggs, patience, and found a way to feed more than just my family."

Mbirika from El-Karia village, earned her livelihood with agriculture, livestock- and especially poultry breeding. The whole region is very poor, the soil is dry and living conditions are harsh. Five years ago, Mbirika's only hen suddenly died, leaving behind eggs ready to hatch. Not knowing what to do with these eggs that represented an important source of food, Mbirika put them in the dung. After a few days she discovered that the chicks were hatching. Mbirika decided to re-do the experiment and developed a method used till today. She puts the eggs with a bit of straw and feathers in plastic bags (to keep the humidity) and places the plastic bags containing 16 to 20 eggs each in holes in the dung, covers them with a piece of cardboard and adds a thin layer of dung on top. Mbirika was so successful that soon her house was full of hens and she started to offer some to her neighbors. Her innovation became famous in the region and she has been invited to present her technique on local TV and on the radio. Since then she has been working together with researchers and developers to build premises adapted to her technique. A local development program is being set up by specialists from the Training Center of Sidi Thabet to disseminate her innovation in other rural areas.

SÉNE N'Dew (60)

Senegal

Fighting Unauthorized Tourism Development

This project supports the following SDGs



"We protected this land so our daughters could work it, not watch it disappear into someone else's dream."

N'Dew from the Lébou tribe, is President of the women's group of the local committee of fisheries and development in the village of Sendou (Commune de Rufisque, coast of Senegal). Sendou is under strong land pressure from the elites in the capital and foreign tourism promoters who want to build hotels and bungalows which would chase away the local inhabitants. Tourism development has a negative impact on coastal communities, in particular on fishermen and women, who are traditional fish transformers. Aware of this plight, N'Dew Séne sensitized local authorities, NGOs and the population to raise awareness concerning the problems caused by tourism in terms of land and resource access. N'Dew Séne organized women in the village and together they managed to regain a valuable area formerly set aside for tourist development. This "reserve", located between two major tourist areas, is exclusively dedicated to women's activities in fishery and agriculture. Thanks to Ms. Séne, Sendou women can ensure the necessary income for their families to survive and guarantee sustainability of traditional activities. This local initiative is also an example for other local communities threatened by mass tourism.



PRIYESH Neela Thangavelu (36)

India

Fighting for the Land

This project supports the following SDGs



"With courage and care, we reclaim land and dignity for the poorest among us."

Neela Thangavelu from the Salem district of Tamil Nadu, was inspired by Mother Theresa's work and decided to work with downtrodden people in rural areas. Being a single mother (a huge handicap in India) and suffering from a physical disability never discouraged Neela. Alone, she formed no less than 141 women's self-help groups, representing more than 3000 women living under the poverty line who benefited from Neela's training. Her other main battle was the land issue. In rural areas of the Salem district, local politicians illegally occupied many acres of unused land leaving many rural people homeless. Neela, with the help of local and district governing bodies, managed to get back the land, although the illegal occupants threatened her life. Today, more than 500 poor families own their plots of land and many of them built houses with bank loans negotiated by Neela. In addition, she organized numerous awareness campaigns on the rampant issues of alcohol, tobacco and female infanticide. She also fights child labor and gives numerous free empowerment trainings to the most disadvantaged rural community members (handicapped, widows, illiterates). Neela is a powerful combination of staunchness and dedication.



Nyuiemedi KOUGBLENOU (44)

Togo

"Together, we bring mobility and hope to those too often forgotten in our communities."

Helping Handicapped Rural People

This project supports the following SDGs



For many years, Nyuiemedi dedicated her time and an important part of her meager income to a category of people ignored by all in rural areas, the handicapped.

In 2002, aware that she alone could only give very limited assistance, she contacted the local NGO "Association for sustainable promotion of disadvantaged women" (l'Association pour la Promotion Durable de la Femme Défavorisée NPFD) to draw attention to the very harsh living conditions of the handicapped and the economic burden put on their families, mainly women who are the sole care-givers in Togo. By doing this, she succeeded in mobilizing the necessary funds to buy 5 wheel-chairs and crutches for the handicapped of her village.

Nyuemedi's action generated collaboration between APDFD and "Joni and Friends," an international NGO focusing on the handicapped. This partnership permitted the acquisition of 12 additional wheel-chairs and 6 pairs of crutches for four other rural communities.

Nyuemedi had to overcome many cultural, logistical and financial obstacles so as to be able to fulfill the basic needs of disabled people. Her perseverance and courage finally opened the eyes of local organisations and the Church and they are now joining forces to promote human dignity.



VIKTOROWNA Ossipowa Tatjana (53)

Russian Federation

"We can do it"

This project supports the following SDGs



"With creativity and teamwork, we transform our village and build hope from the ground up."

Born in 1950 in the village of Iljinka (District of Jaroslaw), Tatjana founded in 1997 the farm "Sibirjatschka" and accomplished the impossible. Not only was she able to establish a model farm, she also showed the whole village how much can be done if things are undertaken creatively. In 1993 the Ossipow family returned to their home village after the Kolchoses closed down. Although Tatjana had been a teacher, she started to milk cows on the farm of a local farmer and committed herself to the farm life. When her husband returned from the army to the village, he found that Tatjana was already managing a dairy farm where the whole family is now involved. The farm income enables her family not only to live, although in difficult conditions, but also to support neighbors and other village people with food. Tatjana also organized a community center where women could learn from each other and also discuss problems, exchange experiences and give help to one another. Many farms in the village have improved since then as well as the quality of life. Other women are following her example because Tatjana's saying "we can do it" inspired them. Tatjana is an example for all who wish to start an enterprise from scratch. Her perseverance and creativity engineered her success.



SELL Rosa (40)

Brazil

Reviving Traditional Farming Methods

This project supports the following SDGs



"By blending tradition and science, we nurture the earth and nourish our children's future."

Rosa learnt very early in life to value simple things. Married at 18, together with her husband and three kids, she cultivated small crops and vegetable gardens to give their children a healthy upbringing. But city life was not fulfilling their need for a healthy life-style.

In 1997, they heard about a government program assisting rural people to go back to the countryside. Rosa and her family moved to Paulo Lopes, a small town where they started organic farming based on traditional methods such as moon phases and values such as respect for the earth. For the other farmers of the region, Rosa's methods were considered "obsolete" while using pesticides and GMOs were considered "modern." These beliefs were an obstacle for selling their products. Rosa realized that she had to complement what she knew intuitively with academic arguments. She went back to school at 38 and learned about agro-ecology and the dangers of genetically modified products. She then initiated an Organic Farmers' market in the center of Florianopolis where local farmers trade since 1999 for self-sufficiency. She now leads a movement for organic food production. Rosa Sell was one of the main supporters of a bill passed in Congress which states that all public schools should provide organic food meals for children.



Rural Women's Association "Alga"

Kyrgyzstan

Taking Control of Our Lives

This project supports the following SDGs



The independence of Kyrgyzstan and its transition to the market economy had some negative impacts especially on rural women living in the least favorable conditions and representing 70 per cent of the poor population of Kyrgyzstan. Olga Janaeva, with a few friends, visited local establishments to understand their challenges. In January 1995, the Rural Women's NGO "Alga" (meaning "forward" in Kyrgyz) was founded as a voluntary public organization.

Its mission: to improve rural women's status and standard of living via stimulation of women's awareness of their realities, develop their capacity for personal development, strengthen their participation in development activities, and advocate for their rights. Olga Janaeva, Founder and Director of Alga, sees a source of leadership in these women which needs only to be tapped. The Alga organization has three main programs: prevention of violence against women; training in leadership development and women's rights; and reproductive health and family planning, all part of the rural women's empowerment program. In addition, Alga created an information-consultation educational center where women can access services that were not available before. It is not exaggerated to say that Alga radically transformed the life of many rural people.



J. RAJPOOT Shameem Araa (30)

Pakistan

"Together, we found our voices and strength to protect our community and build our future."

When Women Cross the Doorstep

This project supports the following SDGs



Shameem Araa lives in the hilly village of Keyan where the very conservative culture restricts women's mobility between 14 and 35 years. This means that they are socially excluded and cannot work outside the house. But Shameem is a single-minded person who fought her family and the tradition for two years to marry the man she chose. Led by her desire to gain some independence and generate some income, Shameem started breeding a goat and sold the offspring. When she heard that a development foundation had created a local women's committee in a nearby village she contacted the organization and mobilized women so that in 1997, the "Rahber Welfare Society for Women" was established in Keyan. Women benefited from different training programs, such as knitting, preventive health care, civic rights and social mobilization. Through this program and committee, 20 women received loans, learnt to raise their voices and were even able to influence local decision-making. The Women's committee opposed the construction of a garbage pit in a location they considered inappropriate and managed to block its construction for two months while negotiating with the men in the village. Because of Shameem's determination and energy, Keyan women crossed the doorstep to the benefit of all villagers.



PANAITE Silvia (53)

Romania

Help to Help Themselves

This project supports the following SDGs



"Real change begins when every voice, especially women's, is heard and included in shaping the future."

Silvia is Director of a local NGO "EU-RO Consult" whose mission is to assist people in rural areas to apply for programs launched by the Public administration and to find funds for the improvement of the quality of life and communication between the Government, public administration and citizens. Silvia first started to look for representatives (mainly local counsellors and mayors) in each of the 56 rural communities in Galati county (a rural area of 43'000 people) who would become development promoters. With the assistance of EU-RO volunteers they prepared local economic and social development plans and identified the most urgent needs. Silvia Panaite organised an important information campaign about rural development plans, and conducted training for writing project proposals to the Public administration. She always ensured that women were included in training programs, helping them to access positions never dreamt of in rural Romania. In each village Silvia worked individually and in small groups to determine their capabilities. Silvia was able to motivate local mayors to actively engage in development activities, raise funds for their projects and include rural people and especially women in the decision-making process. Silvia often gives assistance to the Roma gypsies who are the very marginalized nomads of Romania.



HOFFMAN Theresa Secord

USA

Reviving Native Indian's Basketry

This project supports the following SDGs



"We weave more than baskets, we weave identity, language, and hope back into our communities."

Theresa, a member of the Penobscot Nation, one of the four remaining Native tribes in Maine, left a lucrative job in economic geology to support her community after a land claim settlement. One of her most impressive accomplishments was defeating a U.S. Department of Energy proposal for a nuclear waste dump on tribal land. (All round the planet, governments have dumped such waste on tribal lands, at an immense health cost to tribal populations). When she moved to the Penobscot reservation in 1984, tribal traditions and language were fading. After learning traditional basket weaving, she founded the Maine Indian Basket Weavers Alliance (MIBA), a rare inter-tribal initiative that many believed would fail due to tribal independence. However, thanks to Theresa's vision, political acumen and first-hand knowledge of basketry, the venture blossomed beyond people's fondest hopes. The success of MIBA can be measured not only in the revival of an imperilled art, but also the renaissance of the tribal language and culture, not to mention the renewal of self-confidence and pride. The average age of members dropped from 63 to 43, more youth are training through year-long apprenticeships, and an 86-page basketry guide was published. Basket value rose from \$10 to \$90, transforming a fading art into a sustainable livelihood for Native women.



MATHEW Thresiamma (57)

India

Building Walls of Confidence

This project supports the following SDGs



"We taught women to build walls, but also to break the ones that kept them from dignity and fair wages."

Thresiamma, a graduate in Home Science and Social Development from Canada, returned to Kerala and became Health Education Officer at the Socio Economic Unit of Kerala in Thrissur. Tasked with implementing water and sanitation projects through community participation, she oversaw the construction of hundreds of latrines. Traditionally, male masons would have done this with women as helpers. Thresiamma noted that in the construction sector, while women were performing hard tasks such as carrying stones, sand and cement, they did not earn half the wages of the masons and faced social stigma and endured abuses of all kinds by male superiors. In 1989, she founded the Jeevapoorna Women Masons' Society (JEEWOMS) to train women, most of them illiterate and below the poverty line, as professional masons. Her biggest challenge was overcoming traditional taboos and skepticism among the women themselves. Since then, over 1,200 women have been trained, constructing more than 15,000 latrines and 100 homes. Thresiamma also includes training on personal development, literacy, and social awareness. Thresiamma's initiative shattered gender stereotypes by equipping poor women with skills, dignity, and the ability to earn a fair livelihood.



ADETONA Victoria (54)

Nigeria

Micro-credit for Rural Women

This project supports the following SDGs

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Victoria, born into a poor family, succeeded in getting an education and worked over 15 years for the Women and Development Committee in local government in Oke Ogun, Nigeria. As a secretary, she mobilized women to participate in community development. After receiving training in credit management, Victoria founded Rural Searchlight Nigeria (RUSEL) in 1997, a grassroots NGO focused on poverty alleviation through empowering women. RUSEL provides microcredit to the poorest in the Oke-Ogun area of Oyo State, mainly women. It operates through lending to groups of 10–25 people, who then manage internal lending and repayments. Despite communication challenges in rural areas, RUSEL has reached 62 groups, 75% of them women's groups, impacting around 1,000 people. Many formerly unemployed women are now farmers or traders. RUSEL stands out by offering monthly interest rates instead of a lump sum, making loans more accessible. It also offers training in credit management, marketing, and HIV/AIDS awareness. Victoria's leadership proves that women can excel even in male-dominated societies and lift others along the way.



FENGYAN Wang (43)

China

Breeding Angleworms for Prosperity

This project supports the following SDGs

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Wang, from Yuelong Town in Ninghe County, Tianjin, lived as a humble peasant until 1991, when a magazine article on angleworm breeding changed her life. Also known as earth-dragon, this type of earthworm enriches soil fertility and has become increasingly valued in organic farming worldwide. Inspired, Wang contacted agricultural experts in Tianjin and Beijing who supported her with training and 5 kg of free angleworm grubs. That year, she successfully bred 100 kg of worms in her 200 m² backyard. With continued guidance from Tianjin Agriculture University, she expanded her operation to 300 m², took a bank loan, and soon developed a 50,000 m² feedlot. Within a year, she repaid her loan and began earning a solid income. Determined to help others, Wang launched the Angleworm Business Website (www.qiuyin.com.cn), building a breeding network that now includes 200 rural women and families. Even unemployed urban women joined the initiative, learning and working on Wang's feedlot. With her assistance, 200 local women and families began to breed angleworms and work their way out of poverty.



ZHILAN Wang (43)

China

Working Against Odds

This project supports the following SDGs

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Wang Zhilan was born to a poor peasant family in Ding Xian County, Shanxi Province, in 1960, married a widower with two children and gave up teaching to be a full time mother and wife, with her husband working as a carpenter to support the family. To improve their lives, the couple decided to raise sheep and bought about 100 Xinjiang sheep with fine wool in 1989. The number of sheep doubled within three years. Then Wang started raising pigs and tried to grow corn on her 6 hectares of land with the use of plastic sheets. Production doubled. She then bought a fodder grinder and made her own fodder. Gradually she combined farming, breeding and processing and became more successful. In 1999, Wang and her husband made up their minds to contract about 1476 hectares of barren hillsides and poor land: about 810 hectares for growing trees and 660 hectares for grass. They wanted to turn their hometown into a rich and prosperous place. Every year Wang provides part time jobs for more than 40 people and encourages villagers to actively participate in planting trees to improve the local environment and increase their income.



Women's Group determined to win (GMDV)

Brazil

Cultivating Organic Food for Healthier Living

This project supports the following SDGs

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In 1995, Francisca de Lourdes da Silva, from the Mulungunzinho settlement, formed The 'Group of Women Determined to Win' (GMDV). Struggles started within every home, facing opposition of husbands who did not understand the need for meetings and refused to take care of the children during the short periods when the women were absent from home. Coming from rural areas, ranging from 25-45 years, they had all been impacted by drought and were torn between a working day at home and in the fields. Their most important step toward self-determination came with an incomegenerating project in Mulungunzinho. By clearing 1.5 hectare of land, they started meat production and poultry raising. Then, in 1999, came the idea of growing organic vegetables. It was a pioneer project in their State and the small number of women putting it into practice was in itself a challenge. On this 1.5 ha piece of land, initially planned for poultry, now grow beds of salad, spinach, carrots, sweet peppers, onions and various fruits and vegetables. In addition the group of women deliver weekly baskets with a variety of vegetables to consumers, thereby uniting producers and consumers. Thanks to the Women's group, Mulungunzinho counts today 112 families, an agricultural village, a school, and receives regular visits from a mobile health centre and rainwater tanks.



GUANGLAN Zeng (50) China

“Empowered women lift communities, together, we can grow, lead, and transform our village.”

Changing Mentalities

This project supports the following SDGs

Zeng from Le Du County of Qinghai Province, was concerned about the obstacle to development caused by the conservative way of thinking of women in her village, Da Zhuang. She started to organize cultural activities on International Women’s Day. At first, few women attended but gradually women enjoyed meeting together and began to express their opinions in public. Zeng planted coat potatoes and taught other villagers how to do so. She then started sheep husbandry and offered lambs to poor villagers, so they could start their own husbandry activities and thus generate income. Zeng sensitized the villagers on the need to conserve the environment by planting trees on a barren hill that covered 20 hectares. By joining forces, they planted an area of 100 hectares. In 2002, Zeng was elected Deputy Director of the village committee, the first woman ever elected to this position in the village. With her determination she helped women gain confidence in themselves and demonstrated to men that empowered women can make a difference.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates

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2002



GAILITE Agrita (38)

Latvia

"We bring back the wisdom of herbs to heal our bodies and reconnect with nature, one village at a time."

Rescuing Traditional Knowledge of Medicinal Plants

This project supports the following SDGs



As a child, Agrita learned to use herbs for their medicinal value, a skill handed down to her from her parents and grandparents. She studied pharmacy and, in 1992, established the first pharmacy in her village of Kalsnava (Madona District), an ecological pharmacy selling herbs grown on her small certified organic farm.

To do this meant overcoming many legal barriers due to the dominance of chemical pharmaceuticals in modern life. Last year Agrita also founded a local health club to promote healthy life styles in her village. She educates the villagers on the use of herbs, healthy food and the use of the traditional sauna for health reasons.

She initiated the local branch of the Asthma Patients Association and organises activities to improve their health, such as walks in the mountains, and summer camps for asthmatic children. In addition, Agrita opened up a bookstore called "Herbs for your Health".



T. MERCY Annapoorni (37)

India

Opportunities for Women and Children

This project supports the following SDGs



"We use theatre and training to help women and children find safer, dignified paths to live and work."

Annapoorni began to help rural women of the Virudhunagar and Sivakasi area (Tamil Nadu) by organising awareness programs, action oriented workshops and vocational training sessions to enable them to seek employment other than in the fire and match industries or the sex industry. Six thousand women were thus organised into self-help groups.

As a result of her activities, women have more confidence in themselves and show leadership qualities, and are able to save money. Some have taken up non-traditional employment such as running minibuses. Many freed themselves from bonded labour and bought land to farm. Annapoorni's creative communication skills through the use of people's theatre have enlightened many on critical issues such as family planning, reproductive health, AIDS prevention, environmental issues and labour rights. This technique has made it easier for illiterate people to reveal and discuss certain personal and hygiene problems. Annapoorni has given special attention to children employed in the match industries, by means of schools and non-formal education centers leading to alternative employment.

She also established a HIV/AIDS Care and Support Center and a Family Counselling Center.



BALOUCH Amber (25)

Pakistan

Fighting Women's Exclusion from Education

This project supports the following SDGs



"We opened doors where there were none, education and skills are now part of every village woman's story."

Amber, from the village of Ketti Khushk (Teshil Kandiaro, Khaipur, Sindh), grew up in a culture where women are not allowed to get an education. Lucky to have parents who rejected these customs and allowed her to study, Amber decided to dedicate her life to uplift rural women and began working in 1995 with non-governmental organisations. In 1999, she created the Society for Women Development, working in the Khaipur district of Sindh. Working day and night scheduling meetings with villagers, she created the "Project for the establishment of Non-formal Basic Education Community Schools". She opened non-formal basic education schools in 37 villages, serving 420 boys and 825 girls, and created two vocational training centers for training women in sewing, dressmaking, embroidery, glass and fabric painting thus enabling them to earn an income.

This demanded courage and perseverance to motivate men to allow the women to attend these trainings. Little by little the success of her programs ended up convincing them.

Amber has also opened a display center to sell handicrafts made by the women.



AROKIASAMY Anthoniammal (51)

India

Innovative Vermicomposting for Organic Agriculture

This project supports the following SDGs



"By sharing what I've learned, I hope more women can farm with dignity, naturally and sustainably."

Until 1996, Anthoniammal Arokiasamy from Tiruvalarsolai village (Trichy District, Tamil Nadu), a farmer woman with limited formal education, was not making much income from her two acres of land. After attending a one-day course in Vermi-composting, she experimented for three years developing a new methodology utilizing pre-digested leaf waste and cow dung slurry, which is easier to handle than the conventional method.

Her method has been adopted all over Tamil Nadu and Anthoniammal now trains other women and was even invited by the State Department of Agriculture to train agricultural officers at the state level. She never uses chemical pesticides and fertilizers and is a source of information on vermicomposting and organic farming in Tamil Nadu.



KOUNETSRON Apéfa (47)

Togo

Reviving Ancestral Soap Making Methods

This project supports the following SDGs



“Our soap is more than cleaning, it’s a step toward self-reliance and hope for our community.”

Apéfa Kounetsron (47) from Kpodzi (Department of Kloto) created a small soap factory all on her own by rediscovering an ancestral method using palm oil as a base to produce natural soap which is very effective for cleaning without irritating the skin. Together with 14 other women she produces 100-250 kilos of soap a day. In addition to her soap business, Apéfa is a seamstress and makes free school uniforms to encourage neglected children and adolescents to continue their schooling. With her own money she organises prizes to reward students for their achievements. She also counsels couples in an attempt to prevent domestic violence thus acting as an advocate for homemaker’s rights.



JAISWAL Durgaben (40)

India

Improving Rural Life

This project supports the following SDGs



“With small steps and shared learning, women can build stronger families and thriving villages.”

Durgaben from Bilasia village (Daskroi Taluka, Ahmedabad District, Gujarat State) married into a very poor family. Determined to escape hardship, she got work as a labourer and began saving a little bit every month. Despite the opposition of her husband’s family, she cultivated a wheat field producing three crops per year, which enabled her to repay her debts. When the non-governmental organisation SEWA suggested women start a milk co-operative, Durgaben was the only one to volunteer to take up the leadership despite opposition from her family and harassment of the middlemen who bought milk at low prices to sell at great profit. She learned to keep records for the cooperative and encouraged other women to take various training courses to improve their abilities. She started a childcare center and began visiting the panchayat (local government). By means of small loans she was able to improve her home and buy her husband a rickshaw to earn an income, as he didn’t have a good job. Little by little her life began to improve and also that of the village as women followed her example. Women in the village now know that with courage, patience, enthusiasm and some training, they can accomplish much to uplift themselves and their village.



WEERASEKERA Bandara Menike (43)

Sri Lanka

Leading Women Towards Development and Peace

This project supports the following SDGs



“Empowering rural women with self-sufficiency and peace, because lasting change starts from the community.”

At age 20, Bandara, presently a teacher in the rural community of Bandara Dampitiya (Pihimbiya Ratmale, Hettipola), created a thrift and credit society in her village, mobilised villagers to grow their own food thus teaching women to be self-sufficient. She taught villagers to prepare nutritious food based on vegetables and locally available fish products. Bandara Menike launched a program to make men aware of the negative effects of their drinking habits on women, educated youth in environmental conservation, and published articles on environmental topics. She has been instrumental in obtaining government services for her community and has worked with banks to obtain credit facilities for women. Bandara Menike has also been very active in peacemaking efforts in her community, which was affected by political riots and civil war. Beginning with meetings and workshops with rural women in her community, she organised a Women’s front to demand peace, a movement that extended to a national level. She also promoted inter-religious dialogue and non-violence, helped war widows organise income generating activities, and provided foodstuffs and clothes to poor people displaced by war.



GOMEZ IXMATA Catarina Eleuterio (39)

Guatemala

Education for the Mayas

This project supports the following SDGs



“Our work is to keep our culture alive and help women find their rightful place in the community.”

Catarina from a poor Mayan family from the village of Nahuala, was lucky to be offered an education through a nun for whom her mother washed clothes. This was not easy as it meant being away from her family until grade six. Returning to her village of Nahuala, Catarina worked by day and studied by night to finish high school. In 1992 she joined the Mayan NGO Pop Atziak and created an education project, which provides scholarships to young Mayans, including training in the Mayan language and culture so they do not lose their cultural identity. Priority is given to students committed to their communities. In 1992, Catarina also organised an association to include the participation of women in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the village despite opposition from the men and also from the Catholic and Evangelical churches. The association also revived traditional music and mime groups and created a weaving exhibition to promote high standards in weaving and help find market outlets. Catarina also organises seminars for women on basic hygiene, nutrition, Mayan culture and public speaking. Two years ago she became a Mayan priestess and is called upon to conduct healing ceremonies. She is pursuing a degree in social work while at the same time attending to all her other activities.



SMAKAJ Diellë (40)

Albania

"I want to open doors for blind people, especially women, so they can live with dignity and hope."

A Helping Hand for the Rural Blind

This project supports the following SDGs



Diellë from the village of Bratash (Malesia e Madhe district) having been born with very poor eyesight, decided to dedicate her life to helping the blind people of her isolated mountainous district which lacked infrastructure and social support for them.

In 1991 she created the Association of Blind people in her town and convinced the authorities to give them office space. With the help of CAFOD-Albania she organised and partially taught courses in Braille, insisting that women from remote villages be included in the training and not only men. Thanks to her efforts, many blind people in rural areas have had access to disability pension schemes. Diell has been promoting the rights of blind people by means of dialogue with local authorities, government and non-governmental institutions, and raises public awareness of the problems and needs of the blind. She ensures that blind people's health needs are addressed, often taking them herself to the hospital for check-ups. Diell visits blind people in their homes irrespective of their age, gender or ethnicity, giving them hope and courage.

She is ensuring that the needs of blind people are not neglected due to the remoteness of their rural areas.



IBRAHIMBAI Hirbaiben Lobi (46)

India

A Siddi Community Leader

This project supports the following SDGs



"I work with women to improve health, education, and agriculture for a better village life."

Hirbaiben was born in the village of Jambur, a Siddi community of tribal people mainly descendants of slaves brought centuries ago from Africa. Orphaned as a child, she was raised by her grandmother. Although inheriting a large debt, she refused to sell her tiny piece of land. Rather, she encouraged her husband to work harder, and with help from listening to radio programs on agricultural development, eventually succeeded in freeing the land from creditors. In 1992, Hirbaiben began motivating women to form women's development groups creating three groups that deal with issues of health, hygiene, savings and credit, and agricultural improvement. Realising the importance of education. Hirbaiben set out to find funds for a day care center and primary school, and convinced the village to assign land that had been allotted to private housing, to be used for a school so village children could study past the primary level. Together with other Siddi women she manufactures and sells organic compost proving that women can prepare a high quality product that can compete on the market. She also had the courage to contest the position of Sarpanch (head of the village government) and, although she lost, she is called the "Sarpanch" of the village and even senior government officials listen to her.



MEIYING Hu (54)

China

Turning Hillsides Green

This project supports the following SDGs



"Our small hands have turned barren hills green, protecting nature and building livelihoods together."

Hu from Zhuozuo village (Danzhai County, Guizhou Province), realised that the environment had deteriorated due to the indiscriminate felling of trees. Due to extreme poverty, local communities saw no other means of survival than to cut trees for cash.

Hu decided to lease eight acres of land and planted trees including pear, Chinese chestnut, mulberry and pine, and tea bushes. Building a hut on the hills in order to be nearby to tend to the trees, she worked diligently to ensure their survival turning the hills green after three years. She then organised 263 women encouraging them to do the same on neighbouring hillsides. Under her leadership and with support from UNICEF, the women planted over 600 acres of tea, 50,000 pear trees, 30,000 mulberry trees, and 50,000 pine trees. Hu held village meetings to educate people on the importance of protecting the forests. They worked out rules and regulations with clear rewards and punishments for their implementation. Not only are the once barren hillsides now green but the tree crops provide income for the villagers.



Huashun Feedlot Enterprise

China

Raising Rabbits for Prosperity

This project supports the following SDGs



"Together, we learn and grow, creating opportunities through rabbit breeding to support our families and community."

Huashun Feedlot Enterprise in Xiao Huangzhuang village (Shuangzha town, Jianan district of Tianjin) is a rabbit breeding enterprise run entirely by 18 women. It was initiated by Ji Qinghua who, after having succeeded in becoming prosperous by raising chickens and pigs, wanted to help other women of her village. Purchasing 300 rabbits with her own funds and training to learn how to breed rabbits, Ji Qinghua then shared the knowledge with others.

After some initial failures, the women are now earning good profits and expanding to include more women. They also encourage, train, and provide free seed rabbits for women to begin their own breeding operation.

A rural science programme based on their experience was aired on Chinese television for the benefit of all rural women in China. The women are now starting to process rabbit meat and fur for added value and provide employment for local women.



CHIKA Gladys (69)

Kenya

"Our women's group grows stronger every day, empowering lives through clean water, education, and care for those affected by AIDS."

Fighting Poverty through AIDS Prevention

This project supports the following SDGs



Gladys returned to her rural home in Ruma, Mandiany Division, Bondo district, Nyanza province, in 1991 after retiring from her job as a social worker in Nairobi's Pumwani slums. Upon discovering that local male administrators had grossly mismanaged the Ruma Women's Group, which had been established in 1983, she immediately began revitalizing it by making women aware of their managerial potential. One of her first major efforts was to seek funds to build a water tank that provides clean drinking water, helping to prevent water-borne diseases. Today, women run the project independently from the original sponsors. Gladys also negotiated a grant to rebuild the Ruma primary school and mobilized the community to provide labor. Her most important contribution is the Ruma AIDS awareness project, started in 1994, which benefits approximately 50,000 people. This successful program trains youth as peer educators, forms AIDS clubs in schools, trains AIDS counselors, assists AIDS widows with income-generating activities, and holds regular community awareness meetings. In addition, a family-based orphan project was initiated to keep AIDS orphans within the community. Furthermore, Gladys spends most of her retirement benefits to educate and feed disadvantaged children, counsels women and girls facing difficulties, and hosts international students wishing to learn about rural development.

ARTCAMP Cooperative

Mexico



Mastering Internet Technologies to Market their Art

This project supports the following SDGs



Artcamp is a cooperative of women from the village of Tecapulco (Guerrero State) who, having been abandoned by their husbands and losing their jobs due to the closing of a foreign-owned company, were determined to make it on their own. They formed a cooperative to continue the jewelry handicraft tradition of their village. Not only did they teach themselves English but they got their daughters to learn HTML computer language in order to create a website - www.artcamp.com.mx - to market their products directly through Internet. The women carry out the entire process themselves from the creation of designs, mold making, soldering, finishing and marketing. Village girls who have never seen a computer are trained to use the Excel spread sheets to track production and cost/price analysis. Artcamp is also involved in humanitarian projects. For example it obtained medical equipment for the local hospital and a water project for the village. The women also produced a website for teachers to present the Aztec calendar, a symbol of the Mexican Indian culture and history.



BARRIOS DE CENTELLA Edelmira (55)

Panama

Where there is a Will there is a Way

This project supports the following SDGs



"I believe empowering rural women with knowledge and support brings lasting change to our communities."

Edelmira from Macaracas was raised to love and protect agriculture and nature. Her community work began as a young school student when, her petition to a local politician for a well be dug in her town, was rewarded with a positive answer. She left school at 14. Married at 17, her husband left her to fend for herself and her five children. Edelmira, although struggling to raise her family on low paying jobs and sewing articles to sell, was always active in community affairs and doing volunteer work. She housed 10 students under her own roof thus enabling them to finish school, watched over her deaf neighbour, and was active on the Health committee, helping the town to acquire an ambulance and improve the hospital. Serving as secretary of the housing committee, Edelmira was instrumental in building housing for the poor. Between 1990 and 2000 she worked with various projects within the Rural Women's Programme. At 51 years of age she won a scholarship to take a university course in Agroforestry. With her new degree she went all over the country, training women in organic agriculture, soil conservation, nutrition and related subjects. Together with 19 other volunteers she opened an adult night school in which she taught for free many years. Her activities helped improve the quality of life of many rural people.



NGWENYA Eliza (59)

Zimbabwe

"Our women's collective grows food and shares it fairly, bringing hope and strength to our community."

Creating Solidarity for Food Security in a Time of Conflict

This project supports the following SDGs



Eliza was raised in the tradition of the Ndebele tribe, which has long been marginalized by the government. After marrying she left rural life to settle in Luveve where she got used to modern commodities such as running water and electricity. On seeing her native Bulawayo area (Matabeleland) suffering economically due to the political situation, she decided to return to rural life. At nearly 50, she left the city with her young children for Mataopos. There Eliza got the people and local chief to set aside land for community fields and she became the leader of a group of women starting to plough the fields and grow crops without chemicals. Ultimately she organised the distribution of harvests equitably among community members. Thanks to her leadership, enough food is grown to ensure household food security with sometimes an excess to sell. This collective work brought people together at a time when the land issue was crucial in the country, and is inspiring other women to follow her model. Eliza also directs tourist infrastructure, which serves not only to gain some income but gives space for craftsmen, herbalists, and traditional healers to practice and teach their art thus helping to stem the loss of traditional knowledge.



A. GUEDEGBE Innocentia Edwige (41)
Benin

Mobilising Women for Development
This project supports the following SDGs

"Our strength grows when women unite to protect our land, support each other, and build a better future."

Innocentia Edwige, a rural woman from Bopa with university degrees in law, economics, and political science, founded the Association for the Promotion of Rural Women (APFEM) in 1992. She motivates women to engage actively in their community's development, raising awareness of their rights and encouraging participation in decision-making. Women now serve on parent-teacher associations and advocate for girls' education. Innocentia helped women access training in labor-saving technologies to reduce their workload and established cereal banks in five villages along with a community bank offering loans to women. She led campaigns to protect local natural resources from city merchants by promoting tree planting, fuel-efficient stoves, and kitchen gardens. She educates women on relevant laws and lobbies for their enforcement, particularly on sustainable development. Innocentia also conducts family planning awareness involving both women and men using films and interactive methods. Thanks to her efforts, villages like Agbessikpè, Kpota, and others manage their resources effectively, have latrines, prevent famine through cereal banks, and send children to school. She also coordinated the 2000 World Women's March in Benin.



DÖNZ-GILLARDON Johanna
Switzerland

Farming Flowers for Prosperity
This project supports the following SDGs

"Our flowers bring beauty and opportunity, empowering women to build brighter futures together."

Johanna Dönz, a farmer from Birkenhof (Heinzenberg, Canton Chur), faced a challenge when their leased land was reduced by one third, prompting her to find an additional income source. She began growing strawberries, an unusual crop for the high-altitude farm, and then innovatively built a greenhouse to grow flowers without any imported ingredients. Although she has no formal training as a florist, her work flows from the heart and inspires people. Persevering in her endeavour despite discouraging comments at the beginning, Johanna faced many obstacles before the Chur Authorities gave her permission to exercise her activity as a legally recognised business in her rural community. From May till October she can be found at the weekly market place in Chur where many customers enjoy buying her home produced varieties and bouquets. Alongside long working hours, Johanna offers flower arrangement and decoration courses to other women, encouraging them to develop new ideas and products for sale on their farms. She treats her flowers with great respect, viewing them as living beings that bring love and joy to homes across the region. Through her flowers and courses, Johanna proudly promotes the beauty of the Heinzenberg region.



RAMOS SANCHEZ Julia Damiana (39)
Bolivia

Fighting Exclusion and Environmental Degradation
This project supports the following SDGs

"My goal is to empower rural women through education and sustainable farming, respecting our traditions and environment."

Julia Damiana from the community of Ancon Grande (Aviles Province, Department of Tarija), the eldest of seven children, grew up carrying the responsibility of caring for her younger siblings. From the age of 14, she actively engaged in community organisation and leadership roles. At 22, recognizing that her literacy skills were limited due to only having primary education in her village, she enrolled in night school in Tarija, while continuing her involvement in the peasant union. Julia's leadership strongly emphasised the vital link between environmental protection and community health, championing environmental education at a time when these issues were largely overlooked in Bolivia. To better equip herself to support rural women, she completed various training courses and courageously pursued a Nursing degree, graduating in 1994 despite facing discrimination because of her traditional dress. Her exceptional academic achievements earned her the respect of teachers and peers, challenging existing stereotypes. Currently, Julia serves as Executive Secretary of the National Federation of Peasant Women of Bolivia "Bartolina Sisa," where she tirelessly advocates for food security, sustainable ecological agriculture, and expanded educational opportunities for rural women.



ESCOTO DE ZELAYA Leonila (52)
Honduras

A Model Organic Gard
This project supports the following SDGs

"We learn and share together to grow healthier food and stronger communities, with hope and care."

Leonila from Manzaragua village left school after second grade due to economic hardship. As the eldest child, she helped her widowed mother care for siblings and work the garden and animals. Married at 23, she encouraged her husband to attend agricultural classes offered by the NGO World Neighbours in 1981, which were initially for men only. When preventive medicine and nutrition classes began for women, Leonila eagerly joined and motivated others to participate, hosting sessions at her home. Women started vegetable gardens, with Leonila's being one of the largest and most diverse, applying techniques such as terracing, minimum tillage, green manure, and live barriers. After the NGO left, Leonila continued organizing educational classes and traveled to nearby towns every two weeks to teach. Throughout the years Leonila's farm has become a model experimental organic farm on which she tries out medicinal plants, vegetables to improve the nutrition of the community and innovative technologies. Productivity and nutrition in the rural communities have greatly improved thanks to Leonila's innovative spirit and willingness to experiment.



DIOULDE DIALLO Mariama (42)
Guinea

“Together, we sew skills and hope, empowering women to build livelihoods and support their families.”

Empowering with Sewing
This project supports the following SDGs

In 1985 Mariama, a woman from the Peul ethnic group, created the Tagama Seamstress Association in Dalaba just as the country was coming out of a brutal military dictatorship. The association began when Mariama, together with five friends, decided to teach each other skills such as sewing, embroidery, weaving and dyeing in order to make their own clothes and sell a part of them for income. Beginning with one old sewing machine in the open air and using wool recycled from used sweaters, they now have 20 sewing machines housed in a building together with a school for their children, as well as a family planning centre. They also train others in dressmaking, offer courses in literacy, nutrition, AIDS prevention, simple accounting and marketing. Furthermore they organise a course in the French language in order for women to communicate with increasing numbers of tourists who are among their major clients. Mariama Dioulde Diallo's activities have directly and indirectly benefited 2.500 people and enabled over 250 women to start their own dressmaking business. Mariama is also the founder of the Union of Women Dyers of Middle Guinea.



NYOTA MWAVIDA Mateso (36)
Democratic Republic of Congo

Development Through Collective Work
This project supports the following SDGs

“By working together, we grow food, share labor, and build homes where women can thrive and lead.”

Mateso from Fizi (South-Kivu province) has been working since 1984 to combat malnutrition and lighten the heavy workload of women in the region. By organising women into groups, she encouraged them to plant vegetable crops that mature in three months to replace the long season cassava crops often ravaged by insect pests. Mateso Nyota motivated peasant leaders so that men, traditionally only dedicated to fishing, also got involved in heavy fieldwork. She proposed a strategy of “work share” by which a group of 5-7 families join forces to cultivate the fields of each family in turn, in order to maximise the amount of land cultivated per family in a minimum of time. This system of collective work was also used to build “development towns,” residential quarters with lanes and avenues shaded by trees in which women can thrive and contribute to development. Mateso mobilised women to work towards the purchase of a grain mill and to plant trees for firewood around the village. She sensitised traditional rulers to allow newly wed couples to acquire their own land, rather than having to move in with in-laws, in order to free women from domination by in-laws. Matesi Nyota Mwavita also set up literacy circles and improved micro credit schemes for women.



MIKHAILOVNA MARTINOVA Nadezhda (51)
Russia

Creating an Environmental University
This project supports the following SDGs

“Education is the seed, we planted it for the environment, and now it grows in every student we teach.”

Nadezhda, a teacher from Penza in the Povolzie region of Southern Russia, recognized the urgent need to raise environmental awareness in an area plagued by industrial pollution, deforestation, chemical waste, and soil erosion. In a time when environmental issues were politically unpopular, she bravely founded the Penza branch of the International Independent University of Environment and Political Science. Starting with just a few classrooms and students who had not been accepted into prestigious state universities, she built an institution now serving around 1,000 students. The university focuses on ecology, foreign languages, computer science, psychology, and law, all taught through an environmental lens. Students research local environmental issues and present their findings at conferences organized by the university. Rural outreach programs involve students in seminars, performances, and training to spread ecological awareness. The university also trains company engineers, supports rural students with flexible tuition options or sponsorship, and actively promotes eco-friendly practices. As the first private environmental university in the region and its first female director, Nadezhda has significantly influenced regional attitudes and practices toward environmental responsibility.



Navakasobu Women's Group
Fidji

Saving a Wetland Ecosystem
This project supports the following SDGs

For years, native women have been using Kuta (*Eleocharis dulcis*), a plant used traditionally in weaving, to make objects that are essential to their ceremonies, culture and daily life. In Tikina Sasa (Macuata Province), however, Kuta was disappearing as a result of the destruction of its wetland habitat because the government had leased collectively owned land in the 1970's for sugarcane plantations without consulting the women or informing them of the agreements in their own language. Women were then obliged to travel long distances to find Kuta. Determined to restore its wetland habitat, the women formed the Navakasobu Women's Group. With the help of WWF, the university and the Fiji government, the women put together a plan to restore the habitat and involved the men also making them realise that the wetland habitat is a resource for the village, their children and their future. They also produce handicrafts for income with leftover materials, and plan other projects such as raising fish in the now clean pond. In addition, the local and national governments are now more aware of the need for wetland conservation and management and the importance of consulting local populations.



BYANDUSYA Peace (35)

Uganda

"With mushrooms, we grow more than food, we grow hope, health, and income on just a little land."

Mushroom Growing Brings Income

This project supports the following SDGs



Peace from a peasant family in Bukinda village (Rukiga county, Kabale district) could not pursue studies beyond High-School due to lack of resources.

In 1995 while making her living selling second hand clothes in rural markets, she attended a course at the agricultural research station on how to grow Oyster mushrooms. An activity requiring limited land and using a variety of locally available materials, yet yielding a relatively high priced quality product, growing mushrooms turned into a good income generating activity which Peace decided to share with other women.

Using her own resources she set up a demonstration garden in her home, which became a training center for Oyster mushroom growing. As part of the training Peace teaches women how to prepare delicious meals with mushrooms and educates them on their high nutritional and medicinal value. Peace also lobbies for women to have access to micro credit institutions to help them begin and maintain their mushroom growing businesses and also carry out other projects.



VIJAY Radha (33)

India

Helping Women to Help Themselves

This project supports the following SDGs



"When women earn and learn together, they break free from silence and shape the future of their villages."

Radha, a social worker in the Malpura District of Rajasthan, has helped establish 98 self-help groups in 15 villages, empowering women through income-generating activities.

Among the successful programmes initiated with her help are: a dairy unit providing milk and milk products, training in patch work on clothes and leather which turned into a rural industry, and carpet weaving which was an activity previously only done by men. Radha led an anti-smoking campaign which resulted in all the women of a village giving up their smoking habit, and created a night school for girls in a village where girls were excluded from education.

She organised a common wedding ceremony for 15 young couples as a model to stop the dowry system, and ensured that 100% of the children in a village were properly vaccinated.

Radha Vijay believes that with the help of education and income generating opportunities, women can fight the social evils oppressing them and claim their rights.



ANGULO ANGULO Rosita (37)

Costa Rica

Defending Community Water Resources

This project supports the following SDGs



"We stood together to protect our water, our future, from being drained without our consent or benefit."

Rosita, from the community of Lorena de Santa Cruz in Guanacaste, one of the poorest regions in Costa Rica, has worked for the past eight years on various development projects, particularly in the field of environmental protection. Though the area appears green due to surrounding rivers, it suffers from severe water scarcity. In 2000, a hotel company began boring deep wells and installing large pipes without official permits. Realising the danger to the community's water supply, Rosita motivated residents to request the municipality deny the permit. When their appeal was ignored, she mobilised 150 people to physically block the pipe installation, organised two peaceful demonstrations in the town centre, and pursued all available legal avenues. When the authorities remained indifferent, Rosita brought together people from 12 neighbouring communities to maintain a physical blockade of the construction site for over a month, successfully forcing the hotel to withdraw its machinery. Even after an environmental impact study supported the community's concerns, the municipality refused to reverse its decision. Rosita then brought the case to the highest court, which ruled in favour of the community. A Community Council was created to monitor future threats. Despite intense pressure, Rosita united her community and managed to keep them unified in a struggle against powerful economic interests.



SAWALANKHE Sangeeta (34)

India

Promoting Biological Control of Insect Pests

This project supports the following SDGs



"We began with one idea, to protect health and soil by growing differently, together."

Sangeeta, raised in an agricultural family, witnessed firsthand the harmful impact of chemical pesticides on both the environment and rural women's health in Yavatmal district (Vidarbha, Maharashtra). With women comprising up to 90% of the agricultural labour force, Sangeeta saw how their daily exposure to pesticides, whether in the fields or through contaminated food, was causing serious health issues. Furthermore, pesticide overuse had led to resistant pests, making chemicals increasingly ineffective.

Motivated to find a better solution, Sangeeta studied Agriculture, specialising in biological pest control. In 1995, she founded the Vidarbha Biotech Lab to mass-produce insect parasites and viruses used as biological agents to combat crop pests. Determined to share her knowledge, she organised seminars, field demos, camps, workshops, exhibitions, and gave radio talks and published articles promoting these sustainable methods. Her outreach has trained around 3,000 rural women and 4,000 men in the safe and effective use of bio-agents, who are now spreading the practice. As the only woman entomologist in her region producing and promoting these methods, she is widely known as the Mother of Integrated Pest Management.



WANJIKU MBIRIRI Tekla (56)

Kenya

"We empower women step by step, teaching savings and trust to build stronger communities together."

Teaching Rural Women Management Skills

This project supports the following SDGs



Tekla from Kiserian (Kikuyu Division, Kiambu District) could only attend primary school due to economic factors. Tekla, however, did not let this handicap her but on the contrary decided to use the little knowledge she acquired by seeking employment as a primary non-trained teacher in 1964. After getting married and working at a number of different jobs, she decided to return to farming in order to have more time for her children. Noticing the economic dependence of women on men, she began to engage women in her area in revolving funds to which women would contribute money to be given once a month to one of the group members on a rotational basis. To effectively communicate with the women, Tekla even learned the Maasai language of the predominant ethnic group in the region. Due to the long waiting period before a woman could benefit from the group fund, there was a high dropout rate. Therefore, Tekla trained them on how to mobilize savings, develop rules and regulations, elect group officials, and keep records of loans. She created 32 groups this way, with an average of 20 members per group, making it possible for women to start small businesses and pay for school fees and health care needs. Tekla also found ways for women's groups to access micro finance institutions.

Women's Federation of Pingluo County

China



Innovative Strategies Help the Rural Poor

This project supports the following SDGs



The Women's Federation of Pingluo County, made up of 7 women, have carried out extensive women-oriented activities, trained rural women in many subjects such as greenhouse vegetable culture, poultry raising, and mushroom cultivation, thus empowering them to improve their quality of life.

Among the innovative aspects of their projects is a telephone hotline for advice on how to tackle any problems. This is often followed by a helpful field visit of a federation technician. They established moveable greenhouses, which are less expensive than conventional ones, require less land and are easier to operate thus offering a quick profit. Targeting the poorest of the poor, the Federation followed a "hand-in-hand" policy, matching two skilled women to help out one poor one, formalised by the signing of an agreement for technical advice, information exchange, and other services for poverty alleviation. The Federation also conducted a reforestation program to improve the harsh environment of the Northwest, planting thousands of trees along the Yellow River, in Qu Kou Township and Tou Zha Township, among others.

Urner Wollhandwerk Team

Switzerland



Innovative Products Sustain Mountain Farms

This project supports the following SDGs



On the occasion of the International Year of the Mountains, WWSF proudly awards the Prize to the Urner Wollhandwerk Team in the Urner mountain region. Sheep rearing, a traditional practice well-suited to steep mountain prairies, was economically unattractive as only the meat was marketable while wool was burned due to lack of market demand. Finding this practice wasteful and environmentally unacceptable, Elsbeth Arnold, from the steep hills of Schachten valley (Canton Uri), along with several mountain farm women convinced that sheep wool could enhance their families' quality of life and ensure the survival of mountain farms, formed a cooperative.

They began taking classes to produce high-quality bed covers, which gradually attracted interest and brought in some profit.

Sending wool outside the region for processing was costly, so the group purchased a second-hand carder to treat the wool themselves, turning it into felt. Today, they produce various attractive felt products, hats, decorations, toys, and mats, that sell well alongside the woollen bed covers. Their dream is to process all wool locally, reducing reliance on external markets and securing the future of mountain farming amid globalisation.

Xiji County Women's Federation

China



Skill training for Rural Women

This project supports the following SDGs



Xiji County Women's Federation is a group of six women from the Ningxia Hui Ethnic Autonomous region who provide many different kinds of skill training for rural women.

In 2001 alone, 67 training sessions were organised on subjects such as agriculture, animal husbandry, literacy, tailoring, and education on legal issues. In order to ensure that the sessions were pertinent and successful, they went from house to house to find out what women needed, while at the same time convincing them to attend. They invited experts in the field, designed the courses carefully, studying late into the night, so that the program taught would be easy to learn and apply. They also actively raised money from various sources to provide micro credit for women and help them to identify good projects.

The Federation also lobbied the government and private companies to build water tanks to collect and store rainwater for irrigation as the area suffers from water scarcity. Assistance with legal issues is also part of the Federation's activities.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



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2007



ESTRADA Alcira (58)

Bolivia

Determined to Save the Forest

This project supports the following SDGs



"We knew the forest was our life, so I stood up to defend it, whatever the cost."

Alcira is a representative of "The New Hope of Chiquiacá," the mother's center of Chiquiacá (Department of Tarija), a community located in the middle of a once dense forest in the northeast section of the national reserve of Tariquía. Totally isolated from the rest of the province, the community had a road built in the hope it would contribute to their development. The road, however, rapidly brought on excessive and illegal exploitation of the forest. In 1994, Alcira Estrada contacted an NGO working in environmental protection to help them evict a lumber company that had initiated activities without the community's consent. After a year of confrontations, under Alcira's leadership, and at a time when Bolivia had no official forest legislation, the community successfully evicted the company and elaborated a forest management plan. In 1995, Alcira intervened again when a city-dwelling landowner unjustly claimed land. The land was finally given to the mother's center. In 1999, opponents took advantage of Alcira's absence to dissolve the plan. Upon her return, she called a new meeting and succeeded in reinstating it. Alcira is an example of what one woman's courage and commitment can accomplish.



CAILUAN Bao (59)

China

Greening the Hills

This project supports the following SDGs



"We turned barren hills into abundance, because I believed women could grow both forests and futures."

In the winter of 1990, Bao, a rural technician in Shaolian village (Xi County, Anhui Province) contacted women in 16 households to lease together three hectares of barren fields and plant 19,700 fir trees thus turning the land into a forestry center. They did the same to another 17 hectares the following year. In 1995, despite the slump in the tea market, Bao Cailuan leased another 20 hectares planting them in persimmon, ginkgo and greengage for tea production. She bought tea processing machines and managed the production, processing and marketing of teas making a good profit. Today, thanks to the efforts, courage and persistence of Bao Cailuan, a total of 53 hectares of once unproductive hills are now flourishing with trees, tea and vegetable gardens, and food processing sites.



OFF Christa (57)

Germany

"It wasn't easy at first, but now the farms thrive, and families and guests grow together."

Perseverance Pays

This project supports the following SDGs



Christa, mother of three and a leading woman farmer in Sindelsdorf, Pfaffenwinkel (Upper Bavaria), offers "vacations on the farm." Responsible for adult education in rural areas, Christa is also a member of the regional council. For the past 15 years, she has been Vice-President of the Bavarian Women's Farmers Union on an honorary basis. Ten years ago, when Christa created the Country Union (Landesverband) "Vacations on farms," she was elected first chairwoman. At first, she faced great difficulties, as farmers were reluctant to accept the positive aspect of her idea due to high membership expenses. Christa travelled from region to region, village to village, convincing farmers and their families of the benefits. Her slogan was "Together we are strong." Today, all the different regional associations are members of the country union and are featured in a countrywide catalogue, "Vacations on the farm." Membership fees no longer pose a problem. The project is well known, appreciated, and managed jointly by guests and farmers' families. Income has increased, and life on farms has become more balanced.



ZOLLINGER Christine (48)

Switzerland

Saving Switzerland's Seeds

This project supports the following SDGs



"We wanted to protect forgotten seeds, and now they grow again in thousands of gardens."

A few years after completing an apprenticeship in horticulture, Christine heard about the phenomenon of disappearing plant varieties. On returning from a two-year stay in Nepal with the Food and Agricultural Organisation during which she was initiated to techniques of seed production, she began to carry out her dream of creating a business producing seeds of traditional old varieties according to principles of organic agriculture. As any pioneer project, it required great determination, courage, effort, intelligence and love. Today, together with her husband, their catalogue proudly displays some 120 varieties of vegetables, 50 flower varieties and four of cereals. Her vegetables, which are of exquisite taste, keep much better than many commercial varieties. The family run business in Evouettes near Aigle (Canton of Valais) covers four hectares and serves over 3000 individuals and around 100 organic food shops.

COMIXUL Mixed Cooperative of United Women

Honduras



In Union Lies Strength

This project supports the following SDGs



COMIXUL, a women's cooperative, is an example of what women can accomplish by joining forces, despite being poor single mothers. For young single mothers with little education, the only available jobs were agricultural labour, factory work, or selling at the market, options with little future. In 1986, 12 single mothers from the rural communities of San Pablo and San Juan (Province of Siguatepeque) came together to form a communal bank. Using \$1000 in collective savings, they issued small loans of \$25–200 to develop their countryside-based market businesses in Siguatepeque. More women gradually joined, and in 1991, the group became the Mixed Cooperative of United Women (COMIXUL), with 100 members. In 1995, facing inflation and other financial challenges, they took out their first loan to acquire a building for meetings and training. This allowed them to launch new initiatives, including agricultural training, food security through product diversification, agroforestry projects, health insurance for members, and cultural activities. Today, COMIXUL has grown into a large organization of 5000 women spanning six municipalities in Honduras, proof of the power of solidarity and perseverance in building sustainable livelihoods.



Thuy DIEN Do (37)

Vietnam

Helping her Community Begin Again

This project supports the following SDGs



"From loss, I built hope, showing women that hard work can rebuild a community."

Do had to start anew in the village of Muong Lay (Lai Chau province) in a mountainous area near the border with Laos where the government had moved them after they had lost everything in a flood. Although her husband had given in to gambling, rather than give in to grief and despair, Do Thuy Dien courageously encouraged the village women, showing them it was possible to progress out of catastrophe. She started a small carpentry shop building furniture for the village and employing eight workers including her husband. With a small loan she was able to purchase simple machinery. Realising that the noise and fumes were polluting the village, she moved her workshop to the outskirts of the village and always made sure to choose the lumber judiciously to avoid soil erosion. She planted an orchard to improve the nutrition of the local people and was very active in the establishment of a primary school. Do Thuy Dien has contributed to the re-establishment of her community not only with her ideas and perseverance but also with strenuous physical labour.



Georgina PEREZ MARTINEZ (62)

Cuba

Transforming Wastelands into Vegetable Gardens

This project supports the following SDGs

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Georgina, a graduate in Geography from Havana, began, in 1988, to transform a piece of communal wasteland in the rural community of Arroy Arenas into a vegetable farm. In 1992 a group of 40 vegetable growers selected her as president of the group despite her being the only woman. By organising workshops in the community to train people in soil conservation and agroecological techniques she has been creating a culture of environmental protection in the area. The farm has been designated as a national reference for its productivity and social impact. It is an example of how unused land can be made productive. The consumption of vegetables has increased, and traditional methods of food conservation have been revived.



POIDI Honorine (41)

Togo

Reviving Cultural Identity and Native Language

This project supports the following SDGs

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Honorine, a linguist from Ahlon Sassanou and native of the Bogo people, has been working to improve life for the isolated Bogo communities in Ahlon through health education, literacy classes and the translation of educational literature into the local language. The Bogo people of Ahlon, being the smallest minority in Togo, numbering only 6000 and totally isolated from the rest of the country by mountains, have been neglected by development pro-grams. As a result they suffered an inferiority complex and were cut off from any information. Honorine Poidi initiated activities to teach them to read and write and provided them with training manuals, textbooks, news materials, information on AIDS prevention and other topics including fiction and the bible in their own language. This has helped the Bogo minority to appreciate their cultural values while at the same time giving them access to deve-lopment activities in order to improve their lives. She also established a small village library for the benefit of the community.



MANOHARAN Helen (40)

India

Challenging the Caste System

This project supports the following SDGs

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"Together, we trained, supported, and empowered women to change their lives and communities."

Being a girl in a country where girls are undervalued, and the loss of her sister, beaten and burned to death by parents-in-law, motivated Helen to work for the upliftment of vulnerable women. She joined the Madurai Non-Formal Education Center (MNEC) and, careful to choose a husband who shared her views, decided to have only one child to better dedicate herself to others. As secretary of MNEC, Helen established training centers in 30 villages, training 3000 women in tailoring and 300 rural women in making jute articles. She helped provide housing for 2010 families in 10 villages, and 200 children received food supplements. To promote peace across caste lines, Helen arranged inter-caste and inter-religious marriages through legal means, despite threats to her life. She counselled couples to stop atrocities towards women, even after being beaten for standing as a witness in court. Helen mobilised women to fight for their rights, gathering 100 women to destroy equipment used for alcohol production. She also helped create self-help groups and started schools and learning centers for children.



VIDA DONKOR Joyce (48)

Ghana

Bee keeping Saves Bees and Brings Business

This project supports the following SDGs

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Since 1985, Joyce has been involved in educating the Nyame-So community (Bremam Anhwiam) of peasant farmers on environmental health in an attempt to prevent diseases through cleanliness and incorporating backyard vegetable gardens to improve the nutritional quality of their diet. In 1998, she attended a bee-keeping workshop in order to find an alternative source of income, and also to protect the bees from local extinction resulting from the existing practice of burning hives to kill the bees and harvest honey. Using local materials, together with other women, she designed a beehive. With the participation of men also, they built some hives, baited them, monitored them and, within five months, collected the first harvest of honey, some of which was shared with the commu-nity, the remainder being sold to buy materials for more hives. Joyce Vida Donkor proved to her reluctant community that this safe and eco-friendly project provided a quality product that could be sold with high returns thus providing extra income.



Kassena Building Women

Burkina Faso

Prepetuating Traditional Art Forms

This project supports the following SDGs

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"Honouring our traditional home art keeps alive the bond between our culture, environment, and future generations."

By honouring the Kassena "Femmes Batisseurs", Cécile Katiana, Aneyan Aouygade and Kougnedipe Kaye, for their know-how and creativity in the decoration of traditional homes, know-how that has been transmitted to them from preceding generations and that they continue to transmit, initiating young women in its practice, the Women's World Summit Foundation hopes to contribute to valuing and pro-tecting traditional knowledge and indigenous creativity at the local and international level.

The style of the Kassena home and the meticulous workmanship of the design are rich in symbolism: a rectangular shape, for example, represents man and the bi or trilobed shape represents woman. The orientation of the house is also symbolic: for instance West where the sun sets represents woman. The relationship to the environment, the materials used, the presence of animals and the relationship with the ancestors as well as rituals, together make up an important cultural space characteristic of this heritage, which can be defined as "the link between the sky and the earth."



JAIN Kusum (38)

India

Giving Hope to the Helpless

This project supports the following SDGs

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"Empowerment begins with dignity, whether restoring water, planting trees, or helping people stand on their own feet."

Kusum from Jaipur has been working for 13 years as project director for women's empowerment in rural areas of Rajasthan. Among the many services she has performed, she contacted a group of leprosy sufferers walking along the road, motivated them to give up begging, trained them in weaving and other skills, and provided them with shelter and medical treatment, thus rehabilitating over 500 lepers.

She conducted awareness training of men and women in civic rights, women's rights, the environment and other issues. Kusum Jain helped eight villages solve their water problem by getting the old dried-up wells deepened and repaired. With help from col-leagues, she planted 70, 000 saplings of various tree species thus fighting deser-tification.

The HIV/AIDS prevention program she designed for tribal communities involved in prostitution is being implemented in 21 villages.



Maria de Jesus COLAJ CHAL (34)

Guatemala

Education Equals Empowerment

This project supports the following SDGs

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"Education opened the door, and I walked through to serve my people and protect what we share."

Being a girl, Maria, a Mayan native from the village of Simajhuleu San Juan Comalapa (Department of Chimaltenango), did not have the opportunity to attend school as a child, but decided to do so in her 20's, completing third grade of secondary school despite financial and social hardship. Getting an education enabled her to play a leadership role in various development projects in her own and in other communities in the fields of health, hygiene, nutrition, forestry, conservation, environment, gender issues, Mayan language and literacy.

Due to her dedication, responsibility and respect for nature, she was chosen to be president of a number of organisations including the Community Bank of Simajuleu, and Women for Development and Conservation of the Orient-Women Get Ahead.

This year Maria de Jesus was elected the first woman Assistant Mayor of her community for the promotion of community projects.



HERNANDEZ Mariana (41)

El Salvador

From Excellence to Leadership

This project supports the following SDGs

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"With every small project, we found new ways to care for our land, our health, and our future."

Mariana, from Monte San Juan municipality (Department of Cuscatlan), due to financial constraints was only able to complete her primary education. After receiving some training in reforestation, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation, she has been active in rural development since 1980. Mariana's excellent community work got her elected manager of the mayor's office from 1994 to 1997 and invited as part of the board by the Salvadoran Center for Appropriate Technology to the fourth regional Peasant-to-Peasant meeting.

In 1995, she served as a promoter of agricultural projects. In this capacity Mariana was able to develop many pro-jects for the improvement of the municipality and the environment, such as a pharmacy using natural products, agroecological plots, schools, transportation, sports fields, training in soil conservation among others.

One particular environmental project was the construction of manure-producing latrines, which not only are more hygienic and avoid the contamination of groundwater, but also produce organic fertiliser for vegetable gardens.



LINTNER Martina (59)

Italy

"Sustainable farming is our future, rooted in knowledge, care, and the courage to protect what nourishes us."

Preserving the Rural Way of Life

This project supports the following SDGs



Martina runs the mountain school "Schorhof" near the village of Aldein in Southern Tyrol. For years she has been advocating sustainable farming methods in the Southern Tyrol Women Farmers Organisation. She developed a qualification course for young rural women and is always encouraging them to keep learning, to diversify their products, improve quality, produce their own seeds and protect biodiversity. She supports projects to bring more income to farms such as "Living and Caring," through which senior citizens are taken care of on farms. Martina is also involved in publishing a rural magazine with useful information for women farmers. Not only concerned with preserving traditional rural culture, she keeps up to date and is an outspoken critic of gene-technology in agriculture and its threat to bio-diversity.



Mawulawoe Association

Togo

Struggling to Provide Iodised Salt

This project supports the following SDGs



"We faced storms and setbacks, but our salt project brought health, income, and strength to our community."

Mawulawoe is a group of eight women from Kpele-Adeta who dedicated themselves to providing their community with a source of clean high quality iodised salt. To begin, they first had to accumulate some savings, which took them two years. Despite several setbacks in which they lost the salt due to theft and storm damage, the women persisted. Besides enabling the members of the group to pay for the schooling and health care needs of their own children and contribute to the family income, their initiative has created employment opportunities for other rural women who can purchase salt from them on credit and resell it in small shops for a profit. By providing a source of affordable iodised salt they contribute to prevention of goitre, which was endemic due to lack of iodine. The group also participate in making people aware of the essential need for iodine in the diet.



TASHIEVA Meimanbu (51)

Kyrgyzstan

A Tireless Teacher Promotes Self-Help Groups

This project supports the following SDGs



"By sharing knowledge and building self-help groups, we've helped families grow stronger and more self-reliant."

Meimanbu, a science teacher in Boz-Karagan village since 1971, apart from her classes, led the school's women's organisation, teaching hygiene, respect for the elderly, honesty, solidarity and instilled in them a desire to learn. A highly devoted professional, she is constantly striving to improve the level of education by seeking better teaching methods and improving her own skills. In 1972, Meimanbu was appointed Deputy Director of Education and in 1976 Director of another school. Always ready to share her experience with young teachers, she participated actively in extracurricular activities. In 1982, health problems forced her to quit the directorship but she continued to work as a teacher and as head of a local trade union. In 1998, Meimanbu formed a non-governmental organisation "Ata-Jurt" in the aim to help poor villagers get out of poverty through the formation of Self-Help groups working with micro credit within the Participatory Poverty Alleviation Project of UNDP. Her skills to mobilize the poor, provide the necessary training and assist them in the preparation of business plans and credit applications, plus following-up on credit repayments, resulted in the creation of 15 Self-Help Groups, including 116 members with a repayment rate of 100%. This has contributed to the improvement of life, increased income and skills especially for women.



MAHARJAN Mohinee (37)

Nepal

Making Women Aware of their Legal Rights

This project supports the following SDGs



"When women understand their rights, they gain the power to change their lives and strengthen their communities."

Mohinee, from a farming community in Kathmandu, was lucky to get a chance to study, in a country where few girls are sent to school, becoming one of the first women lawyers in her country. It was during her Law studies at university that she realized that women's rights were not respected due to lack of awareness, poor education and economic dependency on men. In 1993, together with like-minded friends, she created the Women Guidance Association (WGA) to help uplift women's status. WGA conducts programmes in the fields of literacy, legal awareness, micro credit, vocational training, and computer skills. Small libraries have been established in several villages. Mohinee Maharjan has written booklets on legal issues related to women, in order to teach women about their rights, and has created an audio-tape called "Legal Violence" which concentrates on women's property rights and includes interviews with judges, lawyers and victimized women in order to help prevent women from being unjustly deprived of their property. Working as a lawyer parttime, she dedicates herself on a voluntary basis to WGA.



PEREZ BASILIO Petrona (51)
Nicaragua

Education, the Key to Empowerment
This project supports the following SDGs

"With every step I took to learn, I found new ways to help my village grow, read, and thrive."

Petrona, from Telepaneca, lost both parents when a baby. Her only schooling was learning the alphabet from her husband when she married at 14. At age 26 she learned to read and write during a 6-month Sandinista Literacy Campaign. This brought out the leader in her, and, realising that all the children in her village were illiterate, she raised money from the village in order to build and staff a primary school. Later Petrona became a literacy campaign leader despite the dangers involved. Eventually, because of threats from the "Contra" rebels, she was forced, together with 30 families, to flee to Northern Nicaragua where they created the village of Santa Rosa on vacant land. Petrona led the community in establishing a sanitation system, taught the villagers about hygiene, and educated them about contraception despite much resistance. Convinced that education was essential for development, with the help of an NGO, she built a library for the village where adults can attend training courses and children can supplement their schoolwork. Petrona also weekly leaves the village to meet with organisations, in the search for new opportunities for her village to become self-sufficient, being careful to turn down programs the village does not really need.



NARASIMHAN Prema (50)
India

Innovative Rural Development
This project supports the following SDGs

"By working together and thinking creatively, rural women turned local resources into lasting livelihoods."

Prema comes from an agricultural family in a remote village of Kerala. Although her father never went to school, he was supportive and enabled her to complete university in the field of food and nutrition. Proving to be very innovative during her 28 years of rural service in which she traveled long distances on rural transport systems facing threats from landlords, government agencies and politicians, Prema invented models of waste recycling, lowcost latrines and rain harvesting techniques using local materials among other things. She helped the women of the entire village of Pillayar-natham to organise themselves to work, initiating innovative training programmes leading to economic self-sufficiency. Prema developed methods of teaching entrepreneurship to rural women through participatory business games and live case studies, benefiting over 1000 women who are now earning \$50-\$250 a month, and creating employment for over 10, 000 rural women thus stemming rural exodus.



KARTHIKEYAN Rajeswari (36)
India

Eliminating Chemical Pesticides
This project supports the following SDGs

"From a small village school to pesticide-free fields, we've shown what organized rural women can achieve."

Prevented from pursuing her education past 12th grade due to economic difficulties, Rajeswari from a peasant family from Pasupathikoil (Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu), initiated a nursery school in her home teaching village children free of charge. She created the Bharathi Women's Group through which she trains women in tailoring and educates them about their rights. After participating in a Women's Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Farmers' Field School (FFS), she became an IPM trainer. As a result she has eradicated the use of pesticides in the area for the last five years. Spearheading a group of 30 women from the FFS, they approached the police and were successful in eradicating the illicit sale of liquor in the village. She mobilised over 100 women to provide micro finance through the formation of self-help groups to help women start small businesses. Rajeswari has become a role model for the empowerment of rural women in her region.



DEMBETTE Robertine (31)
Chad

Women Take Charge
This project supports the following SDGs

"We came together to grow knowledge and food, nurturing our children's future with every seed and lesson."

Due to the lack of resources to continue her studies past middle school, Robertine moved back to her village where she dedicated herself to cultivating the land together with her husband. Noticing the poor education of the children and the scarcity of seeds, she decided to raise awareness on these issues in order to elevate the educational level of the village and increase household food security. She organised information and training sessions for women and their husbands in seven villages of the canton. Thanks to her efforts couples get along better and are better able to manage the family bud-get. Child education, especially that of girls, has improved, and the products of local wild harvesting are more valued. The women themselves take charge of the teachers' salaries and the construction of classrooms, silos for food storage, a health and literacy center, and a cereal bank with credit given in kind.



Rufina Edith VILLA HERNANDEZ (44)

Mexico

"By reclaiming our knowledge and our voices, we've shown that indigenous women can lead lasting change."

Fighting for the Rights of Indigenous Women

This project supports the following SDGs



Rufina, an indigenous Nahuatl woman from San Andrés Tzicuilan (Cuetzalan, Puebla), only completed primary school and was married off young, like many women in her community. As a child, she learned about medicinal plants and a love of nature from her grandmother, as well as embroidery and sewing. In 1986, she joined the first indigenous women's group of the Northern Sierra to sell handmade clothes at a fair price, taking charge of marketing and starting to advocate for women's rights. In 1992, Rufina founded Maseual Siuamej Mosenyolchicauanij, promoting vegetable gardens, small animal breeding, home improvement, health programs, and the production of traditional medicines. She also created a Botanical Garden and designed a latrine suited to local needs. Her group is part of the Taselotzin Ecotourism Project, which includes cabins, hostels, and a restaurant serving local food. Since 1994, Rufina has led women to report domestic violence and is actively involved in the National Indigenous Congress, advocating for the Law for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Her work has increased women's recognition, reduced violence, and shown they have real alternatives for change.



OTIENO KORIR Selline (36)

Kenya

A Crusader for Peace

This project supports the following SDGs



"When women unite across differences, we don't just end conflict, we build peace that includes everyone."

Selline has been taking risks in North Rift province (Rift Valley) to empower women and children to be active participants in building peace, rather than remaining passive victims, in an area which has experienced much politically instigated fighting since 1992. Working alongside hostile government officials and civic leaders, Selline began forming a women's group network, which cut across regions and ethnic groups and became the foundation of the National Council of Churches of Kenya peace programme. Through a rotational leadership, "Rural Women Peace Link" targets women's groups and ensures that every woman gets a chance to lead. The Network develops intervention measures to curb violence, for example refusing to assemble war equipment when asked to do so by men, and responding quickly to acts of violence mobilising community leaders to investigate the matter. The different women's groups share knowledge and technology such as fuel-saving stoves. This interaction has strengthened relationships between ethnic groups, for example between Maasai and Kisii, and between Sabat and Bukusu. Women interacted despite their differences, and appreciate each other through their diversity. Another achievement of the Network is the creation of a primary school to take care of children victims of war.



THEVE Veronique (42)

France

Working Towards Sustainable Rural Life

This project supports the following SDGs



"By making farms spaces of learning and connection, we bring together generations, landscapes, and communities."

Véronique, after having worked as a nurse for 13 years, took a course in farm management in order to play a role in the rural area of Lille. She generated three important initiatives: a hands-on farm experience in which the child is actor and can follow an agro ecological project that the child is responsible for, a farm visit for the public at large in which people of all socio-economic backgrounds are invited on the farm to better understand agriculture, and learn to value the periurban landscape. The last initiative consists in a project "ACTIVER", whose objective is to make farmers actors in their environment through concrete actions such as planting hedges, fruit trees, integrating agriculture into the landscape, and the mobilisation of secondary education so that students are involved. Through these three initiatives, Véronique Théve is contributing to the development of sustainable agriculture with the active participation of all generations, and linking city and countryside.



Victoria BOSEDE DUNMADE (59)

Nigeria

Appropriate Technology for Women

This project supports the following SDGs



"By placing women at the heart of technology design, we create tools that empower rather than replace them."

Having experienced during childhood the laborious tasks involved in processing foods in rural areas, Victoria from Oro (Kwara State), launched an effort to develop food-processing technologies designed for women. She created the Center for Appropriate Technology (CAPTEC), which attempts to ensure that the needs of women are taken into account in the development, operation, maintenance and management of appropriate technology. CAPTEC networks with other institutes involved in food processing, trains women, helps women form cooperative groups that make up their own rules, provides micro credit, and liaises with interested funding agencies. Indigenous technologies in use are taken into account in order to make sure that the new ones do not displace women but complement and improve upon them in order to liberate women for other occupations. Women are involved from the start, ensuring that the technology is tailored to their traditional way of doing things, which results in its being readily accepted. Women are also trained in operation and maintenance of equipment, which not only saves money but has the additional benefit that women, with a thorough knowledge of the equipment, are able to convert it to other uses as well.

Vikas Mahila Multipurpose Cooperative Society

India



"When women unite with courage and purpose, they transform silence into leadership and injustice into change."

Organising for Change

This project supports the following SDGs



Vikas Mahila Multipurpose Cooperative Society, a tribal women's society of poor women from Muniguda, Ahandrapu and Bissam Cuttack (Rayagada district, Orissa State) with over 1500 members, is the largest women's cooperative in the district. Although many of the women's husbands harassed them for attending meetings, they had the courage to withstand, and are now no longer afraid to leave their homes, travel and meet with officials. One of their achievements was the ending of illicit alcohol brewing as they rallied through many villages destroying pots of liquor with the support of police officials. Another one of their achievements was to win better wages for women, who were being paid less than men. The Society has trained women in different income generating activities and organises exchanges in order to share and learn from other societies and groups working for socioeconomic development. The society has given birth to many women leaders.

GUL Zarin (46)

Afghanistan



"We turned discarded wool into dignity, quiet hands knitting strength into every stitch we shared."

Knitting Brings Hope

This project supports the following SDGs



Zarin is from the small town of Paghman at the foot of the mountains that separate the valley of Kabul from the West. Although her name means Jewel Flower, her beauty remains hidden beneath the veil imposed by the Taliban. For a widow with three daughters and four sons, making a living is a feat in a country where women are only allowed to work outside the home in hospitals and clinics. To earn money Zarin Gul devised a creative and innovative system. She buys wool sweaters from Kabul's vast used clothing bazaar, unravels the wool, and knits woolen items such as socks and baby clothes with intricate patterns. Zarin Gul did not keep this idea to herself but has taught this skill to other women in her community so they too can earn some income. Knitting needles must be made by the knitters themselves from wood or wire, as there are none for sale. This ingenious technique also illustrates how, through women's creativity, one person's throwaway can become another person's treasure.

Women on rural development Association (WORD)

Nothern Ireland



Working Together for Peace and Development

Working Together for Peace and Development

This project supports the following SDGs



Women on Rural Development (WORD) is an organisation of rural women from South Armagh, a rugged mountainous region situated in north eastern Ireland, on the border between north and south, notorious as 'bandit country' and having suffered much political violence. In 1987, in response to seeing their young people leaving due to lack of opportunities, the women of the Crossmaglen area decided to work together to improve their communities. Some of the projects initiated include an environmental education center, an adult education programme, farm diversification projects including an organic garden, a craft fair and country market, an information technology training programme, a community leadership course, and a women's health needs assessment. Among WORD's early successes was the production of post-cards of the area to counter decades of negative media coverage. In isolated areas lacking transportation WORD funds the childcare and transport costs of women to enable them to follow training and education. WORD challenges government policies that discriminate against women in rural areas. One of their most important initiatives is to encourage groups from across religions to join the movement in order to include the entire community and thus contribute to peace in the area.

VALDEZ CHAUPI Zoila (40)

Peru



"I started by listening to mothers, today, we're shaping budgets, traditions, and futures together."

Promoting Women's Rights

This project supports the following SDGs



Zoila grew up in the high Andean rural district of Machaway (Castilla province, Department of Arequipa) at 3200 meters altitude. Although her parents had no schooling, they taught her responsibility and ethics and sent her to school. Married at 20, she left her abusive husband to raise her three children on her own, managed to complete a degree in Literature and get a job as a teacher. As such she visited the mothers of her students and began organising Mother's Clubs. At their weekly meetings, Zoila talked about women's rights and initiated communal projects to improve the school and clean the village streets. The Mothers Clubs also became training centers to learn skills such as sewing and knitting, and served as the starting point for the formulation of complaints and demands to the local authorities, and also the revival of folkloric traditions and the initiation of sports activities, including even a girls soccer team. Her popularity won her an invitation to run for local elections and she became the first woman Lieutenant Mayor of the district. As such, Zoila makes sure that the budget is equitably distributed among the villages and towns of the district, despite having at times to oppose the Mayor, and ensures that women participate in community affairs.



BAI KHATIK Ratni India

"With no schooling of my own, I built a school, so every child, especially girls, could have one."

Determined to Make a Difference

This project supports the following SDGs



Ratni, from a backward caste and being a girl, did not receive an education and was married at 13. She attended a meeting held by the Center for Human Development and expressed her desire to collaborate in projects in Keer Kheda. She created a school taking advantage of a government announcement of opportunities to open self-governed schools. She visited the parents to motivate them to send their children, especially girls, to school and actively participate in major school functions. She disseminated education on health and on the environment with the result that people now boil or filter their drinking water and take care to preserve this resource. Thanks to her efforts, health personnel pay more frequent visits to the village and medicine is made available in a timely manner.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



[Click here to go back to the summary](#)

2000





Association of Women of Yolombé (AMOY)

Colombia

"In a region marked by violence, we sowed seeds of healing, food, rights, and resilience took root."

Organising for peace and the environment

This project supports the following SDGs



AMOY is a group of 100 rural women from Yolombé municipality who initially came together to share ideas and experiences, helping each other identify needs and find solutions through mutual support. Living in an area affected by multiple paramilitary incursions, the women prioritized solidarity, especially supporting those who had lost husbands or sons, while actively seeking peaceful alternatives to violence. To empower their members economically, they established a revolving fund that provides loans for various projects. The group is involved in agro-ecological initiatives aimed at achieving food self-sufficiency, alongside income-generating activities. One notable project includes the creation of a bio-digester that converts pig waste into organic fertilizer, promoting sustainable agriculture. Additionally, AMOY organizes awareness campaigns focused on domestic violence prevention and women's rights advocacy. Through these combined efforts, the group fosters resilience, empowerment, and sustainable development in their community.



BOANTA Mioara

Romania

"When laws didn't exist, I translated change, so rural women and families could reclaim rights and recognition."

Enabling Women to Organise and Regain Land

This project supports the following SDGs



Mioara used Norwegian laws as a model to set up non-governmental organisations in Romania, where such laws did not yet exist. She translated the laws from Norwegian into Romanian and successfully obtained official approval. Following this, she founded a women's organisation that now has five branches addressing various issues, including support for disabled children, agritourism, domestic violence, rural women's rights, and education for girls in rural areas. In 1995, Mioara organised a conference for rural women's groups focused on obtaining legal recognition and managing their organisations effectively. She also initiated a project to teach computer skills to rural girls, helping to bridge the digital divide. Additionally, Mioara has written documents assisting over 7,000 people in legally reclaiming lands that had been taken away 45 years ago, enabling them to recover their property and restore their livelihoods.



BSPALA Natalia

Ukraine

"From our first organic farm, I've helped women grow their futures with seeds and support."

Helping Others Achieve Success

This project supports the following SDGs



Natalia and her husband were the first in their village of Kolomak to privatise their farm when Ukraine gained independence. Choosing to run it organically, they became pioneers in sustainable agriculture in their region. Their success inspired Natalia to support other local farmers, offering personal loans, sharing equipment, and providing seed to help them get started. Seeing the need for greater collective support, she founded a non-governmental women's organisation that now has 300 members, focused on helping women finance and develop their farms. Natalia also developed a new variety of tomato, which she generously distributed to neighbours to promote local food resilience. As the first woman to head the town council, she worked tirelessly to preserve the community's cultural heritage and established several recreational and cultural facilities. Natalia continues to develop and implement impactful local projects and remains deeply committed to improving the quality of life in her village through grassroots leadership.



Ch'aska Palomas Awaj Warmis

Bolivia

"We weave more than textiles, each thread connects our culture, our voices, and our place in community decisions."

Weaving for Development

This project supports the following SDGs



Ch'aska Palomas Awaj Warmis is an association of 300 women weavers, organised into 11 groups across the communities of Calcha, Yawisla, and Ara. Together, they produce high-quality woven items using traditional designs and natural dyes, preserving ancestral techniques passed down through generations. Each piece they create reflects the rich cultural heritage and history of Calcha. However, their craft is increasingly under threat due to modern ideologies, ethnic discrimination, a disconnecting education system, rural migration, and the challenge of accessing raw materials. Despite these obstacles, the women have succeeded in marketing their products through established museums, ensuring both cultural visibility and economic sustainability. Beyond generating income, the project serves as a platform for women to gather, share experiences, and grow as leaders. Through their collective work, many have gained the confidence and skills to participate in decision-making processes within their communities and at the municipal level, actively contributing to local development and cultural resilience.



CUEVA Santos Felicita Salcedo

Peru

"We began with hunger, but through skill and unity, we now export, protect our land, and lead change."

Persistence Pays Off

This project supports the following SDGs



Santos Felicita, responding to severe food scarcity in her community, formed women's groups and secured funding to establish a dining hall for the most vulnerable.

What began as a small "Mother's Club" in her home, supported by a national food aid organisation, grew into a broader initiative. When funding ended, Santos Felicita encouraged the women to continue gathering and began training them to knit sweaters and other handmade items.

To ensure quality and income, she selected the 30 most skilled artisans and began paying them from her own resources.

Today, their products are exported to Japan and The Netherlands. Beyond this, she plays a leadership role in the Central Committee of the Mashcon Valley, where she advocates for better roads, clean drinking water, and environmental protection. She also founded the Women's Association for Life and Peace, which trains women in textile production and natural dyeing, and takes a strong stand against mining pollution. Her expertise earned her a place in regional development planning workshops.



DEVI Kalawati

India

Promoting the Environment and Women's Needs

This project supports the following SDGs



"We lit our village with electricity, then guarded our forest, and won leadership to protect our future."

Kalawati mobilised the women of Bachher village to demand electricity, and their efforts led to success. Energised by this achievement, the group shifted focus to protecting the rapidly disappearing forest. Each household contributed funds to hire a watchman, while volunteers regularly inspected the forest twice a month.

Together, they established clear rules for forest use, which were respected and enforced.

When violations occurred, often by powerful men, including members of the forest department, the women pursued legal action. Recognising the need for stronger influence, they ran for local elections, leading to the historic election of the first female village head.

Today, women are central to village development, actively involved in improving hygiene, supporting schools, and addressing broader community needs. Kalawati also led a successful campaign to shut down illegal liquor distilleries and established a village milk cooperative, providing a sustainable alternative source of income. Her leadership continues to strengthen community cohesion and environmental stewardship.



DALE Ashilde

Norway

Reviving Mountain Farming

This project supports the following SDGs



"By welcoming youth to the mountains, we pass on living traditions, and a deep respect for the land."

Ashild returned to Norway with her husband to take over the family farm where she was born, choosing to preserve the traditional practices of mountain farming. They raise goats and produce brown goat cheese, following methods passed down through generations.

In 1997, she launched a centre for information and training focused on mountain farming, with the aim of reviving the vanishing custom of migrating with livestock to highland pastures during the summer. She also created a project called "Green Care," which invites children and youth to stay on the farm for a week at a time, offering them hands-on experience with nature and rural life. Ashild's work in farm tourism eventually led to the establishment of the Norwegian Centre for Mountain Farming Culture.

In addition to her farm-based initiatives, she is actively involved in the Norwegian Organisation for Small Farms and other groups that advocate for the protection and promotion of family farms as a vital part of cultural and agricultural heritage.



EKEKE Ethel Nne

Nigeria

Empowering through Weaving

This project supports the following SDGs



"We weave more than textiles, each thread connects our culture, our voices, and our place in community decisions."

In 1987, Ethel recognised that poverty and outdated traditional practices were harming women's self-esteem and opportunities. Seeing the weaving skills many women shared, including her own, she mobilised them to form the Umuagbai Women's Weaving Cooperative Society.

Ethel played a key role in diversifying their cloth into a range of household products, which increased demand and created employment for girls, women, and people with disabilities.

By 1990, the local government acknowledged the cooperative's success by building a weaving centre that has since become a popular tourist attraction.

Beyond her work with weaving, Ethel trained as a paralegal and organises seminars on women's rights aimed at chiefs, men, and women alike. Through these efforts, she mediates conflicts and challenges harmful traditional practices, helping to empower her community and promote gender equality.



GUINDO Aissata

Mali

An Exceptionally Creative Teacher

This project supports the following SDGs

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Aïssata began her career as a teacher during the formation of the new Republic of Mali, dedicating 27 years to education. Following this, she took charge of the technical approach at the Training Centre for Rural Development, an organisation focused on improving the lives of rural women and children through training, information, and support. The centre's work spans health, income-generating activities, new technologies, savings and credit, and environmental conservation. Known for her original and creative teaching methods, Aïssata successfully encourages women to openly discuss even taboo topics. She uses proverbs, anecdotes, drawings, and caricatures to make complex concepts accessible to illiterate women. Through her efforts, many women have gained confidence and knowledge, leading to significant improvements in their daily lives and community well-being. Her innovative approach continues to empower rural women, fostering growth, resilience, and a stronger voice within their communities.



KUBAR Ghulam Sughra

Pakistan

Proving Women's Worth

This project supports the following SDGs

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"By breaking barriers, I have helped women lead, protect, and transform our community together."

When the Aga Khan Foundation established an NGO resource centre in her village, Gulam was one of the first two women to break the strict practice of "Purdah" by attending a seminar on savings and credit alongside men. Inspired, she encouraged other women to engage actively in community development. As a result, women now make up the majority of the Kubbar Welfare Association (KWA), originally founded by men. Gulam also spearheaded a campaign against the sexual abuse of children, initiated the women's section of the agricultural development program, and educated women about their human rights. Recently, she was entrusted with managing a vocational centre, further expanding opportunities for women. Through her leadership, Gulam has opened doors for women to become full participants in their community's growth, demonstrating that women can be equally, if not more, skilful and dedicated contributors to development and social progress.



XUEFENG MA

China

Fish Ponds Bring Wealth

This project supports the following SDGs

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Ma, upon noticing two neglected waste ponds, saw an opportunity and decided to transform them into productive fish farms. She sought help from the Aquatic Product Bureau, consulting with specialists to gain the necessary technology and equipment to clean the ponds and cultivate fish for food. Her early success motivated her to expand the ponds and pioneer innovative fish farming techniques. She introduced new fish varieties, developed a policy to balance species ratios, and adopted traditional Chinese herbs to prevent and treat diseases. Her efforts led to impressive yields, bringing her significant wealth. With this success, she opened both a restaurant and a company. However, Ma didn't stop there. She chose to give back, training others, offering employment, sharing guidance and startup capital, and encouraging many to pursue their own projects. Today, thanks to her initiative, Hu Yuang village has been transformed into a vibrant landscape, a colourful garden filled with trees, flowers, nursery stock, vegetables, fish, and animal farms, thriving in harmony with the community.



DOSS Manohari

India

Empowering through Weaving

This project supports the following SDGs

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"Empowering rural women means reshaping the roots of society, justice, dignity, and equality must begin there."

Manohan has served as the Programme Director of the Women's Development Resource Centre in Madurai for over 20 years. Throughout her career, she has passionately championed the rights of rural women, especially dalits, adivasis, and tribal women, often among the most destitute and marginalised. Through tireless advocacy, she convinced the government to provide better housing for the rural poor and to issue legal documents granting women property rights, a vital step toward economic independence. Manohan also established rural credit unions, literacy classes, and awareness programmes to educate women about their rights and opportunities. She has been a relentless campaigner for legal reforms to protect women from violence and discrimination, and she has worked to increase female representation in Parliament and State legislatures. In addition, she led movements against illegal alcohol brewing and mobilised women to prevent waste and water pollution. Her work has also freed many dalit, tribal, and adivasi individuals from bonded labour, and she continues to fight for their rightful access to land and dignity.



MULWANA Rebecca

Uganda

A Model Organic Farmer

This project supports the following SDGs

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“When I proved farming could thrive sustainably, the whole village began to believe in the soil again.”

Rebecca first gained skills in handicrafts and agriculture through training provided by the YWCA. After spending some time working with the government, where she supervised cooperative businesses, she chose to resign and pursue a more hands-on path. Acquiring a plot of land, she began dairy farming, boldly stepping into a field traditionally dominated by men. Alongside this, she embraced organic farming methods, using farm waste to create compost, liquid manure, and natural pesticides from animal urine. Her success quickly caught the attention of her neighbours. In response, Rebecca began organising training sessions and live demonstrations to share her techniques. Inspired by her example, most of the local community now grows vegetables organically. She has since expanded into pig and poultry farming and even learned to build fuel-saving stoves to promote sustainable living. Her work has led to a decrease in urban migration, as families now enjoy food security and can sell their surplus produce. Thanks to Rebecca’s leadership, organic farming has gained strong momentum in the region.



OGOLLA Loyce

Uganda

Planting Trees for Development

This project supports the following SDGs

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“Planting trees was just the beginning, our roots now run through health, education, and women’s empowerment.”

Loyce, a dedicated headmistress at Mudodo Primary School in Tororo district, West Budama County, and a mother of seven, launched the Mudodo Women Tree Planting Project in 1990. Through this initiative, she has played a vital role in improving all aspects of rural life in her community. Beyond training women in seed multiplication and tree planting, she actively promotes the use of fuel-saving cookstoves to reduce deforestation and household energy costs. Loyce encourages women to take part in income-generating activities, empowering them economically and socially. Her own home often serves as a hub for seminars and discussions, and she has successfully lobbied both governmental and non-governmental organisations for financial and technical support. Recognising the importance of health, she also initiated a local clinic to improve access to medical care. To raise awareness about sanitation, education, and environmental issues, Loyce creatively uses music, dance, and drama, connecting with the community through culture while inspiring real change. Her work continues to uplift and transform rural life.



PASUMPON Mayandi

India

A Tireless Village Activist

This project supports the following SDGs

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“From stigma to strength, we build homes, businesses, and hope for every woman in our villages.”

Mayandi, a determined woman from the Kallar caste, a community historically discriminated against for its reputation as petty thieves, has become a force for transformation. She founded the Village Women Development Association to uplift women and improve village life. Under her leadership, the association launched several income-generating activities, including gem-cutting and tailoring, providing vital economic opportunities. She supported 50 families in building houses and distributed specially nutritious food to malnourished children. In 15 villages, she helped organise women’s self-help groups that pool savings to cover health and education expenses or provide startup capital for small businesses. These groups also empower women to advocate directly with the government for essential services and infrastructure. Mayandi’s initiatives extend further: she distributed tree saplings for environmental sustainability and established literacy centres to combat educational inequality. Additionally, she organises health camps and rights awareness seminars, strengthening the community’s voice. A strong opponent of alcohol consumption, she actively campaigns against its negative impact on family and community well-being, promoting healthier, more empowered lives.



“Pueblo Grande” Cultural Organization

Argentina

Establishing a Cultural Identity

This project supports the following SDGs

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“We didn’t just teach art, we recovered our voices, our stories, and our place in history.”

The “Pueblo Grande” Cultural Organisation is a collective of women from Villa Río Icho Cruz, united since 1990 by a shared commitment to popular education, cultural preservation, and the promotion of women’s and community rights. Their work centers on empowering local people through workshops in the visual, plastic, and musical arts, as well as training in communication, gender issues, reproductive health, and community organisation. These efforts have inspired the creation of several autonomous groups, which now travel across the country to exhibit and sell their work, generating both recognition and income. The organisation has also produced a powerful publication addressing cultural, economic, environmental, and gender issues, and created a local radio programme to reach a broader audience. Notably, they compiled the first-ever tourist guide and documented history of the area, collecting testimonies from local inhabitants. In a region long overlooked by government efforts, “Pueblo Grande” provides not only income-generating opportunities but also restores a deep sense of cultural identity and community pride.



SAMAH Yatta

Sierra Leone

"We turned war-torn survival into strength, where once there was loss, now there is leadership and learning."

Healing the Wounds of War

This project supports the following SDGs



In response to the poor living conditions faced by people displaced by war, Yatta mobilised the women of the Moawoma community and founded the Moawoma Rural Women's Development Association. With a membership of over 10,000 women and girls, it has become the most active women's organisation in the Eastern region. The group engages in agriculture and conducts literacy classes alongside income-generating activities such as embroidery, basket weaving, gara tie-dyeing, and soap making. A major milestone was the establishment of a Rural Women's Centre, which led to the successful acquisition of land for a multipurpose facility. This space now serves as a grain store, restaurant, and literacy school, providing practical support for both livelihoods and education. Yatta also plays a critical role in sensitising women to their rights and offers trauma healing, counselling, and training in non-violent communication, vital for rebuilding post-conflict communities. Thanks to her leadership, the government was successfully lobbied to recognise and celebrate World Rural Women's Day, beginning in 1999.



THONG Thavrin

Cambodia

Extreme Hardship Shapes a Leader

This project supports the following SDGs



"I wanted a better life for my family, helping others do the same became my path forward."

Thavin was just nine years old when the Khmer Rouge forced her into a children's work group. Her family, like many others, was left to scavenge for food to survive. After losing her mother, followed by her father and grandfather, Thavin was left to care for her baby brother on her own. When the regime fell, she began selling candy to pay for her own schooling. Her determination caught the attention of a teacher, who helped her find work with the local Women's Association. Today, Thavin is the Director of Aphivat Satrey, an NGO recognised by OXFAM as one of its most successful, strong, and well-organised partner projects in Cambodia. Under her leadership, women have been actively included in all aspects of community organisation, with a strong focus on developing leadership skills. Thavin excels in participatory methods to identify community issues and build effective strategies. The economic activities supported by the organisation directly respond to practical needs, helping families achieve long-term self-sufficiency and resilience.



TARMUJI Ngatini

Indonesia

Fighting Illegal Expropriation of Land

This project supports the following SDGs



"They took our land, but not our voice, organising was our way back to justice and dignity."

In 1991, the military seized the farmland of Ngatini's village to make way for palm oil plantations, displacing local farmers and devastating livelihoods. Refusing to accept this injustice, Ngatini led an eight-day demonstration in front of Parliament in 1993, which resulted in a meeting and an empty promise that the land dispute would be resolved. Shortly after, she was arrested on false charges, but even imprisonment didn't stop her. She continued the struggle through relentless correspondence, appealing to the National Board of Land Affairs, the Police and Military Departments, and the Army Headquarters, all while facing threats and witnessing her village attacked by paramilitary forces. Undeterred, she organised another large demonstration in 1994, both at the House of Parliament and in the capital city. This time, a resolution was finally reached. Following this victory, Ngatini became the leader of a local women's group, using her voice to successfully lobby the government for vital infrastructure: irrigation systems, electricity, a public school, a mosque, and transportation facilities, all improving life for her community.



R Vasantha

India

Helping Women Become Leaders

This project supports the following SDGs



"Empowering women to lead means protecting our land, health, and rights for generations to come."

R. Vasantha founded the non-governmental organisation GUIDE in 1985 with the mission of empowering rural women across Tamil Nadu. GUIDE offers training in human rights, literacy, leadership, and health, helping women build both confidence and capacity. The organisation actively promotes the formation of women's associations, conducts role-playing exercises to encourage self-expression, and organises activities focused on suicide prevention and the rehabilitation of rape survivors. Women are also encouraged to contest local elections, becoming agents of change in their own communities. Thanks to GUIDE's efforts, women have now organised themselves in 230 villages, with participation in village courts reaching 40% and over 500 women stepping into leadership roles. Beyond social empowerment, Vasantha and GUIDE have fought against alcohol abuse, promoted low-input sustainable agriculture, and campaigned to protect community forests and water sources from exploitation and pollution. As one of the pioneers of the Tamil Nadu Women's Movement, GUIDE continues to be a vital force for justice, sustainability, and grassroots leadership throughout the region.



VILLALBA Noma Patricia Saucedo
Mexico

Teaching Respect for the Environment
This project supports the following SDGs

“Teaching children to care for the earth plants seeds of change for our communities’ future.”

Norma, coordinator of environmental education in rural communities of Aguascalientes, launched an inspiring program in 1995 aimed at educating children about environmental responsibility. Through field trips, children learn about local fauna and flora, the importance of water conservation, and how to reduce waste by separating garbage for recycling. They also engage in creative activities by making recycled objects from discarded materials, fostering both environmental awareness and innovation. Norma has successfully organised recycling centres and vegetable gardens within schools, encouraging practical, hands-on learning. Her efforts brought together 105 children and 22 parents to conduct clean-up campaigns across three communities, during which they collected over eight tons of garbage. Building on this momentum, in 1997 she founded the non-governmental organisation Integral Training for Excellence. The NGO offers workshops, courses, discussions, and conferences that equip poor communities with skills for income-generating activities, such as the traditional craft of dressmaking, empowering participants economically while promoting cultural heritage.



TOKORY Laurine
Ghana

Liberating Women and Girls from Sexual Slavery
This project supports the following SDGs

“Empowering women to reclaim their lives and build a stronger, healthier community together.”

Laurine went to remote areas of the Volta region to liberate young women from a form of fetish slavery called “Trokosi”.Trokosi is an ancient practice found among the Ewe whereby prepubescent girls are given to a deity to atone for a relative’s offense. She becomes a slave, serving as the sexual partner of a priest. Laurine trains the liberated women in knitting and dressmaking and educates them about their rights. Through public awareness campaigns she has liberated over 45 women. She promotes the education of the girl child and fights female genital mutilation. Laurine encourages women to plant trees and educates them on the importance of sanitation to prevent disease. She also created the NGO “Mother and Child”, whose aim is to fight poverty and sexual exploitation and work towards economic and social empowerment of women.



MOLAPO Lesego Veronica
Botswana

Encouraging Markets for Development
This project supports the following SDGs

“Together, we built markets and voices, empowering rural women to grow and lead with pride.”

Lesego has dedicated herself to improving the lives of rural women since 1975, beginning as secretary of the Borolong Agricultural Show Committee. She encouraged women to rent stalls to sell their handmade crafts and farm produce, boosting their incomes and confidence. She also motivated women to persuade their husbands to bore water holes, enabling vegetable cultivation and increasing food security. In 1986, Lesego founded the Southern Horticultural Grower’s Association, which organizes an annual field day where farmers can share their challenges and display their products. Recognizing the need for better infrastructure, she successfully mobilized both men and women to lobby the government for a dedicated market. Their efforts led to the release of half a million US dollars to build the Fresh Produce Market, greatly benefiting local farmers. In 1994, Lesego was elected to the local council to represent rural women, where she continues to support them in accessing government microcredit and other development programs, empowering them economically and socially.



ODUAR NDEGUE Fileria
Kenya

Fighting Harmful Traditionnal Practices
This project supports the following SDGs

“Together, we break barriers, nurture health, and empower women to build brighter futures.”

Fileria was married off at a young age to an older man, while her brothers continued their education, a reality that inspired her to take action. She now leads 18 women’s and community groups that she helped establish, focused on fighting for women’s rights, particularly against forced marriages and harmful practices that contribute to poverty and the spread of AIDS. Fileria encourages women to become self-reliant by learning agriculture and crafts and supports their participation in literacy classes. She is also a strong advocate for educating girls and has founded a centre for disadvantaged children to provide them with learning opportunities. Beyond social issues, Fileria promotes environmental sustainability by encouraging soil conservation, tree planting, sanitation, and the use of herbal medicines. She also established a rural pharmacy to improve healthcare access and is actively working to provide clean water to rural women, enhancing their health and wellbeing. Her comprehensive approach addresses both social and environmental challenges to empower her community.



SITHOLE Patience

Zimbabwe

Restoring Land through Traditional Agriculture

This project supports the following SDGs

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“Reviving traditions to nurture the land, empower farmers, and sustain our future together.”

Patience played a key role in founding the Chikukwa Permaculture Club in 1991, focusing on sustainable land use and traditional agricultural methods. In 1993, she helped establish Nyuchi Dza Kasimb, a group dedicated to protecting indigenous trees, planting grasses, and constructing canals and water basins to conserve water and prevent soil erosion. They revived mixed-cropping practices and reintroduced traditional red maize to replace monoculture hybrid corn, achieving higher yields without relying on costly seeds and chemical fertilizers. Since 1996, Patience has led a permaculture school under the Chikukwa Ecological Land-Use Community Trust, where small-scale farmers share their knowledge through practical courses on sustainable farming. Today, about 350 families actively participate in sustainable community efforts, resulting in improved water availability, reduced malnutrition, and more democratic decision-making processes. Patience’s leadership has fostered environmental restoration alongside social empowerment, creating a resilient and thriving community.



NAJJAR Anissa

Lebanon

Creating the Basis for a Distinct Rural Culture

This project supports the following SDGs

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“Educating women to empower communities, preserve culture, and inspire future generations.”

Anissa founded the Village Welfare Society (VWS) with the goal of improving literacy and education among rural women. She understood that better education was essential to prevent rural exodus, social crises, and the loss of cultural identity, aiming to build a distinct rural society. Through VWS, Anissa organised workshops covering topics such as home management, child care, nutrition, rural industries, health, and income-generating activities. The success of these sessions was so evident that men in the community encouraged their wives to attend and proudly shared the products women created. To engage the younger generation, Anissa helped open schools offering the government’s “Rural Brevet” certificate, which includes practical subjects designed to equip women with skills for independence and active citizenship. Her efforts have empowered many women, fostering self-reliance and community pride, while preserving rural traditions and strengthening social bonds.



VIMALAWATHIE Herath Mudiysanselage

Sri Lanka

Organising for Culture, Development and Peace

This project supports the following SDGs

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“Building bridges, empowering women, and nurturing culture for a united, thriving community.”

Herath founded the Sinhala Tamil Rural Women’s Network in 1988 with just 13 women, aiming to promote harmony and break down barriers in rural communities. Since then, the network has grown to over 18,000 members and supports collective farms run by rural women. The organization runs programs to improve child nutrition, establish tree nurseries, and implement planting projects to combat soil erosion. They also operate a savings and credit scheme to empower women financially. Herath initiated the Youth for Peace movement, training 1,300 volunteers dedicated to fostering community peace. To preserve local culture, she launched an annual cultural festival that attracts over 10,000 participants. She also established a pre-school program benefiting 600 children and encourages creativity through a drama group for young women. An award scheme recognizes outstanding artistic and leadership achievements within the community. Beyond these efforts, Herath actively motivates women to participate in local elections, further strengthening women’s leadership and representation.



DOS SANTOS Sandra Mara Ribas Machado

Brazil

Pioneer Organic Farmer

This project supports the following SDGs

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“From loss to leadership: growing organic farms and greener communities with care and courage.”

Sandra initially practiced conventional agriculture alongside her in-laws, but after losing her second child due to exposure to harmful agricultural chemicals, she made a life-changing decision to switch to organic farming. Partnering with another organic farmer, she became one of the pioneers in producing organic potatoes and tomatoes in Brazil. In 1996, her farm earned national organic certification from the Biodynamic Institute for Commercialisation, marking a major milestone. Under her guidance, ten local farmers adopted organic methods, helping to expand sustainable agriculture in the region. Sandra also opened her own shop and launched a small food-processing business, producing 55 different items and creating new employment opportunities for her community. Beyond agriculture, she raised funds to build the first church in her village and introduced an ecological mass, promoting the idea that protecting the environment is a vital responsibility for all, including true Christians. Sandra’s work blends environmental stewardship with community development and spiritual values.



POMA Gladys Vasquez

Peru

Fighting to Save the Andean Wetlands

This project supports the following SDGs

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Gladys, an Aymara shepherd caring for llamas and alpacas, has long advocated for her community's rights in the face of environmental challenges. Since 1981, water extraction from the mountains has caused desertification, severely impacting the livelihoods of more than 400 Aymara shepherd families. In 1994, Gladys appealed to city authorities, but received no response. When it became clear the government would not take action, she escalated the complaint to the United Nations. Recognized for her leadership, Gladys was appointed by the Aymara Parliament to the Commission for the Defence of the International Waters of the Aymara Territories. As a result, the government halted water extraction from some wells, and Aymara communities in Chile united to oppose further extraction plans. The importance of protecting this fragile ecosystem gained international attention, culminating in recognition by the RAMSAR Convention on Wetlands. Gladys's persistent advocacy has been crucial in safeguarding water resources vital to her community and preserving their traditional way of life.



AUER Ingeborg

Austria

Ambassador for Women Farmers

This project supports the following SDGs

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Ingeborg's open mind, creativity, and boundless energy shine through her diverse roles as a farmer, teacher, instructor for rural women and girls, and organiser of major events and exhibitions. Beyond selling fresh farm products directly, she established a dedicated marketplace in town for farmers' goods and successfully persuaded large supermarkets to stock locally produced food. Together with other women farmers, she created a gourmet shop, further promoting regional delicacies. In 1998, Ingeborg accompanied a delegation to Brussels to showcase Carinthia's unique Christmas spirit and culinary specialties to the European Union, opening up new markets across Europe. She also facilitates the Austrian income-generating initiative "Holidays on Farms," which promotes rural tourism and farm stays. Ingeborg passionately shares her deep knowledge of farm culture and traditional customs through seminars, radio broadcasts, exhibitions, and school presentations, enriching her community and helping preserve rural heritage.



LAMBERTIN Georgia

France

Bringing Children Closer to the Earth

This project supports the following SDGs

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Georgia earned a degree in arboriculture to contribute meaningfully to her husband's vineyard and orchard. Her passion soon transformed their farm into an educational hub. In 1995, she mobilized fellow farmers, organizations, and public institutions to establish "Li Granjo Escolo," the Association of Educational Farms of Vaucluse. This innovative association defines educational farms as authentic agricultural enterprises specially designed to welcome groups of children for half a day to a full week. The program teaches children about farming, environmental stewardship, and plant and animal life through hands-on participation in the entire farming cycle. Beyond agricultural skills, children learn the importance of managing landscapes and protecting the environment, fostering a respect for nature and healthy diets. Adults are also invited to join the experience. By 1999, the program attracted 1,000 children and 200 adults from across the region, illustrating the growing impact of Georgia's vision to connect communities with sustainable farming and environmental education.



SZECSENYI Erzsébet

Hungary

Creating an Eco-Village

This project supports the following SDGs

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After the arrival of democracy in her country, Erzsébet returned to school to study organic farming, driven by a vision to transform her village into an eco-friendly community. She joined the Hungarian Society of Organic Farmers and began advocating for sustainable agricultural practices. Despite facing resistance from those invested in chemical-dependent farming, Erzsébet successfully persuaded the village mayor that adopting organic methods would bring prosperity. With support from the Ministry, she helped train 250 local farmers in organic techniques. These farmers now supply fresh produce to local schools and markets, taking full responsibility for processing, handling, and transportation. The community also comes together regularly to clean public spaces and plant trees and flowers, fostering a strong sense of unity and environmental stewardship. Erzsébet has authored over 100 articles promoting organic farming, helping to spread awareness nationwide. Today, her village stands as a shining example of sustainable living, inspiring similar eco-village initiatives across the country.



CALFUQUEO Bernardita del Carmen

Chile

“Standing up for indigenous rights, paving the way for justice and sustainable empowerment.”

Fighting Racial Discrimination

This project supports the following SDGs

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As a student, Bernardita played a key role in integrating indigenous traditional knowledge into the academic curriculum and advocating for increased admission of Mapuche students, especially women, to various faculties. After completing her studies, she worked as a social worker in Lumaco, one of Chile’s poorest regions, where the majority population is Mapuche and faces widespread discrimination from non-indigenous residents. When Bernardita herself experienced discrimination during a labor dispute, she courageously became the first Mapuche woman to take her case to court. Despite facing physical assault by authorities after publicly denouncing mistreatment and offensive acts, she won her case, setting an important legal precedent for the rights of over one million Mapuche people in Chile. Beyond this legal victory, Bernardita established groups focused on promoting sustainable development, with a special emphasis on empowering rural and indigenous women, strengthening their role in community and economic growth.

WWSF China Prize

for Women’s creativity in rural life

The China Prize was a joint-venture between WWSF and Rural Women Knowing All magazine-China. Five laureates were honored in 2000. We regret that we don’t have any pictures to share.

- FENRONG Li

From Xiangshuigou village, took out a mortgage on her own house in order to help 17 women obtain loans to get out of poverty.
- LIFEN Zhang

From Liwan village, used a micro credit to build a greenhouse and then helped other women to build 50 more greenhouses; she also offers interest-free loans and free seeds and seedlings.
- YANHUI Zhao

From Tuonan township, encourages women to be self reliant by learning to read and write, and has provided many jobs for rural women through a knitwear cooperative she started.
- XIUYING Guo

From Yazhibe village, introduced herbal medicines and encouraged women to grow vegetables in greenhouses during the winter. As a result the village now has 150 greenhouses; she also helped many women claim their rights.
- LIXIA Cai

From Bogong village, taught 100 women and girls to grow mushrooms and rare vegetables, raise pigs, chickens and cows, and other income generating activities; she organized many cultural activities and taught women to form support groups.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



[Click here to go back to the summary](#)

1999

Highlights from the 1999 award ceremonies



Laureate **TZAROUKYAN Rosa, Armenia**, in the presence of **G.DORNBOS, FAP President**



TZAROUKYAN Rosa, Armenia



Laureate **SALOME Aslla, Bolivia**



Prize Award Ceremony in Geneva, Hotel Beau Rivage



STEADY Filomina Chioma, 1999 WWSF Vice President



Prize Award Ceremony in Geneva, Palais Wilson in the presence of the Mayor of Geneva



ABAKAH Elizabeth

Ghana

Working for Health and Respect



This project supports the following SDGs



"Change started when we picked up the trash, now we're building futures, one woman at a time."

Elizabeth began her development work by mobilising rural women to clean up the towns, tackling the widespread issue of garbage. This grassroots initiative not only improved public hygiene but also earned her the trust and recognition of local women, who soon chose her to represent and advocate for their needs in the villages. Her leadership extended beyond environmental efforts, she played a critical role in promoting peace by reconciling two local chiefs locked in a longstanding dispute. Elizabeth's commitment to poverty reduction is equally impactful. She volunteers with an NGO that cultivates crops specifically to feed vulnerable children, including orphans, abandoned youngsters, and elderly women. Inspired by her, many women in the area have embraced farming as a path to self-reliance. In the evenings, she leads literacy classes for adults and presides over a women's cooperative society dedicated to securing microcredit funds to support women's initiatives. Thanks to Elizabeth's efforts, women are more respected.



ANAGBOGU Mercy Agu

Nigeria

Restoring the Dignity of Women



This project supports the following SDGs



"Tradition can evolve, our voices reshaped laws, uplifted widows, and opened doors for women in power."

Mercy began her creative activism in 1985 when she presented a paper at a conference on the psychology of Igbo women. This marked the beginning of a commitment to empowering women and transforming social norms. Since then, she has organised numerous seminars and rural workshops in Anambra State focused on survival strategies, food preservation techniques, and poverty alleviation. As the leader of AWAC, a women's organisation offering counselling and legal services, Mercy has been instrumental in promoting women's rights and inclusion in governance. Her advocacy led to significant constitutional changes in her town, allowing women to be appointed to the village council, an achievement that saw women successfully appointed in two villages for the first time. Through sensitisation workshops on widowhood practices, she also helped reduce funeral rites from 28 to just 4 days, effectively eliminating many harmful and degrading rituals once imposed on widows. Mercy's efforts have reshaped her community's view of women and sparked lasting change.



ANGIDA-OMAGOR Petty
Uganda

Providing Vegetables for War Victims
This project supports the following SDGs

"We lost everything, but by planting together, we grew back our strength, our dignity, and our children's health."

Petty, a woman with little formal education from the impoverished village of Agaria, has become a powerful advocate for rural women and children. In the aftermath of a violent rebellion in 1986, during which the entire population was displaced and placed in government camps, the villagers returned to find their homes and livelihoods destroyed. Amid this devastation, Petty stepped up to support her community. She began by organising women into small groups, teaching them essential skills to nourish their children and establish vegetable gardens to fight hunger and restore self-sufficiency. Her efforts laid the foundation for a more structured initiative. In 1995, she founded the Komolo Development Association, an organisation focused on child welfare, basic health education, and sustainable agriculture. Through her creativity and determination, many children in the area were saved from malnutrition, and women gained access to knowledge and resources that allowed them to rebuild their lives. Petty's leadership continues to inspire resilience and community-driven change in Agaria and beyond.



The National Articulation of Female Agricultural Workers
Brazil

Organising for Women's Rights
This project supports the following SDGs

"Together, we've taken small steps to ensure women's voices are heard in our communities."

The National Articulation of Female Agricultural Workers (ANMTR) unites grassroots movements such as the Small Farmer Movement, Landless Peasant Movement, Female Rural Workers Movement, and others. In 1995, it played a key role in the country's first national meeting of female rural workers, where 12 organisations from 22 states came together to set shared goals and launch joint actions. ANMTR aims to strengthen the national struggle of rural women by providing training and promoting the exchange of experiences. It has achieved important gains, including retirement and maternity benefits, as well as official documentation for rural women, crucial for accessing services and securing rights. Most significantly, ANMTR has helped shift cultural norms: women now have a voice in decision-making spaces previously dominated by men, marking a major step toward gender equality and rural empowerment.



CAINONG Bai
China

An Illiterate Woman Becomes a Deputy
This project supports the following SDGs

"Literacy gave me a voice, now I help other women build futures with knowledge, dignity, and purpose."

Bai Cainong was illiterate for many years until 1991, when the local women's federation helped her learn to read and write. Determined to improve her life, she studied hard, attended classes, and learned valuable agricultural skills, including pig-raising and the cultivation of hybrid wheat, corn, and rice. In 1992, she persuaded 47 illiterate women to join literacy classes she held in her own home. Her efforts expanded to eight nearby villages, ultimately benefiting over 400 women. Bai also guided the women in her village to engage in income-generating activities. With her support, 90 families started pig-raising and crop-growing businesses, reducing poverty in 70% of farming households. Her dedication extended to environmental protection—she worked to prevent illegal logging and hunting, and sponsored the planting of forest and fruit trees to restore the local ecosystem. The deep respect she earned from her community led to her appointment as deputy to the People's Congress of her county.



BIBI Khatima
Pakistan

A Model Woman Activist
This project supports the following SDGs

"I started with nothing, but by learning and sharing, we've helped each other stand on our own."

After being abandoned by her drug-addicted husband, Khatima chose to take control of her life by forming a women's organisation in her village. She received training in healthcare, midwifery, family planning, microenterprises, and mushroom cultivation. Using these skills, she trained other women, launched a second organisation, and connected with women from five neighbouring villages. Though illiterate, Khatima became the first woman in her region to manage finances, keeping records by dictating to a literate man. Under her leadership, the organisation began accumulating savings and building a foundation for sustainable growth. Her confidence grew as she attended conferences and visited other grassroots organisations to exchange ideas and experiences. Khatima's efforts not only improved livelihoods but also strengthened women's roles in the community. She is now preparing to become the future forestry motivator in her village, continuing her work in environmental and social development.



Severa Luque Bogarin de COODEÑE

Paraguay

“From humble beginnings, we built a cooperative where everyone’s effort helps the whole community grow.”

Cooperate Organisation Benefits all

This project supports the following SDGs



Severa and a friend introduced the idea of cooperativism in Paraguay, a concept brought from Chile by priest Padre Frederico Schiaron. At the time, it was unfamiliar in the region, but Severa’s determination made it a reality. She successfully gathered 113 people who collectively contributed 72,000 guaraníes to establish a savings and loan cooperative. With dedication, she went door to door in Pilar, speaking directly to poor families, helping them understand how cooperativism could improve their lives. Thanks to her efforts, many low-income individuals gained access to financial services and new opportunities. She ensured farmers from Umbú Island received technical assistance and essential farm inputs. Traditional fishermen in Pilar also benefited, organising themselves to obtain equipment and loans to market their products. Recognising the importance of involving women, she created sewing workshops for the wives of farmers and fishermen.



DEVI Swarnalata

India

Non-Violent Defending Land

This project supports the following SDGs



“For 25 years, I’ve worked quietly, helping my village grow green, healthy, and self-reliant.”

For the past 25 years, Swarnalata has worked tirelessly to improve life in the remote coastal area of Puri. She mobilised villagers to use latrines and helped provide safe drinking water through innovative water filters. Swarnalata encouraged planting fuel and fruit trees along roads and riverbanks, creating a thriving green belt. She stood up for the poor by raising awareness of their struggles to save land and trees from wealthy landowners. She transformed waterlogged wasteland into one-acre plots for poor farmers and promoted renovating water tanks for irrigation and aquaculture. Swarnalata also advocated for building the first road in the area and introduced an innovative irrigation system to support agriculture. Additionally, she encouraged the installation of bio-gas plants and solar cookers, promoting sustainable energy use. These initiatives, among many others, have had a lasting impact on the community’s health, environment, and livelihoods.



DEVI Sangrami

India

Transforming a Poor Village

This project supports the following SDGs



“After loss, I learned, and now we rebuild forests, futures, and safer paths for our children.”

Sangrami, a widow supporting five children and her parents-in-law, witnessed the devastating flood of 1970 that wiped out the thriving centre of Belakuchi across the Upper Alaknanda basin. Motivated by this loss, she left her village to attend an eco-development camp to learn about the vital link between forests and floods. Using this knowledge, she helped reforest barren slopes and protect riverbanks, reducing the need for women to climb dangerous cliffs to collect fuel and fodder, allowing them to care better for their children. Determined to educate her community, Sangrami persuaded organisers to hold a similar camp in her village to teach youth how to prevent future floods. She mobilised women and convinced men to build village resources together. Beyond environmental work, she established a school and advocated for a pedestrian path so villagers could easily access markets to sell their goods, improving both safety and livelihoods.



DOKU Narki

Ghana

Educating Villagers for Better Health

This project supports the following SDGs



“We grew food together, but also knowledge, confidence, and a better future for our daughters.”

Narki grew up in the remote village of Teteman, where access to healthcare and education was limited. After receiving training as a midwife, she took the initiative to organise the women of her village, educating them on nutrition, reproductive health, and family planning. Recognising the power of community, she encouraged the women to start practicing community farming. During breaks in the farm work, Narki used the time to share crucial information about AIDS prevention, the importance of educating girls, and general health awareness. As more women joined and the farm grew, she helped establish a nursery where the elderly and youth cared for the children, allowing mothers to work without worry. Her efforts have brought visible change: the birth rate is decreasing, fish ponds are adding vital protein to the community’s diet, and a new corn mill spares women the 14 km journey they once made to grind corn. Life in Teteman is steadily improving.



HAYES Anita

Ireland

*Saving Scarce Seeds
for Culture and Health*

This project supports the following SDGs



*"By sharing old seeds,
we're planting
knowledge, memories,
and resilience for
the next generation."*

Anita is the founder of the Irish Seed Savers Association (ISSA), a voluntary, non-commercial organisation committed to locating and preserving traditional varieties of fruits and vegetables. The organisation's mission is to conserve genetic material, protect local history, and reintroduce biodiversity into the everyday lives of people. This work is increasingly vital, according to the FAO, 75% of agricultural crop genetic diversity has been lost since 1900. Anita and the ISSA team often rely on the wisdom of older rural communities, reaching out to tap into their knowledge and experience in identifying rare and heritage plant varieties. The seeds that are located and preserved are not for sale, but ISSA members can choose up to five varieties to grow in their own gardens. Looking ahead, ISSA is developing a school program that offers native apple varieties to students, serving as a living educational tool in agricultural history, biology, biodiversity, and insect life, while also promoting healthy eating.



JEGANNATHAN Krishnammal

India

A Gandhian "Joan of Arc"

This project supports the following SDGs



*"Land, peace,
and dignity, these are
what we've fought for,
step by step, without
lifting a weapon."*

Krishnammal has dedicated her life to social work, tirelessly advocating for the poor and outcast communities of Thanjavur. For over 30 years, she was deeply involved in Vinoba Bhave's Land Gift movement, promoting land redistribution for the landless. She worked closely with women and children to strengthen community bonds through women's groups and grassroots initiatives, and led peaceful processions to amplify the voices of the landless poor. Following the tragic massacre of 44 agricultural families in Kilvenmani, Krishnammal co-founded Land for the Tiller's Independence (LAFTI), an organisation that uses bank loans to buy land, over 4,000 acres from the rich, for redistribution to the poor. Through persistent organising, visiting villages, and engaging in dialogue, she has helped reduce violent conflict. She also actively opposes destructive prawn farming by multinational corporations, advocating for environmental protection. Despite being imprisoned for her activism, Krishnammal continues her non-violent struggle for justice, equality, and sustainable livelihoods for the most vulnerable.



ALHADJA Hind

Jordan

Learning by doing

This project supports the following SDGs



*"What began as my
journey to learn became
a shared path of growth
for hundreds of women
and youth."*

Hind Al Hadja, after marrying a formerly nomadic Bedouin, felt a strong need to educate herself, especially when she perceived herself as less knowledgeable than the wives of her husband's colleagues. This personal motivation led her to begin educating the women in her village, which in turn improved her own understanding. She soon established the first Women's Committee in the town, which became a central hub for social and community activities. Under her leadership, the committee launched a local magazine, a pioneering platform for women to express their views. She also established a women's youth centre, which has benefited over 200 young people through awareness programs, and created a handicraft centre where more than 125 women now generate extra income. A dairy production unit was also developed, with 20% of its profits supporting the centre's activities. Now a member of the Municipal Council, Hind works actively to promote family planning, public health, environmental awareness, and literacy.



JERUTO Naomi

Kenya

A Super Social Worker

This project supports the following SDGs



*"Together, we grow,
through learning,
working, and standing
strong against
old challenges."*

Naomi began her career in social work and, even after losing her paid position due to budget cuts, continued to serve her community with unwavering strength and dedication as a volunteer. Observing the low participation in development efforts, especially among men struggling with heavy drinking, she took action by organising 16 self-help groups, 12 women's groups, and 9 youth groups. These groups engage in income-generating activities such as crafts and farming, alongside literacy and health education, and sports programs for the youth. Naomi has also led vital awareness campaigns on HIV/AIDS, family planning, and the eradication of female genital mutilation. In addition, she has implemented social welfare and vocational rehabilitation programs to support vulnerable groups and boost local economic development. Through her consistent efforts, Naomi has played a key role in improving both the human and economic conditions of her community, empowering individuals with knowledge, opportunities, and renewed purpose.



M.A.OKECH Dolphine

Kenya

The “Exemplary Educator”

This project supports the following SDGs



“Teaching women to farm and learn, I’ve seen communities bloom with hope and strength.”

Dolphine began her work as a rural school teacher and administrator, introducing innovative educational programs that empowered her community. She founded the Kenya Female Advisory Organisation (KEADO), a self-financed group that supports rural women in the Nyanza and Western provinces by offering typing and photocopying services. This model helps women become self-supporting and financially independent. Through KEADO’s integrated learning approach, women gained valuable farming skills by collaborating with agricultural experts. The success of their increased productivity is visible in the competitive community shows that Dolphine introduced, which encourage healthy competition and pride among farmers. Beyond agriculture, Dolphine is a passionate advocate for girls’ education, having authored several books on the topic. She is also actively involved in the fight against female circumcision, working to protect the rights and health of young girls in her region. Her dedication has inspired many to pursue education and self-reliance.



JEGANNATHAN Krishnammal

India

Working to Abolish Child Labor

This project supports the following SDGs



“From hardship, I found strength, lifting women and children toward fairness and hope.”

Agnes, born into an untouchable family, was fortunate to have a mother who insisted on her education. After finishing school, she was married, but her husband soon left her. Determined not to be defeated, Agnes began organising women to address critical issues, including persuading men to stop drinking and demanding that her husband pay compensation. She organised health camps to educate women and youth on AIDS prevention, reproductive health, food poisoning, and diarrheal diseases. Agnes encourages women to save money and trains them in income-generating activities like tailoring and making leather goods, baskets, and lace. She also leads literacy campaigns and motivates high school students through essay and quiz competitions. Her activism led to equal wages for women working in quarries and the successful elimination of child labour in five villages, improving the lives and rights of countless women and children.



RATHWA Radhaben Bhanabhai

India

The Power of New Beginnings

This project supports the following SDGs



“When women unite, our voices grow stronger, and new roots of hope take hold.”

Radhaben faced a difficult new beginning after her village was submerged due to the construction of the Sukhi Dam. As compensation, her family received five acres of wasteland with no facilities or services. Initially, the resettled families distrusted outside help, including the economic rehabilitation efforts of the Self Employed Women’s Association. Determined to help, Radhaben convinced the women in her village to form a savings group, taking responsibility for its management. She understood that unity was key, that a village with a strong, collective voice could better face challenges. She now regularly calls village meetings whenever important decisions must be made. As a member of the Sukhi Executive Committee, Radhaben effectively communicates the community’s concerns to government officials. Thanks to these efforts, people now have access to electricity, food, and water, and economic development programs have been launched, bringing hope and progress to the resettled families.



SHAPOVAL Valentina

Ukraine

Organising for Development

This project supports the following SDGs



“Even when faced with resistance, I stand firm to build opportunities for women and community.”

Valentina began her work on a collective farm after graduating from the College of Agriculture. While raising her three children, she organised cultural and educational activities for the youth, which became so successful that she formed several groups for different community members, including youth, the elderly, married couples, families, and cultural studies. In 1995, when authorities resisted her efforts to register a new women’s group, Valentina persisted and took her case all the way to the Ministry of Justice to secure the right to register. Today, women in her village receive support for poverty and unemployment issues and learn about their rights. Despite initial refusal of support from the business community, she self-financed her NGO until securing funds, which she used to offer computer and sewing courses. Valentina has continued her work without pay, showing remarkable dedication even while battling skin cancer, inspiring many through her resilience and commitment.



GOMEZ DA SILVA Raimunda

Brazil

Fighting for Land and Rights

This project supports the following SDGs

Raimunda, originally from Maranhão State, began organizing people through the church to improve the health and lives of women facing discrimination and abuse. After moving to Tocantins State, she courageously joined the struggle for land rights, despite fearing powerful landowners. She balanced this activism with working in the fields and raising her seven children. Raimunda served as coordinator of a union that helped establish the Federation of Agricultural Workers. She became an active member of the Association of Women Agricultural Workers of Bico de Papagaio (ASMUBIP), connecting with other women's organizations and representing rural women's struggles on various platforms. Her commitment led her to speak even to President Cardoso about these issues. By 1999, she was working with the Women's Secretariat of the National Council of Rubber-Tree Workers, continuing her dedicated fight for women's rights in rural communities. Her resilience and leadership have made a significant impact in advancing equality.



SOLOVIEVA Vera

Russia

Pushing Development and Humanitarianism

This project supports the following SDGs

Vera began working in forestry at the age of 18 and later completed her degree at the Institute of Economy and Finance in Moscow. She became director of a kolkhoz and took on the responsibility of managing her village's rural economy. During the period of perestroika, she emerged as a pioneer in Russia's transition to a market economy. Vera founded a diversified agricultural enterprise that successfully cultivated cereals, sugar beet, and forage, while also raising beef. Her initiative grew to include three shops, a mill, and a bakery. Beyond economic success, Vera focused on improving the quality of life for local residents. She negotiated with authorities to introduce a new bus route, pave roads, install telephones, open a school, and secure a natural gas supply. Committed to social welfare, she provides both moral and material support to the poor, elderly, and disabled. She even financed the restoration of the village's Cultural Centre from her own savings.



KAMEL ASAD GHANNAM Subbiyyeh

West Bank

A Rural Woman Activist

This project supports the following SDGs

Subbiyyeh's journey began when her parents paid for her schooling with wheat kernels, an early sign of their belief in education despite limited means. Though she married young, her determination to learn never wavered. She became the first woman in her village to earn a high school diploma, setting a powerful precedent for others. Driven to give back, she founded a teaching centre where she taught 25 women to read and write, empowering them with literacy. Her efforts extended further: she helped establish a kindergarten and traveled to nearby villages to raise awareness on infant nutrition, public health, and child development. Passionate about inclusion, she also supported people with disabilities and launched initiatives to educate women on their rights. Her commitment to advocacy led her to run for the Palestinian Legislative Council, aiming to represent women and disabled people at the national level. Although she didn't win, she remains undeterred and now plans to run in local council elections to continue her work and broaden her impact.



TZAROUKYAN Rosa

Armenia

A Model Animal Farm

This project supports the following SDGs

Rosa and her family founded a cooperative using only their savings, beginning with sheep breeding and later expanding into cattle. Over time, the farm has grown to include a diverse range of animals. Thanks to Rosa's determination, deep knowledge, entrepreneurial mindset, and infectious enthusiasm, the farm's production continues to grow steadily each year. This success is also a result of her attentive care for the animals, their clean environment and proper treatment have led to excellent reproductive outcomes. Today, the farm offers stable, well-paid employment to 30 families, making it a cornerstone of the local economy. Rosa is now planning to launch the production of high-quality baby milk, which will generate even more jobs in the future. Beyond her business achievements, she supports families in need and opens her doors to train future veterinarians and animal husbandry technicians. Rosa is a shining example of a woman manager whose values, leadership, and commitment are essential to sustainable community development.



"We started with what we had, our hands and hope, and turned it into strength for our families and forest."

VONONA

Madagascar

"Ready and Decided" to Save the Forest

This project supports the following SDGs



VONONA, meaning "ready and decided" in Malagasy, is an association of 36 women, mostly single mothers, based in the town of Andranofasika. Their initiative blends economic resilience with environmental responsibility, helping reduce pressure on natural resources while supporting biodiversity preservation in Ankarafantsika National Park. With both financial and technical support, the women established a small factory to dry and process local fruits. Despite facing challenges like changing weather, time constraints, and mastering accounting, packaging, and marketing, they now successfully produce and sell dried mangoes, dried bananas, and tamarind jelly. Their cooperative spirit extends beyond business: they pool resources to support one another during difficult times and bring joy and cultural life to their otherwise isolated community. Their enterprise has increased demand for fresh fruit, creating new income opportunities for villagers who collect and sell fruit to the group.



WEIZAJ Rape

Albania

Teaching Villagers Life Skills

This project supports the following SDGs



"Through teaching and care, we transformed lives, building homes, knowledge, and hope for generations to come."

Rape, the eldest child in a family of seven from the village of Ngraçan, was born into extreme poverty, growing up in a hut without a bed or ceiling. Despite these conditions, she pursued education and became a teacher at the local elementary school, located 5 km away. For 18 years, she walked to and from work on foot, braving snow, rain, and rough terrain. Her dedication extended beyond her teaching job, each evening she returned home to give literacy classes to adults in the village and taught women essential skills such as preparing nutritious meals for their children, bathing them, and washing clothes properly. Through her efforts, the village gradually transformed: families began sleeping in beds, eating at tables, building stone houses with ceilings, and moving animals outside the home. By 1975, 500 adults and 50 children were enrolled in middle school, many of whom went on to become educators, doctors, and nurses.



XIANGLIAN Yang

China

Village Tailor Spreads Success

This project supports the following SDGs



"With a small loan and big dreams, I built a factory that trains, employs, and uplifts our community."

Yang, from Yanling County in Henan province, started a garment factory in the 1980s with a small loan of 2,000 yuan (about \$240), operating out of a humble three-room thatched house. Over 18 years, her enterprise grew into a sprawling facility covering 1,824 square meters, employing 106 people, and generating over 1 million yuan (around \$12,000) in annual profits. Dedicated to skill-building, she has trained more than 9,000 workers in tailoring and sewing, including 386 persons with disabilities, through various training programs both inside and outside the factory. Committed to environmental responsibility, Yang strictly follows eco-friendly standards and even founded a forestry company to help beautify the local surroundings. The factory serves as a vital training hub for rural women and provides steady employment for the local community. Recognizing her leadership and impact, she was elected deputy of the People's Congress of Henan Province.



CHUNLIAN Zou

China

Flowers Help the Poor

This project supports the following SDGs



"Through learning and sharing, I turned a simple farm into a blooming community of hope and growth."

Zou started a horticultural farm to lift herself out of poverty, learning through hands-on experimentation and practice. Her dedication earned her a place at an agricultural college, which she attended by cycling 40 km daily. Equipped with new knowledge, Zou's business thrived as she introduced flowers and plants from the Netherlands, Japan, the USA, and Canada. She established an experimental production base that now provides jobs to over 200 people. Committed to community growth, she shared her expertise and offered financial support to help more than 1,000 families begin growing flowers and nursery plants themselves. Her work not only created livelihoods but also beautified and protected the local environment. By joining China's national flower industry computer network, Zou gained access to valuable market information and opportunities, further expanding her impact.



SAVADOGO Rahamata

Burkina Faso

“Training women in soap-making not only built skills but strengthened our community’s health and economy.”

Pioneer in Rural Creativity & Family Planning

This project supports the following SDGs



Rahamata, a widowed mother of three from a peasant family in northern Yatenga province, has long been a dedicated leader within the Naam peasant movement, the largest federation of farmers’ organizations in Burkina Faso and the Sahel region. In 1984, she played a pivotal role in the movement’s groundbreaking adoption of a family planning information policy, marking the first time a major grassroots organization in Africa embraced such a stance without external pressure. For years, Rahamata managed a soap-making enterprise where local women received training in soap production. Together, they discovered new soap-making seeds with improved dermatological benefits, enhancing product quality. Known for her ability to inspire and gain the trust of her peers, she has been deeply involved in environmental initiatives. Rahamata also founded her own non-governmental organization, further demonstrating her commitment to empowering women and supporting sustainable community development.



SKRASTINA Zentra

Latvia

Beautifying a Rural Village

This project supports the following SDGs



“Through gardening and education, I nurture beauty, history, and community pride in every corner of our village.”

Zentra, a dedicated gardener and landscape designer, has spent 33 years maintaining the beautiful parks and gardens of her village, Burtnieki. Known for its historical significance, Burtnieki benefits from Zentra’s careful efforts to preserve its natural and historical sites exactly as they were long ago. On her private farm, which employs five people beyond her own family, she cultivates plants for landscape design and flowers used in her renowned floristic design workshop. Zentra also shares her expertise by giving lectures to secondary school students and unemployed individuals, and gardening students come to her farm for practical training. Beyond her professional work, she is socially active in environmental protection, participating in the National Environment Club and the Green Movement. Zentra also organizes volunteer initiatives aimed at renovating historical and natural monuments, showcasing her passion for community and conservation.



BINDA KINI Godé

R.D. Congo

Educating for Family Planning & Reproductive Health

This project supports the following SDGs



“By uniting women through skills and health education, we built a movement that transforms lives and communities.”

Godé, trained as a nurse working in remote bush hospitals, organized the women of Isinga Mkanzu village into an association focused on addressing women’s and children’s issues. Starting with sewing, soap-making, and improved seed production, their success inspired the creation of women’s organizations in neighboring villages. What began as income-generating activities soon expanded to include family planning, literacy classes, and preventive healthcare. This grassroots movement became a powerful force in combating birth control challenges, AIDS, and other STDs. Godé supports these associations by connecting them with other women’s groups and helping secure funding. Thanks to her efforts, malnutrition has decreased and family planning initiatives are advancing across several communities. Her work highlights how collective action, education, and health initiatives can transform rural women’s lives.



AILAN Zhang

China

Using Pigs to Combat Poverty

This project supports the following SDGs



“Teaching disease prevention and pig raising, I help families grow stronger incomes and healthier herds.”

Zhang comes from a very poor family and began her journey by attending a pig-raising class. With a loan from relatives, she bought 36 piglets. Her first year was successful, but the next year she lost all her pigs to an epidemic. Undeterred, she sought further training in disease prevention and restarted her business with greater success. Selected as one of the first model households in a poverty alleviation program, she helped three families overcome poverty by providing funds and teaching pig-raising skills and disease prevention techniques. This support enabled them to increase their income by 60% within a year. Since then, Zhang has assisted 40-50 families annually, always keeping her refrigerator stocked with disease prevention drugs. Having directly helped 400 families and indirectly supported 800 more, she is now a respected leader on the village committee.



GARCIA Isidora

Honduras

“Through women’s groups, nurseries, and education, we nurture health, learning, and sustainability in our communities.”

Fighting for the Indigenous Woman

This project supports the following SDGs

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Isidora is a tireless leader advocating for the rights of indigenous women. Married at 16, she and her husband eventually saved enough to buy their own land, giving her a foundation to pursue organized community action, her chosen path out of poverty. She has been elected president of several women’s groups, where she established nurseries for young children, organized meetings to improve schools and secure water supply, and provided courses on soil conservation and sustainable agriculture. Despite raising nine children, Isidora travels widely to promote integration and foster feminist awareness among indigenous women. She has pursued education in nutrition, health, and hygiene, even completing her primary education through a radio literacy program. Her dedication exemplifies how education, leadership, and collective action empower women and transform communities.



Union of Agritouristic, Handicraft and Home Economic Cooperatives

Greece

Uniting for Development

This project supports the following SDGs

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The Union of Agritouristic, Artesanal and Home Economic Cooperatives is an association made up of 11 rural women’s cooperatives from across Greece, soon to grow to 16 members. These cooperatives engage in diverse ventures including the production of gastronomic specialties, handicrafts, and the operation of agrotourism enterprises. They offer lodging in beautifully restored traditional homes or on working farms, providing visitors with an authentic hospitality experience that stands apart from the standard offerings of large hotel chains. By joining forces, the cooperatives have significantly improved their marketing strategies, launched a dedicated website for reservations, and opened a physical store in Athens where they sell their products and distribute samples to merchants. The union’s efforts have led to an improvement in the standard of living for villagers, created new jobs, gained recognition from local communities, and allowed city dwellers to discover and appreciate rural life. This pioneering union is the first of its kind in Europe, demonstrating the strength and impact of collaboration among rural women entrepreneurs.

Hornos “Juana Azurduy de Padilla”

Bolivia



Promoting Seed Potatoes in the Andes

This project supports the following SDGs

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The “Juana Azurduy de Padilla” group is made up of seven Quechua women from Hornos who initially came together to produce hand-sewn goods and raise sheep. In 1995, they received specialized training in seed potato production, a vital staple crop. Unlike traditional practices where potatoes are mainly grown for home use, this training enabled them to cultivate seed potatoes that can be sold at a good price, increasing their income. The group has also begun paying closer attention to other locally grown crops. Recognizing the promise of this venture, they are encouraging neighboring communities to engage in seed potato production by traveling to share knowledge and setting up demonstration plots. This initiative helps to slow the migration of people to the cities by providing local economic opportunities. Additionally, the group has learned to use natural products to combat crop pests, promoting sustainable farming practices alongside economic growth.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



[Click here to go back to the summary](#)

1998

Highlights from the 1998 award ceremonies



Laureate **SENGHOR Thérèse**,
Sénégal



Laureate **LUGMAYR Monika**,
Austria



Laureate **DAGUA Elvia**,
Ecuador



Laureate **GULAM Sugra**,
Solangi, Pakistan



Laureate **HARDNECK Sonia**,
South Africa



Laureate **AEERHARD Elisabeth**,
Switzerland



Prize Award Ceremony in Geneva, Palais des Nations



ADAMU Rose

Nigeria

Overcoming Traditional Taboos

This project supports the following SDGs



"We faced resistance, but protecting women's health was worth every challenge, our community now thrives because we dared." of our village."

Rose, a dedicated farmer and mother of seven, is the president of the Ntyang Women's Group in Razek Fan, a remote community in Plateau State, Nigeria.

She has made a lasting impact in both health and community organization. Rose began by launching a volunteer health worker program to tackle serious reproductive health issues in her district, focusing particularly on AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

Her efforts required challenging deep-rooted cultural taboos and facing strong resistance from local opinion leaders who opposed discussions around contraception. Despite this, her determination led to significant achievements.

Under her leadership, the group established a village pharmacy, which now provides stable income for its employees, and built a maternity center to support women's health.

Rose is widely recognized for her energy, honesty, and tireless dedication to her community. Her leadership continues to break barriers and improve lives in a region where access to health services and information has long been limited.



Women's Cooperative for Hope

Mauritania

Fighting Desertification and Illiteracy

This project supports the following SDGs



"From desert sands to literacy, we planted hope, and now we harvest knowledge and empowerment for all."

The Amal Cooperative was founded in 1975, in response to the severe droughts of the 1970s that forced many men to leave rural areas for urban centers. In their absence, women in the community came together to create "AMAL," meaning hope.

This cooperative empowered women to combat desertification by planting trees with traditional tools and methods, which helped them sustain their families. Motivated by their success, the women pushed for the establishment of an adult literacy school, enabling them to learn reading, writing, and basic accounting skills.

Manam Bint Moustapha, the 63-year-old president of AMAL, was once illiterate herself but now teaches at the school she helped create. AMAL has grown into a model of resilience and empowerment in the local area, demonstrating how women can transform their communities through collective action and education. The cooperative continues to inspire and support rural women in their efforts to combat environmental and social challenges.



Ameyolotzil Women's Group
Mexico

Pioneer in Self-Reliance
This project supports the following SDGs

A group of Nahuatl-speaking indigenous women, with no prior experience in business, trading, or organization, took a bold step to start a small clothing business with a government loan. Determined to succeed, they enrolled in literacy and sewing classes, bought sewing machines and raw materials, and worked diligently to pay off their debt. As their skills improved, they began attending fairs in various states, showcasing their unique creations. Despite facing significant resistance from their spouses and overcoming their lack of experience, their clothing, beautifully embroidered with traditional designs, caught the attention of major stores. This venture became an example of rural women achieving success through their creativity, perseverance, and unwavering courage.



BRUSTAD Anne-Grethe
Norway

An Authentic Biological Farmer
This project supports the following SDGs

Anne-Grethe, her husband, and their children are true biological farmers, avoiding concentrated cattle feed, fertilizers, and pesticides. To maintain this practice while staying debt-free in a country with a short growing season requires a blend of creativity, hard work, and simple living. Anne-Grethe's cows, which are not medicated, live an average of 10-12 years, 2-3 times longer than the national average for medicine-fed cows. Over the years, Anne-Grethe has faced many challenges convincing dairies to accept her bio-milk, but now, demand is surpassing supply as people are becoming more and more aware of the need for genuinely healthy food that corresponds with nature's rhythms and laws.



ALI AL BASHIR Gania
Sudan

Committed to Serving her People
This project supports the following SDGs

Gania, born into a very poor family in Amaara Daloo village, Blue Nile State, established a cooperative and women's group to improve local women's skills through adult education. After completing extensive training in adult education and nutrition, she now teaches nutrition courses and is always the first to engage in projects that benefit women. Gania is deeply committed to reducing the suffering of her community, particularly those affected by hunger and malnutrition. She works to improve the health and well-being of the most vulnerable, actively participating in community activities. Through her leadership, Gania is empowering women to break the cycle of poverty and malnutrition by giving them valuable knowledge that can transform their lives.



LEE CHEU Georgina
Australia

Promoting Culture for Self-Esteem
This project supports the following SDGs

Georgina, a once shy indigenous rural woman, has become a remarkable community leader in Chillagoe, a small district in Far North Queensland. As a member of the Queensland Country Women's Association, she is leading her fellow indigenous people toward greater self-esteem. She has played a pivotal role in promoting cultural activities and developing income-generating craft work that reflects Aboriginal life. Georgina has also worked to improve literacy among illiterate tribal elders and other semi-literate community members by creating educational programs. In addition, she established a nursery dedicated to native trees and shrubs, further contributing to environmental preservation. Through her dedication and leadership, Georgina has not only helped preserve cultural traditions but has also empowered her community by providing opportunities for personal growth, education, and sustainable development.



CRUZ Maria Margarita Maldonado

El Salvador

Overcoming Illiteracy to Run Model Farm

This project supports the following SDGs

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Maria has faced many challenges in her life but managed to build a successful livelihood. She was forced to become the partner of a man who never married her, and together they had eight children. Despite being illiterate, Maria’s courage and determination enabled her to overcome numerous hardships. In 1994, with the help of a modest government loan, training, and technical assistance, she transformed her small property into a model farm. Over the years, she diversified her crops, acquired cattle, and began commercializing her produce. Her success led to the establishment of a Center for Rural Training on her land, where she teaches small farmers various ecological and land-conservation techniques. Through her work and commitment to sustainability, Maria has become a role model for other farmers, proving that with determination, it is possible to turn adversity into opportunity and contribute to the growth of the broader community.



Sister Stella EDDATU

India

Transforming Rural Women’s Lives

This project supports the following SDGs

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Sister Stella, a member of the all-Indian religious order Daughters of Mary, has been transforming the lives of rural women since 1975 through community development programs. She founded the Assisi farm in Tamil Nadu, which serves as a learning center for poor farmers, introducing them to sustainable and ecologically sound agricultural practices. The training center particularly focuses on girls from very poor families. At the end of their training, each girl receives a cow or another animal worth \$250, with the expectation that she will share the knowledge she has gained with at least 10 other women. Through this initiative, Sister Stella has empowered countless women, improving their livelihoods while promoting sustainable farming practices. Her work not only helps women gain financial independence but also strengthens community bonds by creating a network of women who teach and support each other.



DAGUA Elvia

Ecuador

Leading Women to Dignity

This project supports the following SDGs

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“Empowering women, preserving traditions, and creating opportunities for all, this is the path I walk for my community.”

Elvia, a Quichua woman from the Amazon jungle, was abandoned by her husband at 18, leaving her to care for her children. Undeterred, she and a group of other women founded an alphabetization center where she taught literacy. Together, they later built a school for their children. In 1992, Elvia became the first woman leader in her community, responsible for overseeing finances for health and nutrition needs. She initiated workshops focused on traditional dance, songs, and food preparation, with the funds raised going to those in need. Alongside her many projects, Elvia fights against domestic violence and supports women in remote rural areas by helping them organize small farms for commercial purposes.



El Despertar

Spain

Culture and Sustainable Development

This project supports the following SDGs

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“We started by preserving our culture, but we ended up building futures, together, one woman at a time.”

El Despertar is a self-financed, apolitical organization made up of 700 women from various independent women’s groups in Cádiz, a region facing severe development challenges, with over a third of the population unemployed and/or illiterate. The organization was born out of a collective need to foster resilience, autonomy, and cultural pride among women. Its core activities are cultural, focusing on the revival and preservation of local traditions and crafts, the safeguarding of regional music, and organizing music workshops tailored for children to connect younger generations with their heritage. El Despertar takes an active role in social development by hosting conferences and workshops on education, literacy, vocational training, and employment opportunities. Their approach also includes economic empowerment: with their guidance and zero-interest loans, several small-scale businesses have emerged, offering women practical avenues for self-sufficiency.



EWUME Alice
Cameroon

Healing with Herbs and Love
This project supports the following SDGs

“Where modern care can’t reach, traditional healing steps in, with knowledge, respect, and results.”

Alice, a herbalist living in Likoko Membea, Buea, has built a reputation so strong that even doctors from the local hospital refer chronic cases to her, patients whom modern medicine has failed to cure. She specializes in treating women and couples suffering from sexually transmitted diseases, which remain widespread in this region. Many of her patients live in poverty and cannot afford conventional treatments, so Alice accepts whatever payment they can manage. Her remedies, rooted in deep traditional knowledge, typically take just one to four weeks, with their effectiveness confirmed through follow-up medical checkups. Her work highlights the vital role of traditional herbal medicine in countries where modern medical care is often unavailable, unaffordable, ineffective, or culturally unsuitable. Alice’s practice serves as a living testament to the power of indigenous knowledge and its ability to fill crucial healthcare gaps, offering not only healing but accessibility to those most in need.



BAOJING Han
China

Clean Water is the Key to Good Health
This project supports the following SDGs

“Clean water and healthy land aren’t luxurie, they’re the foundation every village deserves to stand on.”

Han graduated from a vocational medical school in 1962 and chose to settle in Sunbao village, located in Shaanxi Province. There, she discovered a widespread local illness linked to drinking water lacking essential trace elements. As a people’s deputy, she became a strong advocate for her community, persistently appealing to local government officials until her voice was finally heard. Authorities agreed that the only long-term solution was for villagers to migrate to a safer location. After successfully resolving housing issues, Han took further initiative, raising funds to drill a new well and provide access to clean drinking water. Her efforts didn’t stop there. In 1996, she secured 200,000 yuan (around \$24,000) to purchase 2,000 acres of land for cultivation, supporting local food security and livelihoods. Today, she continues working to improve water quality and tackle the ongoing challenges of irrigation, demonstrating a commitment to public health, sustainable agriculture, and community resilience.



FREIMANE Rasma
Latvia

Run a Dairy Farm Cooperative
This project supports the following SDGs

“Real change doesn’t always need huge budget, just commitment, local knowledge, and the will to act together.”

Rasma is a veterinarian with a thriving private practice and a mother of five who still finds the time to engage deeply in community work. She is the founder and chairperson of a dairy-farming cooperative society that provides free guidance in farming techniques, veterinary care, and small business economics. With a strong belief in grassroots empowerment, Rasma also established a credit union aimed at supporting local entrepreneurs in launching or expanding their businesses. One of her current initiatives includes transforming an old canteen into a community bakery and recreation center, a space intended to bring people together while creating jobs and opportunities. What sets Rasma apart is her practical, low-cost approach: she addresses complex community business challenges without relying on expensive technical infrastructure or formal planning. Her leadership is grounded in everyday realities, offering accessible, sustainable solutions that respond to local needs.



HARDNECK Sonia
South Africa

Teaching Values for Life
This project supports the following SDGs

“We don’t just teach lessons, we build values, skills, and hope in a place the world often overlooks.”

Sonia, an educator of creativity and dedication, teaches 210 children in the apple-farming region of Grabou, a deeply impoverished community where 80% of the workers are illiterate and many struggle with alcohol dependency. In the face of challenges, Sonia succeeded in founding a pre-primary school, laying a educational foundation for the youngest learners. But her vision went far beyond the classroom. She created a “Whole-School Development Curriculum” that not only addresses academic needs but also builds character and community. Central to this curriculum is a shared code of values, caring, sharing, consideration, peaceful coexistence, honesty, and hard work, which now form the vision, mission, and moral compass of the entire school community. Understanding the needs of her students, Sonia also integrated swimming and computer skills into the curriculum, along with additional support in mathematics, chemistry, and art.



CHUNLIAN Hu

China

Topping the Tea Trade

This project supports the following SDGs

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"I grew more than tea, I cultivated skills, dignity, and opportunity for women who needed it most."

Hu, now the General Manager of Liu He Township Sheng Le Tea Corporation Ltd., began her journey in 1984 by signing a 15-year contract with the Chang Le Village committee to cultivate tea on 5.8 acres of wasteland. Through 13 years of effort, she expanded her tea farm to 17.5 acres. Along the way, she mastered the art of producing high-quality tea, earning recognition for having some of the best tea in Hubei Province. Hu also became the first female tea sampler in Yi Cheng city, breaking gender barriers while lifting others with her. She uses her own processing equipment and expertise to support poorer women by helping them process their tea. Committed to empowerment, she hires girls and women from low-income households to work on her farm, where they learn modern tea cultivation techniques. Each year, she hosts a 10-day training workshop for local tea growers. Today, thanks to her leadership, 2,310 acres of township land are dedicated to tea cultivation.



KACHHAWAH Lata

India

Helping desert Women Survive

This project supports the following SDGs

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"Empowering women to stitch their future with skill, confidence, and independence."

Although born into a wealthy family, Lata chose to dedicate her life to serving the poor. After gaining valuable grassroots experience, she became a founding member of SURE (Society for the Uplift of Rural Economy), a non-governmental organization focused on empowering rural communities. Through persistent efforts, she successfully earned the trust and collaboration of the rural poor. Lata has formed over 20 village groups composed of women artisans, gradually helping them achieve economic self-sufficiency through embroidery and patchwork. Alongside technical skills, she teaches them organizational abilities and marketing strategies, enabling these women to take control of their economic futures. Thanks to her role as an awareness raiser and mentor, women from this desert region are gaining confidence, independence, and economic viability.



IRULA Tribal Women's Welfare Society

India

Asserting Human Rights

This project supports the following SDGs

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"We may have started with nothing, but our knowledge is our strength, and now, our path to power."

Although Irula Tribal women are among the financially poorest people on earth, they possess a wealth of traditional knowledge about plant and animal life, knowledge they are now using to reshape their futures. Mostly landless, the Irula community faces severe hardships, including limited access to clean drinking water, proper housing, and formal education. But the women of ITWWS are working to change that reality. Through collective action, they have planted hundreds of acres of once-barren land with medicinal plants, food crops, and fodder trees, restoring both the environment and local livelihoods. In parallel, they are investing in themselves, pursuing literacy and numeracy classes, and for the first time, stepping into village governance structures to claim their rights and participate in local decision-making.



KILEY-WORTHINGTON Martha

Great Britain

A Ecological Farmer, Teacher & Writer

This project supports the following SDGs

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"Farming shouldn't fight nature, eco-agriculture proves that food, animals, and wild spaces can thrive together."

Martha grew up in Kenya, where she became deeply aware of the ongoing tension between agriculture, food production, and wildlife conservation. This early awareness shaped her life's work. In 1972, she launched her first eco-farm on the Sussex Downs, later relocating to the more challenging environment of the Isle of Mull, and eventually establishing her third and most ambitious project in Dartmoor National Park. There, Martha developed her innovative theories on eco-farming, with a special focus on new approaches to multispecies living, creating ecosystems where animals, plants, and people coexist in balance. She now trains students from around the world in eco-agriculture, continuing her research into sustainable farming practices, animal behavior, and cognition. A passionate educator and lifelong learner, she also travels globally to share her knowledge and learn from others. Her book, Eco-Agriculture: Food First Farming, Theory and Practice, outlines her pioneering techniques in the field of sustainable agriculture.



KOSSIDONKO Amavi
Togo

Her Courage has overcome All Obstacles
This project supports the following SDGs

"I had little but strength, so I shared it, and together we built something no one could take away."

Despite facing a serious physical handicap, the loss of her husband, and later her parents, Amavi found herself solely responsible for raising her own child along with her 13 younger brothers. Refusing to give in to hardship, she chose to live from the soil, even though her fields lay a grueling 14 kilometers from her village in the Koélé-élé region of Togo. Determined and resilient, she began by convincing her neighbors to join her in collective farming, believing in the power of shared effort. After 15 years of community work, her vision gave rise to a local "tontine," a traditional African revolving savings scheme, allowing women to pool resources and access small-scale financing. Her leadership also led to the formation of a self-help organization called Ee Mawusi, which now operates a community granary with a 100-ton storage capacity.



BALTAZAR LUGONES Tawa (Nena)
Bolivia

Queen of the Forest
This project supports the following SDGs

"Protecting wildlife isn't charity it's survival. When we care for nature, we care for ourselves."

Tawa, known as Nena, runs the Inti Wara Yassi Wildlife Refuge and Rescue Center with almost no resources, relying instead on her courage, relentless dedication, and unshakable determination. As a volunteer for the Inti Wara Yassi Society, a local ecological and social NGO, she works 16 to 17 hours a day, seven days a week, without rest days. Her work is not just a job, it's a mission rooted in deep respect for animals and the natural world. Despite the challenges, Nena continues to rescue, rehabilitate, and care for wild animals, often victims of trafficking, abuse, or habitat loss. She has demonstrated that balanced, sustainable development in rural areas is only possible through close collaboration with nature. For Nena, environmental protection is inseparable from human well-being, echoing her belief that "when animals are hurt, we are hurt. When nature is hurt, we are hurt." Her life is a living example of compassion turned into action.



LUGMAYER Monika
Austria

A Strong Advocate for Women Farmers
This project supports the following SDGs

"We don't just work the land, we claim our rights, our status, and our place in agriculture's future."

Monika, alongside her husband and two sons, managed the family farm and personally experienced how little societal and legal recognition exists for professional women farmers. Determined to change this reality, she co-founded AGB, a rural women's working group that now has over 45,000 members. Since 1985, she has led the Association of Women Farmers of Lower Austria, advocating for a more just and equitable position for women in agriculture. Her efforts contributed significantly to a key reform in social legislation, enabling Austrian farm women to be recognized as self-employed agricultural entrepreneurs with access to health and old-age insurance. In 1996, Monika became president of the European Association of Rural Women within the CEA (European Commission for Agriculture), representing rural women's interests at the EU level. She continues to push for deeper understanding and respect for the challenges women face in agriculture, ensuring their voices shape policy and progress.



MASINDE Theresa
Kenya

A Tireless Organiser
This project supports the following SDGs

"Empowering women lifted our families, but bringing in the youth gave our movement a heartbeat and a future."

Theresa, a grandmother and mother of six, is the Chairperson of the Bukhayo West Joint Women's Groups (BWJW), and the tireless force behind the coordination of 60 women's groups committed to fighting poverty, illiteracy, and disease. Under her leadership, BWJW has become a powerful grassroots movement in rural Kenya, known for its strong mobilization and training capacity. The groups engage in a variety of micro-enterprise activities, including agro-based rural cottage industries, as well as oil and food processing for household consumption, generating both income and local food security. A particularly innovative aspect of BWJW's work is the integration of youth initiatives into the women's groups. These young members play a vital role in raising community awareness through culturally relevant methods such as drama, music, and dance. This intergenerational collaboration not only strengthens the impact of the groups but also ensures that vital messages around health, education, and empowerment reach every corner of the community.



MUKANDEMEZO Espérance
Rwanda

Walking her Talk and Inspiring Others
This project supports the following SDGs

“From devastation, we built hope, uniting women to rebuild lives and nurture the future.”

After the genocide claimed nearly all of her immediate family, Espérance took it upon herself to gather the widows scattered across her region of Ntamara. Together, they performed the solemn duty of burying the dead and adopted orphans, Espérance herself taking in four children. Through her courage and resilience, over 30 women were able to emerge from isolation and unite in rebuilding their community. They collaborated on reconstructing homes, revitalizing agriculture, and reviving artisanal crafts, all while fostering a spirit of solidarity and shared purpose. Espérance’s leadership extended beyond the grassroots; she became the local President of Association of Rwandan Refugee Women (ASOFERWA) and served as a representative of the Ministry of Family. Through her dedication, she helped build a project for the future that stands as a symbol of hope, perfectly embodying her name, ‘Espérance’, meaning “Hope.”



Network of Rural Women of Uruguay
Uruguay

Influencing by Organising
This project supports the following SDGs

“When rural women unite, they transform challenges into opportunities for community growth and empowerment.”

The Network of Rural Women of Uruguay, founded in 1991, is a organization made up of groups and cooperatives of women who live and work in the countryside. These women believe in voicing their opinions through direct engagement to drive changes in their everyday lives. The network has played a key role in organizing a national meeting for dairy-producing communities across the country, creating a platform for shared learning and collaboration. It has also provided training for women in first aid and health care, empowering them to better support their families and communities. Beyond health, the network offers technical training in business administration and has been instrumental in establishing technical schools for local youth. The organization also pioneered the first workshop dedicated to discussing rural women’s challenges and organized the first national meeting bringing together rural women and young entrepreneurs, fostering dialogue and cooperation to strengthen rural livelihoods.



MUPANDUKI Virginia
Zimbabwe

Empowering Women through Garden Cooperatives
This project supports the following SDGs

“Gardening cooperatives and adult learning are planting seeds for stronger, self-reliant rural communities.”

Virginia, a widow raising eight children on her own, is a dynamic and innovative grassroots community leader who has dedicated many years to mobilizing rural communities in Mashonaland. Her efforts have been particularly impactful in empowering women to organize gardening cooperatives and other income-generating projects, providing much-needed financial stability and hope. This work is especially vital in an area where high rates of suicide among women are linked to husbands depleting family incomes, leaving many families vulnerable. Recognizing the power of education, Virginia founded the Zimbabwe Adult Learners Association, which has successfully mobilized over 20,000 learners across the country. Through her leadership, countless women and communities have gained the tools and confidence needed to build sustainable livelihoods and improve their quality of life.



La Poza del Clavo Women's Group
Mexico

Entrepreneurship for Survival
This project supports the following SDGs

“Together, we turned cattle into community strength, building livelihoods and nourishing our future.”

A dedicated group of 15 women, aged between 24 and 60, from the state of Chiapas, embarked on a transformative journey after receiving a grant that enabled them to acquire 43 heads of cattle for a cattle-raising project. Through the sale of meat and milk, along with the commercialization of various dairy products, these women have empowered themselves economically, significantly improving their living standards. Their initiative also provides the local community with a more affordable and reliable source of nutritious food. Buoyed by this achievement, the group secured a larger loan to expand their cattle-raising operations and further develop their business. This project not only fosters economic independence but also strengthens community food security and demonstrates the power of collective action in rural development.



ROSSI Portia Nayve

Philippines

Modeling Organic and Animal Farming

This project supports the following SDGs



“Small farms, big impact, showing how organic, humane farming uplifts rural lives sustainably.”

Portia has followed a highly original career path. After a successful academic career that equipped her with knowledge and skills, she chose rural life at the age of forty to make a tangible difference in rural communities. She now manages a humane, organic demonstration animal farm that has become a beacon of sustainable agriculture, attracting around 7,000 visitors annually. Portia’s day begins early, at 3:30 am, feeding her rabbits, and often stretches until 10 pm. She raises a wide variety of poultry and even keeps owls as a natural method of controlling rats. Through her work, Portia has demonstrated that a small family farm on just two hectares can raise living standards by employing ecologically intensive mixed organic farming practices. Her farm serves as an example of how sustainable agriculture can be both productive and environmentally responsible, inspiring others to adopt similar methods.



SMUK Ewa

Poland

Reinvigorating Village Life

This project supports the following SDGs



“From an old barn, we built a space where creativity, sustainability, and community grow side by side.”

Ewa recognized the need to bring change to the lives of women and children in Grzybow, a small village near Warsaw where she and her husband work in organic farming. With passion and vision, she and a group of friends launched an environmental and ecological initiative called Ziarno. They transformed an old barn into a meeting and training center that now hosts concerts, exhibitions, poetry evenings, seminars, lectures, small festival performances, and pottery classes. Ewa’s energy and creativity breathed new life into the once-drab area, making it a hub for learning, culture, and sustainability. She introduced children and adults alike to music and poetry, encouraged organic vegetable growing and traditional bread baking, and helped market the products to generate income for underprivileged women and the continued development of the center. Today, thanks to her initiative, local residents are empowered to pursue a more sustainable, creative, and fulfilling lifestyle rooted in community and self-reliance.



SENGHOR Thérèse

Senegal

Combatting Fish Piracy in Coastal Seas

This project supports the following SDGs



“By defending our waters and connecting women across borders, we’re reclaiming our livelihoods and our future.”

Thérèse is an advocate for traditional fisheries, actively fighting against industrial fish piracy and championing sustainable development. A native of the coastal village of Joal, she is a founding member of the CNPS (Collectif National des Pêcheurs Artisanaux du Sénégal), the first nationwide organization of traditional fishermen in Senegal. As an organizer of women within the fishing sector, Thérèse has worked to give artisanal fishers, especially women, a voice in national and regional economic dialogues. One of her most notable achievements has been facilitating commercial partnerships between women in Senegal and women importers in Togo, helping to strengthen regional trade and economic cooperation. Despite her frequent travels across Senegal and throughout the West African sub-region to support her work, she continues to raise her four children on her own. Thérèse is a living example of grassroots leadership, building resilience, regional solidarity, and economic opportunity from the ground up.



S. SOLANGI Ghulam

Pakistan

A Perfume of Roses

This project supports the following SDGs



“We turned quiet villages into engines of change, through savings, rose farms, and women leading the way.”

Sughra, founder, catalyzer, and president of the Marvi Rural Development Organization in Sindh, has travelled a long and courageous path since the day she was forced into marriage at the age of 15 to her cousin. Refusing to accept the limitations imposed on her, she began her activism by going door to door, speaking directly to women about the importance of organizing to change their conditions, despite male resistance and even ridicule from some women. Her determination paid off when a small group agreed to join her cause. From those modest beginnings, the Marvi Rural Development Organization has grown into a driving force for change, launching a series of impactful economic and social initiatives such as credit and savings schemes, rose cultivation, healthcare, and family planning programs. Today, Sughra is not only a respected leader in her community but also a symbol of resilience, empowerment, and grassroots transformation in rural Pakistan.



TAPIERO Milena Ducara

Colombia

Indomitable Activist and Women's Leader

This project supports the following SDGs

Milena, a native Colombian woman of extraordinary courage, determination, and vision, has spent many years working to improve the living conditions and uphold the human rights of indigenous women in the region of Tolima.

In a patriarchal society, she began organizing women through small, almost clandestine meetings that rapidly expanded to include 10 communities. Her grassroots efforts laid the foundation for larger initiatives once she joined the Tolima Regional Council, where she was able to implement concrete projects in animal farming, vegetable gardening, and handicraft production.

Despite the loss of her husband to violence, Milena remained steadfast, raising her family alone while continuing to build opportunities for other women. Her resilience and leadership culminated in a historic achievement: becoming the first indigenous woman community leader in Colombia. Milena's life is an example of how grassroots activism can bring lasting change, even in the face of personal tragedy and structural inequality.



THOMPSON Lois

Sierra Leone

A Beacon of Hope in a War-Torn Area

This project supports the following SDGs

Lois has been a pillar of community development in her village for over 30 years. When rebel forces invaded, she took the lead in organizing women to ensure safety and provide humanitarian assistance for themselves and their children during the crisis.

As the founder and former President of the Young Women's Christian Association, Lois has promoted adult literacy through her leadership in the Gloucester Development Association. She also supervises a day care center that offers hot meals to children from low-income families, addressing immediate nutritional needs. Lois plays a crucial role in strengthening connections between rural villages and nearby markets by advocating with local authorities to repair roads and water infrastructure. Thanks to her efforts, pipe-borne water is now accessible to women living in remote rural areas, improving health and daily life.



TAWAISINDH Sa-ing

Thailand

Saving the Community Forests

This project supports the following SDGs

"Uniting 21 villages, we saved our forests and secured women's voices in conservation and development."

Sa-ing has been a dedicated environmental conservationist and grassroots activist in Thailand since the late 1980s, working to improve the lives of rural women while protecting the natural environment. Widely respected among NGOs, governmental agencies, and local communities, she is best known for her impactful work in forest conservation.

In the province of Kalasin, she successfully organized people from 21 villages to join forces in protecting their community forests. Together, they launched large-scale tree planting campaigns, pushed back against government plans to allocate forest land for farm development, and defended their right to sustainable land use.

Through her leadership, local people became environmental stewards of their own resources. Recognized for her unwavering commitment and effectiveness, Sa-ing was selected to represent rural women at the 4th UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.



XIAOJING Zhao

China

Creating Prosperity Through Pigs

This project supports the following SDGs

"I failed, I learned, and I rose, now we raise pigs, and with them, our future."

Zhao, now a well-known pig farmer in Jiu Jiang Village, once faced a mountain of family debt after marriage. Determined to pay back the debt, she first experimented with growing watermelons, but harsh weather destroyed the crops. Not giving up, she moved on to raising rabbits and chickens, only to fail again due to inexperience.

Refusing to back down, she turned to pig farming. Starting with just eight piglets, Zhao subscribed to farming and animal husbandry magazines, learning every detail of the trade. Her persistence paid off, over time, she grew her farm from a modest 204 to an impressive 800 pigs. Her success has not only transformed her own life but also inspired and supported around 30 fellow villagers to enter the same trade.

Today, Zhao is not just a successful farmer, but a community leader whose hard work have put Jiu Jiang Village on the map.



AIMING Zuo

China

Raising Chickens & Ducks for China

This project supports the following SDGs



"From one borrowed chance, I built a farm where knowledge hatches and entire communities grow."

Zuo is now a renowned chicken and duck breeder in Fei Xi County, but her journey began humbly. After finishing school, she took a job at a duck roasting restaurant, where she slaughtered ducks. There, she met local duck breeders and gradually learned how to raise ducks herself. In 1993, she built her own duck farm, starting with 20,000 ducks and financing it with a bank loan. To cut transportation costs and reduce duckling loss, she established a small-scale hatchery. Today, she incubates around 130,000 eggs annually and sells approximately 110,000 ducklings. As her business flourished, she began supplying chicks to neighboring farmers, helping others grow alongside her. With a duckling and chick survival rate of 98%, Zuo's farm has gained widespread recognition. It now functions as an experimentation station, attracting over 2,000 visitors each year who come to learn more scientific and effective methods of raising poultry.



AEBERHARD Elsbeth

Switzerland

Finding our Rural Roots

This project supports the following SDGs



"Our farm is a living classroom, where nature heals, teaches, and connects us back to what truly matters."

Elsbeth and her husband, while raising three children, run a farm that has become a center for inner restoration, agri-tourism and nature-education for citizens longing for nature's peace; school children who ignore the relationships between what they eat and nature; the handicapped who need contact with animals; and for children who have never visited a farm. Making up less than 4% of the population, Swiss farmers (in addition to their role as producers and wardens of the landscape) will necessarily assume more and more the role of witnesses of tradition and experience living in the countryside. With her smile and her enthusiasm, multilingual Elsbeth plays this role with as much intelligence as passion.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



[Click here to go back to the summary](#)

1997

Highlights from the 1997 award ceremonies



Laureate MAIGA Mariam, Burkina Faso



Laureate MIOCINOVIC Ema, Rep. Croatia



1997 - Former President of Ireland & Chair of Human Rights Committee, Geneva, received Laureate MIOCINOVIC Ema, Rep. Croatia



Mme E. PRADERVAND, WWSF President introduced Laureate MAIGA Mariam, Burkina Faso



Prize Award Ceremony in the presence of WWSF Laureates and the Mayor of Geneva



AAYER Saviben Debhabhai

India

"With every stitch, we wove dignity into our lives, and turned five villages into thriving communities."

1000 Wanderers become Artisans

This project supports the following SDGs



When Saviben rose above poverty, she didn't rise alone, she brought five villages with her. Starting with embroidery work commissioned by Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), she quickly became more than just an artisan. She took on the responsibility of inspiring and organizing others, encouraging fellow women to join the trade. Saviben helped form crafts cooperatives that became models of self-reliance and success. By 1997, her efforts had created steady employment for 1,000 artisans, while ensuring quality, timely production, and delivery. Her role extended far beyond stitching; she stitched together livelihoods, dignity, and hope. Today, thanks to her initiative, at least 600 families in the Datrana region have broken free from the cycle of wandering in search of temporary, uncertain work. They now earn a stable and respectable income.



MUTLAQ AL-GHNAMEEN Kawkab Ibrahim

Jordan

Improving Quality of Village Life

This project supports the following SDGs



"From a seed of unity, we grew a movement empowering women with knowledge, rights, and opportunity."

In 1991, Kawkab launched her first partnership project with seven other women, determined to improve the quality of life in their village. Together, they leased land and began planting Hava beans, a small but powerful step. Their initiative quickly gained momentum, and their determination led them to organize a rural market, which has since grown into a regular monthly event, creating both economic opportunity and community engagement. As their success continued, they leased more land and expanded into vegetable farming. The number of women involved grew rapidly, and today the group has 165 active members. Through training committees, they offer courses in food preservation, processing, literacy, sewing, and knitting. The center now also runs a vital revolving loan fund to support women's small businesses. Kawkab's work focuses on "Rural Women Empowerment Programs," including study groups that explore legal, social, and marital rights within Islamic society, helping women understand and assert their rights.



AHIR Puriben Vaghabhai Kehu

India

Human Rights Leader

This project supports the following SDGs



"We began with embroidery, but now we stitch together rights, water, health, and the power to be heard."

Purben successfully organized a Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) cooperative where the traditional art of embroidery has been transformed into a reliable source of income. But her impact reaches far beyond economic empowerment. She has used women's groups not only to build financial independence but also as platforms to launch vital community projects in health care, education, and water access. Thanks to her efforts, women in her region no longer endure the backbreaking labor of digging water holes in the desert. Purben's vision for holistic development has also sparked a wave of political awareness among rural women. Her leadership has inspired nearly 3,000 women to stand beside her as she challenges local authorities, demanding basic rights and essential services for their communities. Her work is not just about crafts or infrastructure, it's about reclaiming dignity, voice, and agency.

Sharing one prize with Menaben H. Thakore, \$250 to each laureate



ALONIOUNIOU

China

Growing Trees for a Healthy Environment

This project supports the following SDGs



"By planting trees, we nurture the land and grow hope for our families and future generations."

Aloniouniou, a woman from the Yi minority in Sichuan Province, faced a serious challenge: fuel scarcity in her region. In response, the local government encouraged residents to plant trees, introducing laws and regulations to protect those who took part in reforestation efforts. Recognizing the environmental and economic benefits, Aloniouniou dedicated herself to this cause. Through hard work and careful management, she transformed 155 hectares of barren hills by planting various bushes and trees, turning once lifeless land into a thriving green area. Aloniouniou is very socially conscious, and shares whatever she has with other villagers. With the income earned from tree growing, Aloniouniou was able to help nine impoverished families pay their agricultural taxes, easing their burdens. She acts as a model for many women in her area who grow trees to both protect the environment and generate income.



ALVES Da SILVA RODRIGUES Emilia
Brazil

"Through knowledge and solidarity, we rise together, building autonomy and hope for every woman."

Promoting Rural Knowledge and Culture

This project supports the following SDGs

Emilia lives in Tocantins State, where agriculture is traditionally practiced on lands reclaimed through burning. Unfortunately, these lands were soon sold to businessmen from the South, forcing families to face eviction. After years of struggle, by the end of 1986, the land was reclaimed, allowing 27 families to resettle. Throughout this difficult period, Emilia stood firmly alongside women in their fight for greater equality and rights. In 1992, she founded the “Regional Association of Rural Women of Bico do Papagaio,” which now consists of 22 groups and 260 members. Serving as the general coordinator, Emilia dedicates her time to empowering women to develop autonomy and self-reliance. A self-taught woman, she shares her knowledge and creativity, fostering well-being, friendship, and solidarity among the community.



Bamako Initiative Women's Group
Kenya

"With medicine, bicycles, and care, we bring healing home , and health becomes a right, not a privilege."

Village Doctors on Bicycles

This project supports the following SDGs

Formed in 1996, the Bamako Initiative Women's Group includes 15 committed community health workers who focus on food security, health, nutrition, and water sanitation. Their mission is to bring health care to rural communities, often traveling by bicycle to reach remote homes. Following guidelines from the Ministry of Health, the group receives training and a supply of medicines. Today, they serve more than 12,000 people and are widely respected as “village doctors.” Their approach includes selling medications at minimum profit to ensure affordability. The group also works closely with traditional birth attendants , all women, integrating them into their health network. As a result, maternal complications and mortality rates have been significantly reduced. They have also increased prevention of malaria, scabies and diarrhea, fought severe malnutrition of children, and promoted overall well-being.



Salvadorian Association for Rural Health
El Salvador

"We traded chemicals for knowledge, silence for voice, and now we grow both food and respect."

Rural Women or a Healthy Future

This project supports the following SDGs

In 1996, in Santa Ana, the Salvadorian Association for Rural Health Care (ASAPROSAR) took a step toward economic and environmental empowerment by breaking the local monopoly on credit and agricultural knowledge. They trained 10 women in ecologically friendly farming techniques, opening new pathways to self-sufficiency. By 1997, despite resistance from husbands and fathers, these women were marketing their own products, gaining not just income, but also respect. Imelda, 25, became so successful in cucumber farming that her husband eventually joined her venture. Yareli, just 19, persuaded her family to use chilies as a natural insecticide, avoiding chemical pesticides and saving money. Knowledge is being passed on, multiplying hope for a better future.



BEN YUCEF Fatima
Algeria

"I fought for my right to work, now I fight so young women can build futures of their own."

Where there's a Will, there's a Way

This project supports the following SDGs

Fatima, born into a Bedouin family, experienced both marriage and divorce at a young age. Faced with the responsibility of supporting her family, she fought hard for her right to work outside the home, a right that was even challenged by her own brother. Refusing to back down, she took him to court and won. Through creativity and perseverance, Fatima became the owner of two stores, proving her ability not only to survive but to thrive. In 1990, she founded the Hassiba Ben Bouali Association, which today includes over 70 members. Her mission: to provide underprivileged girls with vocational training and the chance to earn an independent income. In the first two years alone, more than 100 young women, many illiterate or under-educated, were trained. Fatima has invested all her energy and resources into this initiative, building a foundation for dignity, skills, and economic empowerment for future generations.



Butthri Women's Organisation
Pakistan

Promoting Health Care
This project supports the following SDGs

In the village of Butthri, the BWO (Butthri Women's Organization) has taken bold steps to challenge poverty by organizing women to collectively mobilize resources, involve development agents, and take decisions, a radical shift from the village's traditionally patriarchal norms. One of their achievements was reviving the extinct handicraft "jisti" and transforming it into a viable business. They also launched savings schemes, and members have successfully accessed loans to purchase livestock, improving both their economic status and household nutrition. The foundation of their work is built on solidarity, partnership, and the upliftment of the entire community. As a result, visible improvements have been made in health practices, and modern facilities are more accessible. BWO plays a integral role in identifying and prioritizing the village's health and sanitation needs. Through their efforts, the village has developed a new approach to health and sanitation issues, particularly sensitive to the participation of women.



CRISOSTOMO de PEREZ Maria Elena
Guatemala

Barefoot Pharmacy
This project supports the following SDGs

Maria Elena, who lives in Aldée Tituque, Olopa Chiquimula, has dedicated 20 years to organizing community groups aimed at empowering rural women. She promotes and develops training programs, including the use of a portable pharmacy to support animal husbandry. Additionally, she leads the credit committee of the communal bank, helping women gain access to much-needed agricultural credits. Under her leadership, 64 rural women actively participate in these groups and have installed 150 stoves, built brick lodging, and improved their living conditions. Maria Elena also promotes the production of coffee and basic seeds, boosting agricultural productivity. She plays a key role in the promotion and production of Nixtamal mills, which are essential for food processing in the community.



CACERAS GLADYS
Nicaragua

A Tireless Leader
This project supports the following SDGs

"I returned home to grow more than gardens, to plant dignity, healing, and hope in rural lives."

Gladys dedicated her early years to teaching rural women. After a successful career in the education sector, she returned to her hometown to focus entirely on the advancement of rural communities. In the district of Madriz, she established welfare kitchens and care centers where the hungry can find meals and children affected by war are given shelter and support. In 1990, she founded an institute in Somoto to facilitate housing construction and fund children's education. Committed to building long-term self-reliance, she promotes kitchen gardens, livestock rearing, and sustainable organic farming, providing tools and hands-on training to rural families. In the field of health, Gladys makes care more accessible through her expertise in natural medicine. She also trains and supports midwives, ensuring that rural women receive care and assistance throughout their pregnancies.



XIULAN Fang
China

The Ecological Breeding Cooperative turns shared resources into shared success, empowering farmers, feeding villages, and restoring dignity.

Raising Chickens to Ease Poverty
This project supports the following SDGs

Fang began her journey in 1982 by opening a small farm machinery repair shop. With savings and determination, she used her earnings to establish a chicken farm in 1986. Her operation grew quickly, and she soon expanded into raising pigs and ducks. By 1996, Fang's farm had flourished , her assets reached one million yuan (approximately \$126,000), with an annual output value of two million yuan and a net profit of 100,000 yuan (\$12,600). Wanting to lift others out of poverty, she launched the Ecological Breeding Cooperative, securing one million yuan in support from the local government and farmers. By 1997, the cooperative managed 5,000 chickens and 13.3 hectares of fish ponds. Committed to sharing her success, Fang also runs training programs to teach her farming and business skills. She donates chickens not only to her own village but to nine neighboring ones as well, spreading opportunity and knowledge across the region.



KHAN Jabeda Sattar

Bangladesh

"When women stand together on reclaimed land, they don't just grow crops, they grow freedom and self-reliance."

Half a Million Women on the Move

This project supports the following SDGs



Since the 1970s, Jabeda has moved from village to village, mobilizing rural, landless women with unwavering conviction. Her dedication has helped unite over half a million women into a grassroots movement that now operates across more than 80% of Bangladesh. Through her efforts, women have become a driving force behind the Bangladesh Krishok Federation's Land Settlement programs. Their participation has been instrumental in transforming these programs into successes. By 1997, over 250,000 landless peasants had moved from the brink of starvation to self-sufficiency by gaining access to fallow land. The total area occupied by the Federation reached more than 100,000 acres, where formerly landless farmers now cultivate their own crops. The farmers prove that empowerment is an unavoidable stage in rural development.



XIFEN Luo

China

A Peppered Path to Prosperity

This project supports the following SDGs



"From homemade sauce to village prosperity, our peppers now spice lives and futures alike."

Luo, a woman of the Buyi minority and Director of the Women's Federation of Majiang County, turned a simple idea into a powerful engine of rural development. In 1993, she noticed how much people loved her homemade thick pepper sauce and, together with a group of friends, decided to set up a small processing plant. Local peasants began selling their peppers to the factory, providing them with a much-needed source of income. By 1996, hundreds of households were earning at least 650 yuan (around \$78) annually from this practice. The factory revitalized the village economy, with total output reaching half a million yuan (approximately \$63,000) in 1996. Luo successfully repaid her loans and went a step further, investing 30,000 yuan to establish a scholarship fund for disadvantaged students in the county. She has since expanded the factory and diversified the local economy, creating sustainable livelihoods and lifting many families out of poverty through food, community, and entrepreneurship.



KOLI Shantaben Lakhmanbhai

India

Salt Farmer Protects Children

This project supports the following SDGs



"In the salt pans, I fought not just for wages, but for childhood, care, and a future for our children."

In the harsh salt pans of Surrender-Nagar, salt farmers labor from dawn to dusk, while their children are left exposed to the desert sun with little care or direction. Among them, Shantaben, a salt farmer and mother of four daughters and a son, was determined to break this cycle. She dreamed of a safer, more dignified future for her children, rooted in education. Seeking protection, medical care, and empowerment, she joined Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA). When the government resisted SEWA's efforts to open a kindergarten for salt farmers' children, Shantaben stood her ground. She confronted the opposition with unwavering resolve and eventually succeeded in defending the children's rights. Her efforts led to the founding of a SEWA-run kindergarten, where the children of salt farmers now receive basic care, nutrition, and education.



MAIGA Mariam

Burkina Faso

An Exceptional Rural Women's Leader

This project supports the following SDGs



"Through education and empowerment, we transform rural women's lives and communities sustainably."

Mariam, a mother of four girls, has long been an advocate for women's rights through her work with the NAAM Movement, a nationwide grassroots federation of 2,000 village groups. In 1996, she founded her own association, "ZOODO," to focus specifically on rural women and their unique needs. Her mission includes expanding rural women's training centers for family planning, campaigning to end female circumcision, and fighting AIDS and other diseases. Beyond health advocacy, Mariam empowers women economically by teaching soap production, batik, and weaving, providing them with skills to achieve greater financial independence. Through ZOODO, she also promotes nutrition and health education, emphasizing traditional medicine practices. In addition, she introduces sustainable technologies like solar-powered methods for fruit and vegetable preservation and water heating.



MAKOTA Cecilia

Zambia

Succeeding through Good Organisation

This project supports the following SDGs



“Uniting rural women to reclaim their land and grow sustainable futures through organic farming.”

Cecilia, a schoolteacher and farmer, founded the **Zambian Women in Agriculture** organization, which has grown to over 5,000 members. She took on this initiative after attending the first International Conference on Women in Agriculture (held in Australia) in 1994. In Zambian society, women farmers are voiceless and their contributions to household and national food security go unrecognized. In 1996, Cecilia launched the first-ever “World Rural Women’s Day” event, organizing a parade that encouraged more than 100 women farmers to unite and raise their voices. Thanks to their own organizational structure, rural women gained the platform to engage directly with the Minister of Agriculture. Cecilia also dedicates her efforts to helping widows and divorced women reclaim their land rights. As of 1997, she was pioneering the introduction of organic farming practices in Zambia, promoting sustainable agriculture and empowering women in rural communities.



MIOCINOVIC Ema

Rep. Croatia

Dedicates her Life to Peacemaking

This project supports the following SDGs



“Uniting women’s hearts worldwide to spread peace and nurture hope for future generations.”

Ema, born into a rural worker’s family, founded the peace initiative “**Screm do Mira**” (With Heart to Peace) in 1978. Alongside her artistic talents, she paints and writes about holistic agriculture and children’s tales envisioning a better future. The “Screm do Mira” idea, supported by the Net of Peace, originated during the war in 1990 as a call to spread peace within everyone’s heart. Ema also established the “**Women’s Group of Samobor**,” embodying selfless dedication to universal sharing of peace, love, and the preservation of human dignity, especially that of children. In 1993, she organized the first international assembly of women in Samobor, where the International Peace Initiative “Screm do Mira” was officially launched. This initiative encourages women worldwide to unite, think together, and bring peace to the earth through the language of the heart.



CHANGLIAN Miao

China

From Rice growing to Creative Resourcefulness

This project supports the following SDGs



“Empowering women through agriculture and skills, transforming villages toward self-sufficiency and hope.”

Miao, director of the **Women’s Federation of Enrong Village**, has applied her talents to rice cultivation with impressive results. In 1996, she produced two tons of hybrid rice seeds on just 0.6 acres, earning an income of 20,000 yuan (approximately US \$2,400). Beyond her own success, Miao is committed to helping others in her community improve their livelihoods and move toward self-sufficiency. She offers loans to villagers to support their initiatives, such as one loan that enabled a villager to establish a small processing factory focused on teaching practical skills to women. As an advisor to over 20 households, Miao has played a crucial role in helping 12 families escape poverty by 1997.



Oshitukafitu Women’s Group

Namibia

Rural Poor helping to Educate Society

This project supports the following SDGs



“Turning everyday skills into powerful tools for environmental care and community well-being.”

The **Oshitukafitu Group** harnesses domestic skills to drive community projects, notably the “**Keep Namibia Clean**” campaign. With 100 members, they sew textile shopping bags to raise awareness about the environmental and livestock dangers posed by plastic bags throughout their region and across Namibia. These rural women have also improved local health standards by introducing vegetables into a diet traditionally focused on meat. Beyond advocacy, they organize nutrition and cooking classes, equipping community members with knowledge and skills to prepare nutritious, home-produced foods. These foods are sold in local markets, creating opportunities for income generation. Through the household arts of sewing, gardening, and cooking, the group has created sustainable jobs that generate not only income but also savings.



PANWHAR Farzana

Pakistan

"Sindh Rural Women's Uplift Group proves that equal pay in sustainable farming transforms more than just fields."

Promoting Sustainable Agriculture

This project supports the following SDGs



Farzana transformed traditional life patterns by hiring 10 to 15 women on her farm and conducting a comparative study on the work performed by men and women. Originally a biochemist, she concluded that women often achieve better results in tasks like mowing grass for mulch, and collecting leaves, twigs, and bark. This insight led to the founding of the "Sindh Rural Women's Uplift Group," which employs women full-time in sustainable agriculture and pays them equal salaries to men. This shift in employment radically changed family dynamics and local traditions. At first, men would take away the salaries of women, but gradually women asserted and empowered themselves and now talk about sending their children to school, a revolution in this region. The attitudes of men, both at home and in the community, evolved positively as well. Farzana's initiative not only advances gender equality but also fosters sustainable agricultural practices that benefit entire families and communities.



PEKOKEH Mary

Cameroon

Helping a Village Become a Small Town

This project supports the following SDGs



"A single corn mill became the engine for food security, income, and community-led transformation."

Mary's journey toward community transformation began when she opened an account with the local credit union using income from her farming activities. In 1995, she acquired a corn mill, what started as a self-help initiative quickly grew under her leadership to become the only corn mill serving nearly 3,000 people. Recognizing the potential for broader impact, Mary organized a group to acquire more land and expand the mill's operations. A supervisory committee was also formed to ensure effective management and sustainability of the project. Inspired by her success, other groups in the area have since emerged, engaging in farming as a profitable venture. Mary's effort, intelligence, and hard work have turned what was once a neglected village into a small, self-sufficient town.



PEERIS Amara

Sri Lanka

Ending Rural Women's Poverty

This project supports the following SDGs



"Training, care, and community service are the tools we use to help women transform poverty into possibility."

Amara, honorary president of the Sarvodaya Women's Movement (SWM), devotes her volunteer efforts to uplifting poor women and designing activities aimed at eradicating poverty. Founded in 1987, SWM focuses on empowering women from disadvantaged rural and urban communities by equipping them with knowledge and skills through targeted capacity-building programs. Under Amara's leadership and inspiration, the movement has trained thousands of young women, who now volunteer in key areas such as maternal and child care, family life education, and home economics. These women also support community savings and credit schemes, contributing to greater financial independence at the grassroots level. Beyond service delivery, SWM plays an active role in promoting and protecting the rights of women and children, advocating for dignity, equality, and access to opportunities.



Ms. Rani

India

Persistence Pays Off

This project supports the following SDGs



"Through SHARE, we turned skills into strength, and strength into opportunity for women and their families."

Rani was forced to leave school at thirteen due to poverty and the limitations placed on her because of her gender. Refusing to let her circumstances define her future, she joined a local handicrafts center in her village. This experience eventually contributed to the emergence of the Self Help Association for Rural Education and Employment (SHARE). Although she faced strong opposition for working with women, her family welcomed the additional income she brought in. Married at fifteen to an unemployed man, Rani's personal challenges deepened as her husband struggled with her growing independence. Yet, her persistence, resilience, and creativity led to her election as the first woman Secretary of SHARE in 1995. Rani remains deeply committed to a better future, not just for herself, but for her family and community. As she puts it: "My goal is still far reaching... but first and foremost, I will work to send my children to school."



RATHOD Manchaba Kheraji
India

“Empowering women through embroidery inside their homes, preserving tradition while fostering independence and income.”

Needling Women out of Hunger
This project supports the following SDGs

Manchaba, married at the age of 15 to a 60-year-old man who remained perpetually unemployed, faced severe economic and social constraints from an early age. Refusing to surrender to her circumstances, she courageously and resourcefully transformed her household embroidery skills into a sustainable income-generating activity. Determined to help others do the same, Manchaba began organizing workshops and sharing her knowledge. By 1997, she had successfully led 20 workshops that brought together more than 500 women, giving them the tools and confidence to create their own livelihoods. In a society where conservative traditions prevent women from working outside the home, Manchaba found a solution by bringing opportunity within their walls. Through embroidery, women are now able to earn income while respecting cultural norms, ultimately supporting their families and gaining a measure of financial independence.



ANDRADES De QUISPE Rosario Ladies
Argentina

“Uniting women artisans and herdswomen, we build cooperatives that empower and transform rural communities.”

Fron Lama Herdswoman to Community Leader
This project supports the following SDGs

Born into a mining family in the Puna Jujena region, Rosario spent her early years tending lamas until she was ten. Later, she dedicated five years to community leadership in the Puna district, advocating for women's rights and empowerment. Through her efforts, she successfully organized 208 artisans and herdswomen, leading to the foundation of the “Women's Association of Abra Pampa.” Alongside raising her seven children, Rosario actively promotes social, agricultural, and health programs aimed at improving the lives of rural women. She fights for equal opportunities for women and for the establishment of cooperatives for small producers.



RECIF / NGO
Burkina Faso

“Through unity and skill, we transform challenges into thriving opportunities for rural women.”

Using Information for Empowerment
This project supports the following SDGs

Founded in 1991, this network includes over 100,000 members from 15 provinces, dedicated to advancing women's status. With nearly 90% of the population engaged in farming, RECIF/NGO focuses on empowering rural women. It organizes public debates on taboo topics like women's conditions, child abuse, and early pregnancies, which often exclude girls from school. Thanks to RECIF/NGO's financial and technical support, rural women have transformed their efforts, such as peanut oil production and mango drying, into profitable businesses. This network not only promotes dialogue on critical social issues but also fosters economic independence among women, helping them overcome traditional barriers and improve their livelihoods through entrepreneurship.



Rural Women Welfare Organization
Pakistan

“We've united to empower women, protect our environment, and build a fairer, healthier community.”

Bringing Development to the People
This project supports the following SDGs

Imamzai, founder and president of the Rural Women's Welfare Organization (RWWO) established in 1990, has worked to liberate uneducated and oppressed women in Sanghar from the stronghold of feudalism. Through her door-to-door efforts, she mobilized 500 women, organizing projects across 50 villages. Guided by the motto “Conserve nature, Share knowledge,” RWWO has successfully introduced health services, family planning programs, and pollution control initiatives, while fostering political awareness and human rights education. Farmers in the community have boosted their incomes through improved goat rearing, dairy production, and farming techniques. Beyond economic progress, the community has embarked on environmental restoration by planting 100 trees over 10 acres, with participation from villagers and school children alike. Equality has replaced the unnecessary male domination and wife beating has been eradicated from the community.



SHA' SAH' A Najwa

Jordan

"Rural women are the backbone of agriculture; confidence and education unlock their true potential."

Self-Confidence is the Key

This project supports the following SDGs



Najwa turned the family farm into a success story. Through hard work and patience, she proved to many women living in the area that a woman farmer can be just as efficient as a man, as long as love for the land, motivation and self-determination prevail. She affirms that rural women are often the back-bone of agricultural societies and realizes that most rural women want to escape rural areas. The needs and sorrows of rural women have always occupied her and she started to seriously encourage, empower and motivate them. "The most important and fundamental requirement for rural women is to be confident in their abilities and develop their educational skills while maintaining their rural affiliation. Modernity is not only confined to cities but can be positively utilized in improving quality of life everywhere"



THAKORE Menaben Harchandbhai

India

Fighting the Challenges of the Desert

This project supports the following SDGs



"We planted more than saplings, we planted hope, income, and a greener future for our village."

In 1991, Menaben embraced SEWA's initiative to combat desertification by launching a plant nursery in Lodra village. With technical training, she quickly mastered the skills required and began passing her knowledge on to others. Through efforts and community outreach, she convinced villagers, who had never planted saplings before, to join in the reforestation work. Today, Lodra is on the path to becoming a greener, more sustainable village. Villagers not only contribute to ecologically sound regeneration programs but also benefit from a stable income generated through these activities. Menaben also addresses rural financial instability. She formed a savings group that empowers villagers to break the cycle of debt and build resilience. By 1997, her group had already supported over 46 people in gaining financial independence.

Sharing one prize with Puriben V.K: Ahir, \$250 to each laureate



Sudanese Refugee Women's Group

Kenya

Refugees Strive for Self-Sufficiency

This project supports the following SDGs



"From desperation to empowerment, we transformed our lives through sewing and hope for a better Sudan."

In 1992 and 1993, fifteen young Sudanese women, weary and starved, sought refuge north of Nairobi. They settled in a rural slum, where driven by desperation and determination, they decided to learn sewing and sell their handmade clothing. Under the guidance of two literate refugee women, Grace Tire and Marcelline Narot, the group learned basic skills such as counting and measuring. Generous donations of cloth and sewing machines enabled them to practice and quickly become proficient. Soon, they were selling their clothing in the Nairobi markets. In four years they earned several government trade test certificates in dress-making and tailoring and provided for their families (sometimes even neighbors). As of 1997, the women hoped to return to Sudan and help pull their communities out of destitution with the skills they have acquired.



THAPA Nirmala

Nepal

Uniting and Educating Women for Change

This project supports the following SDGs



"When women unite with purpose, even the most remote village becomes a center of change and possibility."

Nirmala, working with the community development program, has become an agent of change in the remote villages of the Khalicot district. Her mission focuses on awakening the potential of rural women, many of whom live in extreme isolation and poverty. Through her efforts, she encourages them to confront illiteracy and economic dependency. By organizing self-help groups, Nirmala has brought together over 700 villagers to collectively achieve what once seemed unreachable, such as gaining access to small credit, establishing kitchen gardens for income, and improving sanitation with the construction of pit latrines. Her approach doesn't impose solutions but empowers women to take the lead in their own development journey.



VASILJEVIC SMILJANIC Dobrila

Yugoslavia Serbia

"With every thread we weave, we restore dignity, preserve heritage, and build stronger rural futures."

A Unique Example to be followed



This project supports the following SDGs



Dobrila worked for the past 35 years to revive the traditional weaving culture of women. More than 2500 weavers from more than 40 villages create with their ideas and needles walking pictures on woolen sweaters. Their success can be measured by their comfortable new homes and better living conditions in the rural communities which now have roads, running water and electricity. By revitalizing this traditon, Dobrila demonstrates her love for rural women and honors their creativity. She also established an open-air museum where the beauty of old architecture and life in ancient Serbian villages is preserved and exhibited.

WWSF is making an exception with this nomination since Dobrila already received international recognition for her work. WWSF hopes she will be a model for more village leaders around the world.



YAGUOB Hawa Adam

Sudan

Using Sheep to Fight Famine



This project supports the following SDGs



"When women take the lead in farming and finance, famine fades and dignity returns."

Hawa rescued her village from famine through an innovative sheep-rearing initiative. As subsistence farming was no longer enough to sustain her community, she took a step toward cash farming and successfully negotiated a loan to start her project. She encouraged 60 women to join her, helping them file for credit and guiding them into the sheep farming venture. By 1997, they were marketing hundreds of sheep, significantly improving household incomes. Through a Cooperative Credit project, Hawa not only increased financial access but also introduced training in literacy, health awareness, and marketable skills such as sewing and traditional handicraft making. The sale of wool products, rugs, mats, and other items, further contributed to lifting the village above the poverty line and ended famine in the area.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



[Click here to go back to the summary](#)

1996

Highlights from the 1996 award ceremonies



Laureate MUKASARASI Godeline, Rwanda



Prize Award Ceremony in Geneva at the Hotel Beau-Rivage. Laureate MUKASARASI Godeline was awarded in the presence of the Mayor of Geneva and Krishna Ahujaa, WWSF President.



Prize Award Ceremony organized by SEWA, Nepal



AKINBODE Janet

Nigeria

Working to End Hunger

This project supports the following SDGs

Janet is the first woman to have formed a cooperative in her hometown. She introduced soya-bean seeds to Idoani, an innovation that would change lives. As both production and consumption spread to the entire region, more families began integrating soya into their diets. By 1996, her cooperative was producing over 20 tons annually. Beyond raw beans, the group processed soya into milk, cake, yeast, “gari,” and other edible foods, which found their way into markets and shops across the region. These products not only became a source of income for many households but also served to improve nutrition levels across communities, reducing malnutrition in the area.



AWASH Alganesh

Ethiopia

Ending Violence Against Women

This project supports the following SDGs

Alganesh, after 13 years of marriage, finally divorced her abusive husband Rather than simply reacting as a victim In 1991, she founded and was elected President of a women’s organization dedicated to combating violence. Through persistent negotiation with local judges and providing advice and moral support, she has empowered many women in her village to stand up against abuse. Her efforts have created a safer community where violence against women has substantially decreased.



Alkuvoima (Primal Force)

Finland

Their “Primal Force” is People

This project supports the following SDGs

“Together, we transform farming into a shared journey of learning, selling, and empowering our community.”

Founded in 1993 with just 19 members, Alkuvoima is a non-registered association based in Kymeenlaakso that operates without a chairperson or administrative personnel. Today, two-thirds of its member farmers are women. The members actively engage with consumers at marketplaces, fostering open dialogues where they discuss, listen, teach, and learn from one another. In addition to participating in public debates, they channel their energy and talent into developing their own products. In 1995 the group established a cooperative and acquired their own bus, enabling them to efficiently sell their products directly to consumers.



BENT MOKHTAR Latifa Meddeb

Tunisia

Persistence Pays Off

This project supports the following SDGs

“Our strength lies in creativity and hard work, turning the land’s gifts into sustainable income for our families.”

Latifa, a resilient widow from the Nahli rural area, works despite being illiterate. Her diverse activities follow the seasons: during winter, she cultivates spices; in spring, she distills fragrant orange blossoms, roses, and jasmine; autumn sees her drying dates and harvesting olives. Summer is devoted to growing strawberries, lemons, oranges, and melons, along with producing fresh fruit juices. Additionally, Latifa crafts a variety of cosmetics, which provide her primary income. Through her ingenuity and determination, she exemplifies the creative spirit of rural women, balancing multiple roles and ventures to support her livelihood.



BHATTARAI Radha

Nepal

"Together, we learn, save, and build new futures through education and enterprise."

Improving the Quality of Life through Education

This project supports the following SDGs



Radha, a schoolteacher, took on the role of coordinator for the Adult Women's Literacy Programme. By 1995, she had successfully trained 1,200 illiterate women across the villages of Lohana and Banherwa in the Janakpur District, representing nearly 30% of the area's illiterate female population. Beyond literacy, Radha organized informal education for more than 300 underprivileged children. Her leadership inspired 50 women to establish Women's Savings Groups, which in turn launched a bamboo-based small cottage industry in 1996, creating new economic opportunities. She is an example of how a single courageous woman can change the life of other rural women.



De CASTILLO María Ana Angel

El Salvador

A Woman of Indomitable Spirit and Courage

This project supports the following SDGs



"When the land is nurtured with care, it grows more than crops, it grows leadership, equality, and hope."

María, from San Francisco Iraheta, was responsible for caring for her 6 children and disabled husband. Through hard work, she transformed her land into a productive and diversified farm. Her dedication to sustainable agriculture and rural development turned her farm into a Rural Development Center, where she trains fellow farmers in organic practices, environmental protection, and sustainable rural livelihoods. Inspired by their mother's strength and values, her sons now actively engage in work traditionally assigned to women, breaking stereotypes and encouraging balance in the household and community.



SHUZHEN Cai

China

An Agricultural Researcher increasing Productivity

This project supports the following SDGs



"With shared knowledge and new methods, even a village field can become a place of transformation."

Cai began as an ordinary rural woman who raised chickens and ducks in the village of Beilahao. Driven by determination, she dedicated herself to learning practical agricultural skills and succeeded in becoming an agricultural technician, the first in her country to apply innovative technology to rice planting. Cai established a research station aimed at increasing agricultural productivity. She documented her experiences and findings in a book, which she distributed free of charge to local farmers to help improve their practices. Additionally, Cai provided free rice seedlings to support her community's growth. She has been named "Capable Woman" in the Campaign of Two Learnings and Two Contributions.



YUNLIAN Chen

China

Prosperity from Peppers

This project supports the following SDGs



Chen, from Taian Village in Jilin Province, became a catalyst for agricultural innovation and community empowerment. In 1985, she learned the technology for planting green peppers and applied it to her own land. Her success not only proved the technique viable but inspired others in her village to follow her lead. Chen shared her knowledge and even lent money to fellow farmers so they could begin their own green pepper ventures. As production expanded to neighboring villages, she took it upon herself to solve the growing marketing challenges, ensuring that the crops found buyers and generated sustainable income. Chen also became known for her role in conflict resolution and local governance. Her dedication earned her affectionate nicknames such as "Pepper Chen" for her agricultural influence, "Coordinator Chen" for her organizing skills, and "Civil Administrator Chen" for her calming presence in village affairs.



CIRENZONGBA

China

*“With thread and soil,
I stitched a path out
of poverty, not just for
myself, but for others
too.”*

**Overcoming Disability
and Hardship to Lead**

This project supports the following SDGs



Cirenzongba, a lame Tibetan woman with a hunchback, lives in village No. 4 of Anrao Town in Tibet. Despite her physical disability and a life surrounded by hardship, caring for her blind mother, mute brother, and adopted son, she showed remarkable determination and strength. Through self-learning, she acquired literacy skills, mastered farming technology, and revived traditional Tibetan handicrafts. Today, she crafts clothing, carpets, quilts, and cushions, lifting her family out of poverty with her hands and heart. Her leadership and talent earned her the title of “Capable Woman” in the Campaign of Two Learnings and Two Contributions.



N. INOZEMTSEVA Tatjana

Russia

**Innovative Farmer,
Philanthropist, and Poet**

This project supports the following SDGs



*“With determination
and care, I cultivate both
crops and culture
to sustain my
community’s future.”*

Tatjana, raised in an orphanage, exemplifies determination and self-reliance, having built her own house with her own hands. In Parfenjevskij, she established a unique nursery-farm where she independently manages all operations. Her expertise includes testing 60 varieties of potatoes, producing 5,000 seedlings annually, and practicing selective breeding of livestock. Beyond agriculture, Tatjana dedicated many years to leading a children’s horseback riding school. A gifted writer, she has authored nine books of prose and poetry and earned membership in the Writers’ Union of Russia since 1979. Her life reflects a blend of creativity, resilience, and leadership, making her a true inspiration in her rural community.



Goaler VITA

Bangladesh

A Pioneer Rural Women’s Group

This project supports the following SDGs



*“Through unity and
perseverance, we turned
resistance into respect
and built new paths for
rural women’s progress.”*

Goaler Vita is a pioneer women’s group in the Kurigram District, established in 1989 with the support of the Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service. Formed in the face of rigid social barriers and resistance from their husbands, the women showed exceptional courage and determination. They created a self-help group that allowed them to engage in income-generating activities, including small-scale farming, handicrafts, and petty trade. Perhaps the most significant transformation lies in the shift of perception within their community, their husbands and the wider male society have come to respect and value their contribution.



JAIN Tulsi Devi

India

Tribal Woman Turned Activist

This project supports the following SDGs



*“When women unite
and raise their voices,
change becomes not
just possible but
unstoppable.”*

Tulsi Devi is a woman from the grass roots who has emerged within the tribal communities of Udaipur (Rajasthan) as an organizer, activist, and leader. She has played a vital role in empowering women of the Bhil tribe by encouraging them to join Mahila Mandals (women’s groups). She has motivated these women to assert their rights and interests in various aspects of their lives, whether in their relationships with their husbands, their interactions with community elders, or their dealings with local bureaucracy and police. Tulsi has served as a model with her outspoken and energetic advocacy.



KHADOUJ

Morocco

Giving Loans for Freedom

This project supports the following SDGs

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“Empowering women with resources and rights transforms families and uplifts entire communities.”

Khadouj has profoundly influenced the lives of rural women home workers in her region. As President of the Women’s Cooperative of Targha, she has provided weavers with essential raw materials and expertly organized the marketing of their finished products, enabling these women to earn a stable income. For the first time in this region, women were able to receive interest-free loans, which guaranteed them some freedom. Khadouj has also been a defender of women’s basic human rights.



MAPANGA Lephina

South Africa

Helping Others Help Themselves

This project supports the following SDGs

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“Rural women deserve more than survival, they deserve opportunity, dignity, and a voice that’s heard.”

Lephina, from KwaZulu-Natal Province, was selected in 1978 to be trained as a fieldworker to support rural women. A rural woman herself and an incredibly hard worker, she has had phenomenal success over the years and achieved great improvements in the quality of life for rural women in her district. One of her most notable achievements is the establishment of over 70 pre-school day centres, an initiative that has impacted early childhood development in rural communities. A remarkably purposeful woman, she is loved and respected by all. Even in 1996, at the age of 66, when the idea of retirement came up, she simply laughed, proof that her dedication has never been tied to age or recognition.



KUNWARBEN

India

Handicapped Woman Overcomes Leprosy and Leads

This project supports the following SDGs

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“Together, we overcame caste barriers and built a stronger, more empowered community for all women.”

Kunwarben, from the village of sayla Taluka, is handicapped with leprosy and lives on crutches. As the wife of a small farmer supporting a family of seven, she took it upon herself to educate both children and adults in her community. In 1991, she initiated a women’s organization dedicated to challenging the rigid caste system that limited opportunities and equality. Through their collective savings, these women successfully installed pulleys in every well, significantly improving access to water and daily life. On International Women’s Day in 1996, Kunwarben shared her experiences of involvement in the development of her village with 300 women participants.



MICHEL Sara

Haiti

Record-Making Rural Midwife

This project supports the following SDGs

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“Every safe birth is a promise kept , to mothers, to tradition, and to the future.”

By 1996, Sara, from Chatard, had been practicing midwifery for an record of 81 uninterrupted years. In a country where there is only one doctor for every 50,000 people and just one nurse for every 60,000, Sara has carried a major responsibility in ensuring mothers can give birth safely. She has a perfect knowledge of traditional herbal medicine, and a rare and special sensitivity for the psychology of rural women. Her work is not only clinical, it is deeply human and grounded in cultural understanding. Over the course of a lifetime, she has offered more than just care, she has given an outstanding gift to the women of her nation: safety, trust, and dignity in childbirth. The president of Haiti received her to congratulate her for the WWSF recognition.



MIRA Victoria

El Salvador

"When war took my land, I found new ways to feed, heal, and teach, starting with my own family."

Creativity and Innovation despite Old Age

This project supports the following SDGs



Victoria, from El Arco, is a widow responsible for six children. When guerrilla forces planted landmines on her farmland, she was forced to abandon agriculture and quickly adapted by turning to cheese and bread making, which she sold to support her family. She then trained herself to become the first midwife in her community. With the end of the civil war, she returned to farming and began raising hens. A true innovator, Victoria took the initiative to educate herself in a broad range of fields, including environmental protection and nutrition. She has since become a trainer, sharing her knowledge and empowering others in her community. Through her persistence and resourcefulness, she kept her family afloat under truly difficult circumstances.

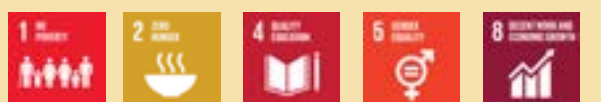


MURADOVA Sudaba

Azerbaijan

Organising Solidarity for Survival

This project supports the following SDGs



"Together, we build more than farms, we build hope, skills, and support for those who need it most."

Sudaba began her career working on a collective farm, where she took on roles both as a farmer and an accountant. In 1994, she founded an agricultural farm with 19 other families that, as of 1996, employed 25 people in the Goranboy District. By 1996, this farm had grown to employ 25 people, becoming a vital source of income and stability for the community. Alongside managing the farm, Sudaba organized training courses for refugees, and used part of the farm's profits to assist widows, the disabled, orphans, and families in need. She is a model for women in other rural regions and has demonstrated that women's solidarity and cooperation are the only way to survive under situations of extreme hardship.



MUKASARASI Godeliève

Rwanda

Determined to Help Women

This project supports the following SDGs



"SEVOTA began with simple support, helping widows come together to face each day."

Godeliève has refused to be discouraged by many obstacles and has shown an exceptional capacity to organize women. She is the founder of SEVOTA, a solidarity-based structure created to support rural widows and orphans in the Taba district. As of 1996, SEVOTA had brought together 1,246 widows across 74 groups, an extraordinary example of grassroots organization. The group engages in agricultural production activities, helping its members rebuild their lives through collective work and shared purpose. Beyond farming, SEVOTA also provides support to women who have been raped or otherwise deeply traumatized, offering them a safe space. SEVOTA has served as a model for many women's organizations that deal with development issues in rural environments.



(UMM NASSER AL AZMI) Abad Farhan

Kuwait

Weaving Bedouin Beauty

This project supports the following SDGs



"Through every thread, I carry the stories and traditions of my people to the future."

Umm Nasser Al Azmi is a traditional weaver who began learning her craft at the age of thirteen, watching and assisting her mother as she dried, spun, and wove wool. By fifteen, she became captivated by the intricate designs and vibrant colors of a beautiful tent partition, inspiring her dedication to sadu weaving. Through her keen observation, devoted practice, and hard work, she has become a true specialist in Shagarah, the most complex of all traditional Bedouin patterns. She is a highly accomplished weaver with incredible creativity. A special Association in Kuwait, teaches today others the traditional weaving skills, preserved by Umm Nasser.



NAVAS Paulina Diaz

Costa Rica

"They tried to silence me, but with support, I spoke, and reclaimed both my land and my dignity."

Courage in the Face of Personal Abuse

This project supports the following SDGs



Paulina, a Bribri woman from the small town of Bolas, has succeeded in defending her rights as an Indigenous woman to keep the ancestral land passed down through generations. Her struggle gained strength through the support of the Feminist International Radio Endeavor (FIRE), which helped bring her story to light. For three years, Paulina endured sexual harassment by police officers. It was only when FIRE amplified her voice that the Ministry of Security took notice and offered the necessary assistance. Because of her unfailing courage to fight back and the special support of FIRE and other women's organizations, Paulina has managed to win her battle.



OLAWOLU E.O.

Nigeria

Helping Others Help Themselves

This project supports the following SDGs



"Weaving is more than fabric, it's a path to dignity, heritage, and a livelihood for our women."

E.O. Olawolu, a renowned traditional cloth weaver from Ondo State, has played a key role in preserving cultural heritage while promoting women's economic empowerment. As the head of Asoleso, a cooperative society dedicated to the weaving and sale of traditional Nigerian apparel, she has combined artistry with community development. She has devoted her time and personal resources to training women, completely free of charge, in the weaving industry. Between 1982 and 1995 alone, she trained over 500 women, offering them not just a craft, but a means of earning a livelihood. Her work has significantly contributed to reducing unemployment in the region.



ÑIRRIAM Rosalía Jara

Chile

Development Depends on Education

This project supports the following SDGs



"Healing begins with knowledge, of our bodies, our land, and our own potential."

Rosalía, a Mapuche woman from Repocura-Deuco, started a rural health center. At this center, children, pregnant women, and mothers have access to essential medical care, including food support, general health exams, and gynecological consultations. Committed to expanding her impact, Rosalía has continually deepened her own medical knowledge and teaches basic preventive health care to those around her. She also created an association that provides training in farming, gardening, traditional handicrafts, helping community members build sustainable livelihoods, and started a literacy program for adults.



OLIVAS María Auxiliadora López

Nicaragua

Banking by and for the People

This project supports the following SDGs



"We didn't wait for change, we built spaces to protect, educate, and empower each other."

María, attended primary school before marrying at the age of 15. She is the founder of the Legal Defence Group Against Violence Aimed at Women, an initiative born from a broader empowerment program that encouraged women to participate in the social and political development of their community. Through this work, María has helped women understand and defend their rights in the face of domestic and structural violence. She has also served as Treasurer of the Savings and Credit Communal Bank, an institution that enables women to manage their own finances and strengthen their economic independence. In addition, she founded the Women's House in her community of Aranjuez, a safe space for learning, organizing, and mutual support.



GUILIAN PEI

China

“They gave us barren hills, we turned them into orchards, schools, and a future for our children.”

Increasing Prosperity for All

This project supports the following SDGs



In 1982, Pei Guilian’s village of Hongshiya saw its fertile farming land taken over by factories that employed only the men, leaving the women with four barren hills. Refusing to accept this injustice, Pei led the women to adopt gravity-based irrigation methods and successfully plant 330,000 fruit trees on the hills. She then went on to establish a technical school, where 51 women became literate and gained practical technological skills. By 1996, the village had undergone a remarkable transformation: average per capita income rose from 1,270 to 4,290 yuan (from \$159 to \$536), children were attending school via the village’s commuting bus, and elderly residents had begun to receive old-age pensions. Pei Guilian’s vision turned exclusion into opportunity and has left a lasting legacy of empowerment and self-reliance.



RHOOMS Ethlyn

Jamaica

Incredibly Resourceful Rural Woman

This project supports the following SDGs



“I didn’t wait for change, I asked, insisted, and then became the one to lead it.”

Ethlyn, from Mary’s Village District, is an unsung social and Christian worker, farmer, single mother, grandmother, craft producer, dressmaker, and respected community leader. She literally pressured her government into sending trainers to her remote community, determined to bring access and opportunity where there had been none. Eventually, she became a trainer herself, focusing on empowering women who struggle with low self-esteem due to lack of education. Ethlyn’s own journey is one of resilience and purpose, balancing many roles while staying rooted in her community. In addition, her coffee farm and vegetable garden have both received recognition for environmentally sound agricultural practices.



RAFAEL Teresa de Jesus

Guatemala

Mayan Farmer and Political Activist

This project supports the following SDGs



“Exile did not silence us, it gave us space to organize, to speak, and to rebuild together.”

After the army killed both her husband and father, Teresa was forced to flee to Mexico. In exile, she founded Mama Maquin, a refugee women’s organization that has since grown into a strong political force. As a regional coordinator, she educated both women and men about women’s rights, and empowering others through action. In the village of Cuarto Pueblo, she organizes women in community projects such as literacy programs, corn-grinding mills, and childcare centers, initiatives that address daily needs while strengthening long-term resilience. She is a leader and an international human rights activist who simultaneously cultivates her land single-handedly and raises her children.



Self-Help Savings and Credit Group

Viet Nam

Finding their Niche in the Market

This project supports the following SDGs



“With knowledge and unity, we broke barriers and found our place in the changing economy.”

As of 1996, this group consisted of 14 women from two ethnic minorities in the Yen Son District, many of whom had limited formal education. Despite these challenges, their creativity and resourcefulness in managing two loans led to significant benefits for all members. The creative and resourceful usage and management of two loans brought great benefits to these women, who were enabled to improve their techniques, promote family planning, and successfully break rigid social barriers. They experienced a newfound understanding of the market-economy system, and have explained the way it functions to rural people. These women have carved out a unique position within this economic system, demonstrating that even marginalized groups can successfully navigate change.



QUNYING Zhao

China

"From rabbits to industry, we built growth and jobs for our family and community."

Prosperity from Rabbit Breeding

This project supports the following SDGs



Zhao, from Lianhua Village, began her journey in 1985 when she received 47 pure-bred breeding rabbits from the Dayi County Rabbit Association. Starting from these initial rabbits, she skillfully bred 500 young rabbits and continued to expand her herd throughout 1986 and 1987. By steadily increasing her stock, Zhao Qunying grew her rabbit population to 6,000 young rabbits and breeders. Her success allowed her to supply 300 local farmers with breeder rabbits. Seeing an opportunity to diversify, she decided at the end of 1991 to invest her rabbit farming profits into a metal mold factory. Mobilizing her entire family, Zhao created jobs and provided employment for at least 12 villagers.



CHAVARRÍA Lucrecia Flores

Nicaragua

Illiterate Cook achieves Leadership

This project supports the following SDGs



"Learning to read opened doors; now I help others grow and cultivate their future."

Lucrecia has worked hard to become one of the most energetic local leaders in a rural development project. Beginning in 1982, she joined a bio-agricultural project and simultaneously started attending literacy classes, committed to improving both her skills and knowledge. Within two years, Lucrecia co-founded an ecological agricultural center, which quickly gained a reputation as a successful training hub for farmers in the region. By 1996, she had taken on the role of leading workshops, where she trained participants in innovative agricultural techniques aimed at sustainable farming and improved productivity. Her contributions also extended to co-authoring a book, sharing her insights and experiences to further support the growth of ecological agriculture.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



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1995

Highlights from the 1995 award ceremonies



Two Laureates with E. Pradervand, WWSF President, at the Beijing Conference



Her Royal Highness Queen Fabiola from Belgium participated at the Prize event with the Laureates



Laureate JUNQIAO Jia, China with E. Pradervand





AGBO Joan

Ghana

Knowledge Seeds Prosperity

This project supports the following SDGs

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"Sharing knowledge helps women grow stronger, together we build better futures."

Joan, from the Hohoe District in the Volta region, is a dedicated coordinator of a group focused on supporting rural women involved in farming and trading. In her training workshops, Joan teaches planting methods and how to keep records of expenses, apply fertilizers and identify diseases, which attack rice. Joan was one of the 10 prize winners awarded in 1995, the first year of the official Prize program for rural women. She received the WWSF Prize during the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing, an event attended by many notable figures, including Queen Fabiola of Belgium.



BARRIOS Domitila

Bolivia

Fighting for Justice Against All Odds

This project supports the following SDGs

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"Even in the darkest times, courage lights the path to justice and freedom."

Domitilia Barrios is an internationally recognized grassroots leader, widely known for her role in leading strikes against the Banzer dictatorship. Despite enduring torture, she never wavered in her fight for justice, advocating for some of the most oppressed communities in the world. Domitilia was one of the 10 prize winners awarded in 1995, the first year of the official Prize program for rural women. She was personally honored with the WWSF Prize during the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. At a special prize award ceremony, many conference participants attended the event, including Queen Fabiola from Belgium.



SAAD EI SHERBINI FADL Gawaher

Egypt

Turning Wasteland into Opportunity

This project supports the following SDGs

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"When women lead, barren land becomes a source of hope and growth for all."

Gawaher is a farmer from the Mehallet Demma village in the Dakahlia Governate. She leads groups across rural areas to form land reclamation cooperative societies and oversees the construction of the necessary infrastructure for cultivation. Thanks to her leadership, more than 10,000 acres of previously unused land have been brought under cultivation, significantly boosting agricultural production. Gawaher was one of the 10 prize winners awarded in 1995, the first year of the official Prize program for rural women. She was personally honored with the WWSF Prize during the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. At a special prize award ceremony, many conference participants attended the event, including Queen Fabiola from Belgium.



ABDEL EL HAMEID Huda

Sudan

From River to Recognition

This project supports the following SDGs

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"They said fishing wasn't for women, I turned it into a craft, a business, and a breakthrough."

Huda Abdel E-Hameid comes from Awila, near the White Nile. She learned the art of fishing from her father. In Sudan, this activity was traditionally reserved for men. She became an expert in salted fish (fesiekh), preparing it in powder form with spices, for the first time in Sudan. Huda was one of the 10 prize winners awarded in 1995, the first year of the official Prize program for rural women. She was personally honored with the WWSF Prize during the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. At a special prize award ceremony, many conference participants attended the event, including Queen Fabiola from Belgium.



JUNQIAO Jia

China

"We planted trees where there was nothing, and grew strength, knowledge, and hope alongside them."

From Wasteland to Orchards

This project supports the following SDGs



Jia from the village of Longju in the province of Hebei led women in her village to plant trees and orchards and created four large reservoirs. Through these efforts, she successfully reclaimed 167 hectares of barren islands, turning neglected land into productive and sustainable farmland. Jia subscribed also to science and technology journals and shares her knowledge with others, teaching new skills such as weaving and sheep-rearing to fellow villagers. Jia was one of the 10 prize winners awarded in 1995, the first year of the official Prize program for rural women. She was personally honored with the WWSF Prize during the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. At a special prize award ceremony, many conference participants attended the event, including Queen Fabiola from Belgium.



XIAO Lai

China

Raising Sheep, Raising Standards

This project supports the following SDGs



"Care, knowledge, and tradition, that's how we turned fragile lambs into a strong future."

Lai Xiao, is a Mongolian herds woman from Sumu in Inner Mongolia. Contracted to raise flocks and herds, she pioneered a scientific strategy for breeding and rearing sheep, dramatically improving the survival rate of newborn lambs to nearly 100%. Her innovative approach has not only strengthened her own livelihood but has also set a new standard for herding practices in the region. Lai was one of the 10 prize winners awarded in 1995, the first year of the official Prize program for rural women. She was personally honored with the WWSF Prize during the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. At a special prize award ceremony, many conference participants attended the event, including Queen Fabiola from Belgium.

SMAKE Nakani & SANGARE Aminata

Mali



Leading Together from the Margins

This project supports the following SDGs



"Together, we strengthen women's voices and nurture the land that sustains us all."

Nakani Samake and Sangaré Aminata share one Prize. Nakani raises sheep and Aminata is an agricultural laborer. Both educated leaders in the poorer section of the outskirts of Bamako, the help women in a wide variety of concerns, including environmental issues. Nakani and Aminata were two of the 10 prize winners awarded in 1995, the first year of the official Prize program for rural women. They were personally honored with the WWSF Prize during the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. At a special prize award ceremony, many conference participants attended the event, including Queen Fabiola from Belgium.



BHAILAL SOLANKI Madhuben

India

Building Security through Solidarity

This project supports the following SDGs



"Learning to read opened doors; saving together gave us the keys to a better future."

Madhuben, an illiterate agricultural laborer from Vakharia, has shown extraordinary determination to uplift her community. Despite her lack of formal education, she learned to read and took the initiative to establish savings groups in several villages. Through these groups, Madhuben has helped many families improve their living conditions and achieve greater financial security. Madhuben was one of the 10 prize winners awarded in 1995, the first year of the official Prize program for rural women. She was personally honored with the WWSF Prize during the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. At a special prize award ceremony, many conference participants attended the event, including Queen Fabiola from Belgium.

Coordinating Bureau for Women's Groups "SUKURI"

Togo



"Together, we learn to create income and build stronger, healthier communities."

Skills for Life and Livelihood

This project supports the following SDGs



"Sukuri" (school for rural women) operates under the Centre du Développement Agro-pastoral et d'Accueil de Baga, serving women from villages in the Niamtougou region. The school focuses on empowering women by teaching them how to generate income to meet essential needs such as health, food, housing, and clothing. United by the shared experience of poverty, these women come together to build skills and resilience, creating opportunities for themselves and their families. "Sukuri" was one of the 10 prize winners awarded in 1995, the first year of the official Prize program for rural women. It was personally honored with the WWSF Prize during the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. At a special prize award ceremony, many conference participants attended the event, including Queen Fabiola from Belgium.

Samuben UJABHAI THAKORE & Ranbai JEMALJI RAUMA

India



Self-Reliance through Collective Action

This project supports the following SDGs



"We turned challenges into chances, building security and fairness for our communities."

Samuben and Ranbai share a Prize. Samuben's fellow villagers were forced to migrate for 6-8 months of the year during the period of drought. Under her leadership, women used their agricultural skills to raise and sell saplings instead, so the villagers are no longer at the mercy of rich land-owners and their daily wages have increased. Ranbai's village, Anternesh, is situated in the middle of a desert in the Gujarat area. The villagers traditionally sold their harvest of raising gum to local traders. Ranbai realized that they were being exploited and bargained with the government to obtain fair returns for their labour. 1000 families from her own and neighbouring villages benefitted from the increased price in gum. Samuben and Ranbai have led women in their areas to bring them greater self-reliance, security and empowerment.

Presentation of yearly WWSF Award Laureates



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1994





FOFANA Fatoumata & TAMBA Adama

Senegal

“Through hard work and courage, we reshape traditions and build new paths for women.”

Example of Rural Creativity



This project supports the following SDGs



Fatoumata, an illiterate peasant woman, became the first woman to run a sesame oil press with great dedication and exemplary efficiency. Her courageous efforts and the quality of her work resulted in her becoming the leader of the first cottage industry for the treatment of sesame seeds in Senegal.

Adama became the first peasant woman in the Casamance to use a bullock-driven plough to till her own land and trained her daughters to do the same.

The Prize for Women’s Creativity in Rural Life was created in 1994 in celebration and memory of the extraordinary courage of TEDY BA, a Senegalese peasant woman who regularly walked 43 miles to market and back for an average profit of less than \$2. She died for lack of simple medical assistance while giving birth to twins in 1992.



In gratitude, the WWSF Prize Program Committee expresses thanks to all who participated and supported our initiative and we hope they will continue in the future.

Rewarding more rural women leaders for their extraordinary courage, creativity and compassion is a valuable contribution to creating a world for the common good for All.