



ISSUE 1

WOMEN FARMERS CARING FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET

Sustaining land, water and biodiversity



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE
WOMAN FARMER
2026





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UN
WOMEN



**FOR ALL
WOMEN
AND GIRLS**

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FOREWORD

Across fields, forests and drylands, women farmers care for people and our shared planet every day. They sustain land, water and biodiversity through knowledge passed down across generations and practices shaped by innovation and technology, while nourishing families, strengthening communities and building more resilient futures.

This year has been declared the International Year of the Woman Farmer (IYWF) by the United Nations General Assembly, recognizing women farmers' essential contributions to food systems, rural economies and environmental stewardship worldwide. It is a call to confront the structural inequalities that continue to limit women's rights, opportunities and leadership across food and agricultural sectors. The International Year also reaffirms the commitment of the United Nations system, including FAO, IFAD, WFP and UN Women, to support rural women and advance inclusive, resilient and sustainable food systems through interagency collaboration.

The UN Women portrait series *Women Farmers: Caring for People and Planet. Sustaining Land, Water and Biodiversity* was created to place the diversity of women farmers' voices and experiences at the center of global dialogues and action on sustainable development and food systems. The stories shared in these pages are stories of resilience, ancestral knowledge, collective action, innovation and dignity. They are the faces and voices of women cultivating the land, while adapting to a changing climate, caring for their families and protecting ecosystems. They are women transforming local economies, leading cooperatives, preserving biodiversity, managing water resources and creating opportunities for future generations.

These portraits remind us that women farmers are not only essential food producers, but also environmental stewards, custodians of traditional knowledge and leaders in building sustainable, climate-resilient communities. At UN Women, we affirm that effective policies and programmes must be grounded in the lived realities, knowledge and aspirations of women in all their diversity. These stories showcase UN Women's work under the Global Programming Framework on Gender-Responsive Climate Action and Green-Blue Economies.

May these stories support recognition of women farmers' strength, wisdom and leadership and inspire renewed commitment and collective action to translating our global commitments into tangible opportunities and outcomes for women farmers, helping build a more just, sustainable and gender-equal world.

Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda

Deputy Executive Director, UN Women



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A GREENHOUSE BUILT ON DETERMINATION

Svjetlana Šolbić

Kakanj, Bosnia and Herzegovina

On a seven-acre farm near Kakanj, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Svjetlana Šolbić has built a livelihood from the ground up. Originally from Sarajevo, she moved to the area after marrying and, together with her husband, slowly built their farm by purchasing small parcels of land. Today, the farm is the family's main source of income.

When they started, neither had any farming experience. Through years of hard work and determination, they taught themselves everything they needed to know. Today, Svjetlana manages the farm's vegetable production, growing peppers and tomatoes in greenhouses while cultivating potatoes and wheat in open fields. She also cares for 15 cows and their calves and is exploring opportunities to expand into sheep farming.

For women farmers like Svjetlana, access to agricultural support can be critical. Making public agricultural grants more responsive to women farmers' realities is an important step toward addressing barriers in the sector, including through the introduction of gender-responsive eligibility and scoring criteria.

With support from one of these grants, Svjetlana purchased three 10,000-litre water tanks to secure irrigation during dry periods, a solar-powered electric fence to protect her land from wildlife and improved watering systems for her cattle. These investments are helping her strengthen the farm she and her family have worked years to build.

This initiative is supported by UN Women through the "Women Driving Resilience in Agriculture and Rural Areas" programme.



"This is a hard job but it gives me what I value the most - my independence."

Svjetlana Šolbić



© UN Women China

COLLECTIVE ROOTS, STRONG FUTURES

Ma Rong

Sichuan Province, China

After spending several years away from home, Ma Rong returned to rural life in Sichuan in China and took on a role few expected: organizing collective farming and livelihoods across two villages where most younger people had left and women and older people make up most of the remaining workforce. In China, traditional farming systems are increasingly in need of adjustment to better support local incomes and livelihoods.

In response, Ma Rong stepped up to reorganize local farming through a collective model. Land is now consolidated and leased collectively, allowing households to receive dividends. She also creates opportunities for villagers to work on large-scale farms and in agricultural parks for regular wages, promoting equal pay, insurance coverage, and improved working conditions. She expanded the e-commerce business, helping local products reach wider markets, creating new business opportunities and increasing sales. Additionally, she promotes traditional and higher-value crops suited to local conditions. Beyond this, Ma Rong supports women in accessing flexible, local employment opportunities, increasing their ability to participate in paid work.

Serving as a bridge between the villages and the outside world, Ma Rong continues to bring new ideas, partnerships and market opportunities. She is now exploring livestock farming as a new collective income source, inspired by a recent exchange with her peers.

The initiative is supported by UN Women through the “Sichuan Women Cooperative Leaders Capacity Development Programme”.



**“As a rural woman of this new generation,
I am committed to driving real transformation
—so that lives improve, and my village
becomes stronger.”**

Ma Rong



© Oscar Leiva

CULTIVATING IMPACT AND INDEPENDENCE

Flor de María Ramos

Bella Vista, Chalatenango, El Salvador

For Flor de María Ramos, a 23-year-old farmer from Bella Vista in Chalatenango, El Salvador, agriculture has become both a livelihood for her family and a source of confidence. What began with growing lettuce has grown into a small farming enterprise that she continues to develop with determination and care.

"I really enjoy agriculture," Flor de María explains. "I've liked it since I was little, but before I was 19, I didn't have the means to work." When an opportunity arose to apply for greenhouse structures through a local project, she seized it. Today, she manages two greenhouses. Agricultural innovation, efficient water management and market access have strengthened her family's livelihood.

Farming has also given her a sense of purpose and independence. However, as is the case for many rural women in the region, she continues to face barriers to land ownership. "The land belongs to my brother, but he lets me use it to farm," she explains.

For Flor de María, farming is more than a source of income. It is a place of refuge and resilience. "I feel happy because I truly enjoy this work," she says. "When I have problems, I just come out here. Being in the cabbage field helps me clear my mind."

This initiative is supported by UN Women through the "Women, Local Economy and Territories" (MELYT) Programme.



"I really enjoy agriculture. I started when I was about 19, beginning with what you could say was the easiest crop, lettuce. Over time, I started figuring things out and felt more capable because I really wanted to prove my worth."

Flor de María Ramos



© Oscar Leiva

NEW HORIZONS BUILT ON TRADITION

Fátima Yesenia Jiménez

Pashapa La Labor Ocotepeque, Honduras

In the rural community of Pashapa La Labor Ocotepeque, Honduras, the scent of freshly fried banana chips drifts from the home of Fátima Yesenia Jiménez Aguirre. At 38 years old, Fátima transformed a small kitchen enterprise into a symbol of resilience, creativity and hope. Her business, Tajadas Pashapitas, was inspired by the recipes and traditions passed down by her grandmother and strengthened through training opportunities that changed her life.

Raised close to the land, Fátima grows bananas, cassava, sweet potatoes and taro using organic farming methods.

"Everything we grow at home is organic, not chemical," she explains while walking through her plantation. "I fertilize my bananas with coffee husks mixed with pulp to avoid contamination because we want to eat healthy food."

For years, Fátima struggled financially and doubted her own potential. Training in accounting, marketing and social media gave her the skills and confidence to grow her business. "These trainings were the push I needed to move forward," she says.

Today, the income from Tajadas Pashapitas helps support her children's future, including her son's engineering studies. "Paying for an engineering degree is not easy," she says proudly. "But my business makes it possible."

This initiative is supported by UN Women through the "Women, Local Economies and Territories" (MELYT) Programme.



"Paying for an engineering degree is not easy, but my business makes it possible."

Fátima Yesenia Jiménez



© UN Women LCO/Georges Roukoz

SEEDS OF BEIT LIF - KEEPING HOME ALIVE

Zamzam Najiibe

Tyre, Lebanon

For Zamzam Najiibe, home is deeply connected to the land. After conflict forced her to flee her village of Beit Lif in southern Lebanon, she found a way to maintain that connection through agriculture. Now living in displacement in Sour, Zamzam participates in community farming, cultivating the land as a way to preserve her ties to home, sustain her livelihood and remain connected to her roots despite being far from her village.

"I did not forget my town and loved ones," Zamzam says. "This helped me to move away from what we are experiencing."

With support from UN Women, Zamzam learned practical techniques to support more sustainable farming, including how to produce organic fertilizers using materials such as oleander, coal ash and worm cast instead of relying on costly chemical fertilizers.

"I learned a lot of things related to the land that I did not know before," she says. "We were taught how to produce organic fertilizers ourselves."

For Zamzam, this knowledge is something she hopes to carry back to her village. "I want to implement the same project back home, where I have a piece of land."

When she returns, she already has a name for it: Seeds of Beit Lif.

This initiative is supported by UN Women through the "Seeds of Sour" project.



**"I want to implement the same project
in my town and call it Seeds of Beit Lif."**

Zamzam Najiibe



© UN Women/Srijana Bhatta

HER VOICE SHAPING THE FUTURE

Oshima Khatun

Laxmipur Patari, Siraha, Nepal

In Laxmipur Patari Rural Municipality in Nepal's Madhesh Province, Oshima Khatun has challenged the discriminatory social norms that limit women's voices and decision-making power, transforming her own life from one of invisibility to leadership.

As a mother of two, Oshima works on the land and tends to livestock, helping sustain both her family and the local food system. Yet for many years, her contributions went largely unrecognized, with decisions made around her rather than with her.

Through leadership and capacity building opportunities, Oshima gained skills in climate-resilient agriculture and financial literacy. More importantly, she found the confidence to speak up and participate in decisions affecting her life and community.

She began joining savings groups and speaking at public meetings. Over time, she became a catalyst for change. Today, she mentors other women farmers, shares her knowledge and encourages them to engage in public decision-making spaces.

Oshima has witnessed a shift in her community, where women are increasingly recognized not only as agricultural workers but also as decision-makers shaping agriculture, nutrition and local development.

Today, Oshima is a community leader and role model. Her journey shows that when women feel confident to speak and act, they can improve their own social and economic situation and strengthen their communities.

The initiative is supported by the Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment (JP RWEE), implemented by FAO, IFAD, UN Women and WFP.



“We are not only growing food—we are sustaining our food systems and growing confidence, leadership and a better future for our communities.”

Oshima Khatun



© UN Women Rwanda

SOWING THE SEEDS OF PROSPERITY

Jacqueline Nyirandorimana

Rusebe, Nyamasheke District, Rwanda

In Nyamasheke District in western Rwanda, Jacqueline welcomes each day with a sense of pride and possibility. A mother of four sons, she once faced daily financial challenges, earning a small income through agricultural labour on other people's land.

"Life was a constant struggle. I had limited farming skills and almost no resources of my own," she recalls. "We used to consume or sell our produce immediately after harvest because we had no way to preserve it. This often forced us to sell at low prices and earn very little income."

Training in climate-resilient agricultural practices, including use of organic manure, improved seeds and minimum tillage, supported Jacqueline to increase her harvests. Access to grain silos also enabled her to store her produce and sell it later at more favourable prices. Today, she is able to provide for her family and generate income from surplus production.

Through local savings groups, Jacqueline has taken loans, built her assets and lifted her household out of extreme poverty. Together with other members, she formed a cooperative, diversifying into aquaculture as an additional source of income.

Today, Jacqueline is a respected leader in her community and a source of inspiration for other women. Her experience reflects how practical skills, financial tools and cooperation can transform livelihoods over time.

This initiative is supported by the Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment (JP RWEE), implemented by FAO, IFAD, UN Women and WFP.



"We are now confident and empowered women, making decisions and building our community together."

Jacqueline Nyirandorimana



© UN Women Senegal

GROWING A FUTURE ON HER OWN TERMS

Sina Diagne

Ross-Béthio, Senegal

In the community of Ross-Béthio in northern Senegal, Sina Diagne now walks through her fields with pride and confidence. A few years ago, however, her reality was very different.

"We used to work on small plots of rented land. We were at the mercy of informal lenders who would offer us agricultural inputs at very high interest rates. Despite all our efforts, we could never seem to make ends meet," she recalls.

Sina's life took a new direction when she participated in a seed production field school, where she gained practical skills in climate-resilient agriculture, including sustainable soil management, climate adaptation methods and high-quality seed production. "Today, we can even produce our own certified seeds," she says proudly.

She also gained access to agricultural and health insurance, helping her manage risks more effectively.

As a result, she reduced her dependence on external suppliers and loans and strengthened her economic autonomy.

Today, Sina is part of a growing network of women farmers, sharing her knowledge with others. "I don't keep what I've learned to myself," she explains. "I train other women so they can improve their production and gain autonomy as well."

The initiative is supported by UN Women through the "Programme d'Appui aux Femmes dans l'Agriculture et le Développement Durable" (Support for Women in Agriculture and Sustainable Development Programme).



**"We no longer farm in fear,
but with a vision for the future."**

Sina Diagne



© Radmila Kuburović - Foto Mijo

GROWING IN CONFIDENCE AND OPPORTUNITY

Slavica Čović

Hercegovačka Goleša, Serbia

In the rolling landscape of southwestern Serbia, in the village of Hercegovačka Goleša, Slavica tends the land she cultivates with her family. Together with her husband, children and mother-in-law, she raises cows, sheep and pigs, and grows raspberries, apples, plums and seasonal produce that support their household. Since 2012, agriculture has been both their livelihood and their way of life.

Slavica took part in a series of workshops organized by the Association “Save the Village” from Priboj. This paved the way for new opportunities for income generation as she expanded her skills and knowledge, from wool felting and weaving to zero waste production and new approaches to rural entrepreneurship.

As she began applying these skills in her everyday work, she started to see tangible changes. For example, learning how to produce oil proved both practical and valuable for bringing income to her household.

“Today, I apply much of what I’ve learned. The more I learn, the more possibilities I see, and the more confident I feel in my work,” Slavica says.

Slavica testifies that she feels more secure than before, both in her work and at home. Her livelihood that once depended only on effort has grown with knowledge, confidence and skills, bringing stability instead of uncertainty.

The initiative is supported by UN Women through the project “Ending Violence, Empowering Change”.



**“Today, I apply much of what I’ve learned.
The more I learn, the more possibilities I see,
and the more confident I feel in my work.”**

Slavica Čović



FROM NEW BEGINNINGS TO FEEDING THE NATION

Juliet Laverley

Bo District, Sierra Leone

Juliet Laverly, a proud mother and grandmother, did not set out to become a farmer. After the passing of her husband and the end of a career abroad, she returned home to Sierra Leone carrying grief, uncertainty and determination to start again.

Beginning farming in her fifties, she faced doubt and difficulty in accessing land. The unspoken message was clear: "Farming at scale is not for women like you."

What began as a small cooperative of seventeen women has grown into Ma Nyande, a movement of 1,250 women building their income, resilience and leadership.

"My greatest joy has been mentoring younger women, widows, single mothers, survivors of hardship, women who once whispered their dreams because they feared saying them aloud. I have watched them grow into confident farmers, agroprocessors and cooperative leaders. Their courage strengthens mine."

Drought, heavy rains, broken machinery and community scepticism tested their strength. Support from UN Women helped the cooperative gain access to mechanization, improve yields, and strengthen its structures. Today, the cooperative supplies rice, cassava and beans to the National School Feeding Programme.

The heart of this story is about women rising together, with dignity and determination. "I am a farmer, a leader, a mentor and every day, I stand in my farms, my processing centers knowing that the soil has given me back more than I ever imagined: purpose, community and a new beginning."

This initiative is supported by UN Women in Sierra Leone.



**"Our rice now feeds schoolchildren
across Sierra Leone – that is
something we are deeply proud of."**

Juliet Laverley



© UN Women/Shopi Makhaola/Maphuti Mahlaba

STANDING STILL WAS NEVER AN OPTION

Mapula Rapholo

Bochum, Blouberg Municipality, South Africa

When South Africa went into COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, Mapula Rapholo, now 34, suddenly found herself without a job. Without a background in agriculture, she decided to start over rather than stand still. From Bochum in the Blouberg Municipality, she launched Mopi Fresh Produce.

The early days were challenging. “We used to write down sales only — we didn’t track inputs like fertilizer, so we couldn’t tell where we were losing money,” she recalls.

This changed when Mapula completed the Improve Your Business training. “Through the training, I learned how to separate my personal and business finances and keep better track of stock and expenses,” she says.

The new skills helped her strengthen and expand the business, creating jobs for five people in her community. She later joined another training and mentorship programme, where she learned agricultural techniques such as crop diversification and drought-resistant planting.

Like many emerging farmers, Mapula faced setbacks, including crop diseases and water shortages. She adapted by expanding into agroprocessing and producing dried fruit, helping sustain the business income.

Today, Mapula hopes to grow her business, create more jobs, and mentor other emerging farmers. “One minute it’s rosy, the next it’s raining, and it’s raining hard. You need the perseverance to face challenges head-on and keep going.”

This initiative is supported by UN Women and De Beers Group through the EntreprenHER programme.



“One minute it’s rosy, the next it’s raining, and it’s raining hard. You need the perseverance to face challenges head-on and keep going.”

Mapula Rapholo



© MILKist Social Design/Ezgi Tek

THE SOIL AS A SOURCE OF POSSIBILITY

Nurşan Güneş

Dara, Mardin, Türkiye

Born and raised in the Dara Ancient City of Türkiye, Nurşan Güneş has lived and worked on the same land for decades while raising her four children. In this region, land ownership traditionally passes from father to son. However, Nurşan manages and cultivates the land inherited from her father under her own leadership.

In the face of drought, economic pressures and changing climate conditions, Nurşan continues to adapt her production methods while creating income opportunities for other women in her community.

Alongside farming, Nurşan is involved in secondary raw material transformation. Working with agricultural waste, wild plants and surplus biological materials, she guides a group of 10 women who collect, sort, dry and process raw materials together. Through this work, the group produces natural pigments and dyes from agricultural waste and sells them for use in different industries.

Materials often considered waste — such as fallen black mulberries, mahaleb cherries, walnut and pomegranate peels, and naturally growing plants including poppy, nettle, dandelion and calendula — are processed into valuable raw materials.

“I believe everything that comes from the soil can be transformed and reused. The soil creates a product, those products create livelihoods, and those livelihoods become hope and inspiration for other women. We are part of a process that extends from the land to trade,” says Nurşan.

This initiative is supported by UN Women through a media and social design project in Türkiye.



“I believe everything that comes from the soil can be transformed and reused.”

Nurşan Güneş

UN WOMEN EXISTS TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS.

As the lead United Nations entity on gender equality and secretariat of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, we shift laws, institutions, social norms and services to close the gender gap and build an equal world for all women and girls. Our partnerships with governments, women's movements and the private sector, coupled with our coordination of the broader United Nations, deliver lasting changes. We make strides in four areas: leadership, economic empowerment, freedom from violence, and peace, security and humanitarian action.

UN Women keeps the rights of women and girls at the centre of global progress – always, everywhere. Because gender equality is not just what we do. It is who we are.



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