

**Solidaridad**

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## **AFFIRMATIVE GENDER**

**ACTION AND INCLUSIVITY REPORT 2021**

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# CONTENT

<b>1. Acknowledgement</b>	01
<b>2. The Team</b>	02
<b>3. From MD's Desk</b>	05
<b>4. Introduction</b>	06
<b>5. A. Prosperity (Economic)</b>	07
Collectivisation model	07
Inclusion in formal supply chain	10
Entrepreneurship development	14
<b>B. Inclusivity (social prosperity)</b>	16
household level intervention	16
Knowledge and skills/ Access to information	18
Nudge the social norms	20
Develop and promote women leadership	22
Inclusive Market Connect	24
Inclusive service delivery system	26
<b>C. BALANCE WITH NATURE</b>	28
Good Agriculture Practices	28
Certification	30
<b>6. KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS</b>	32
<b>7. SDG Mapping of Gender Inclusivity actions 2021</b>	34
<b>8. WAY FORWARD</b>	35



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



Hi everyone!

Hope everyone has been keeping well! I am back again with the Gender Annual report for the year 2021.

Year after lockdown looks brighter, during the lockdown it was stressful specifically for women, 2021 brought in new hope. With the Asia's Multi Annual Strategic Plans (MASP) 2021-2025 giving more recognition and importance to me; I feel pandora's box of opportunities has opened up for me. In the past one year, I have been incorporated into a lot of the project interventions across different parts in Asia and across various interventions. This report will bring you some highlights of the work done in the past year, towards gender inclusivity. While we have begun taking larger strides towards gender transformative approaches, we also have a long way to go.

Some of the highlights of the year:

1. Development of strategy (REC ASIA MASP) recognising the differential needs of women.
  2. Deepening of gender specific actions in more than 20 projects.
  3. Impact of stand alone gender project getting recognised and paving the way to include these gender specific actions in other projects.
  4. Development of new models to include women into formal supply chain.
  5. Women getting more recognition as "farmers" within the organisation and thus getting more space in the discussions, research and program conceptualisation.
  6. New funding ensured for stand alone gender project.
  7. Successful demonstration of how market can be used as lever to drive social change.
- I express my heartfelt gratitude towards Dr Shatadru Chattopadhyay, Managing Director, Solidaridad Asia, for his vision and overall guidance without which Gender Mainstreaming would have not been possible.

I thank Mr. Nitin Rao, for his insights and incessant support and motivation which kept my spirits always high, which helped me overcome all the hindrances and challenges on the way of gender mainstreaming. I also take the opportunity to thank the PMEL team for their continuous support.

A special thanks to the Gender REC Asia team; people who have been my strength and who made the programme a success. We have travelled the journey together. Thank you for being a part of it.

It had been a tough year with Covid 19 still continuing and affecting field implementation in a big way. Thanks to all the country managers, programme and commodity leads and their team for making gender inclusivity a reality by implementing the gender action plans even in these trying times.

Last, but not least, thanks to all the women farmers from different projects, who not only entrusted us, but also challenged the social norms and actively took part in various activities to transform their own lives.

Hereby, presenting to all the REC Asia Affirmative Gender Action and Inclusivity Report 2021.



# THE ASIA GENDER TEAM



**Neha**  
Gender Lead, Asia

Neha is working in the capacity of Manager Gender in Solidaridad Asia since 2016. She has an experience of about a decade to work on various issues of gender. In her present role, she is working towards gender inclusivity for all the programmes and projects of Solidaridad Asia.



**Nitin**

Nitin is working in the capacity of planning, monitoring and learning coordinator for REC Asia. He is a developmental professional with close to two decades of experience. Prior to joining Solidaridad, he was the CEO of a consulting firm. Nitin's passion is to seek solutions and facilitate changes. He strongly feels that integrated and multiple methods are effective ways to achieving results.



**Taslima Islam**

Has over 8 years of experience in various areas of the development sector, including child and maternal health, disability, sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and adolescents, WASH, and women empowerment. She joined Bangladesh team of Solidaridad in the year 2020. She completed her Bachelor of Arts (Hons) and Master of Arts in History at the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. She also did her Master of Arts in South Asian Studies at Pondicherry University, India.



**Sakshi Chawla**

Holds a Master degree in Water Sciences and Governance and has been working with Solidaridad since the last 5.5 years on Leather and Dairy programs. She has also worked in Coca-Cola India Private Limited on various watershed management, replenishment projects and a WASH program called Support My School. She understands the importance of gender inclusive development and has keen interest to work on the same.



**Suksma Ratri**

Joined Solidaridad Indonesia in 2015. Prior to that, Ratri was working in several local and regional organizations focusing on health, harm reduction, gender, and human rights. She is currently handling the communication aspect as well as gender for Solidaridad in Indonesia.



**Heena Bhasin**

Is a developmental professional with a Master's degree in Human Resources. She brings on board more than six years of experience of working with premier executive search firms. She has experience in handling and delivering multiple projects and streams of work concurrently while applying excellent partner management and influencing skills. She supports employee and organizational development through training initiatives.



**Bernadine Yatawara**

Has been working as a development practitioner for over 26 years in Sri Lanka, with International NGOs, Foreign Mission and Multi-lateral Donor Organizations in the capacity of Project Manager and Director. At present I work as the Gender and Documentation Officer for the Reaching the Unreached (RTU) project with Solidaridad Network Asia Sri Lanka. She is tri-lingual and a Team Player. She is a strong supporter of Gender Mainstreaming



**Namrita Bhanweria**

Holds a post-graduate diploma in Rural Management and is working with Solidaridad since 2016. She manages programme activities related to sustainable rural livelihood by supporting the development and advancement of Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), training and capacity building of farmers, especially for the women involved in agriculture and related activities, promotion of food and nutritional security aspects, and women empowerment related interventions.



**Nandita Kandal**

Has been part of the Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning team of Solidaridad since the beginning of 2019. She supports the gender team within the realms of her PMEL role. Prior to joining Solidaridad, she worked in enabling technology driven English language learning in government schools. Her education background has always been in the fields of Economics and International Relations with the aim of working in the field of sustainability and development.





## FROM THE MD'S DESK



**Dr Shatadru Chattopadhyay**  
Managing Director, Solidaridad Asia

The COVID-19 crisis threatens decades of progress for women and girls, disproportionately impacting women's incomes, employment, and education opportunities. Women are facing profound challenges in employment. In low-income countries, more than 80 per cent of women's employment is in the informal sector, with less job security, lower social protection, and lower pay. Due to the lockdown and closing of childcare centres, women—who already undertook the majority of unpaid care and domestic work before COVID-19—are taking on even more unpaid household work and childcare.

Yet, Women's economic empowerment is central to realising women's rights and gender equality. Women's economic empowerment includes women's ability to participate equally in existing markets; their access to and control over productive resources, access to decent work, control over their own time, lives and bodies; and increased voice, agency and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels from the household to international institutions.

I am glad to present the work done by Solidaridad Asia's gender team to address these issues from the three pillars of sustainability defined by Solidaridad. They are inclusivity, prosperity and production in balance with nature. The case studies under these three heading from across Asia capture different interventions and how they contribute to empowering women in Asia. Most of these interventions are in the agricultural sector, as increasingly, farming activity is feminised.

Each of the case studies is personally inspiring to me. These are entrepreneurs who have tackled all hurdles to emerge triumphant. The stories from the dairy enterprise in Bangladesh, successful farmers' companies in India, cocoa-based enterprises in Kalimantan, Indonesia or community leadership in Sri Lanka are fascinating tales of how a little support could bring transformative change, especially in tumultuous times like now.

We wish you a good read.

# INTRODUCTION

Sustainability seems to have lost its true meaning. There is no such thing called sustainability when the people who produce live in poverty, when natural resources are not managed sustainably and working conditions are poor. Even sustainability initiatives designed to improve livelihoods are failing small holder farmers and workers. We at Solidaridad, want to redefine sustainability and reclaim its essence : power to the people (inclusivity), respect for the planet (produce in balance with the nature) and a fair share for everyone in the chain (prosperity), that's genuine sustainability.

As per my experience, if the change has to be more sustainable rather than ephemeral, it needs to be inclusive and beyond just economic progress. Solidaridad Asia acknowledges this fact and seeks to move beyond the traditional depiction of income poverty. We seek to analyse multiple dimensions of the poverty discourse as depicted in the 11 points on sign of the times. The REC Asia strategy keeps the SDG-1 as the core of its work with its overall objective aiming to Eliminate poverty in all forms and improve the resilience of vulnerable population to social, environmental and economic shocks. It's a recognised fact that women are not only more affected by these shocks, but also possess ideas and leadership to solve them. The gender discrimination still holding too many women back, holds our world back too. We cover several other SDGs in our result chain that all at the end contributes to the SDG-1.

My efforts are focused towards deepening the gender relevant actions and mainstreaming it in the three impact areas of the MASP and its implementation. One of the biggest achievement of the year for me is the development of five year strategy of REC Asia with a gender lens. Withing each element of the MASP women and their differential needs have been recognised and accordingly included. In the coming section, I will try to capture the highlights of last year's work of mine, especially with the women dwelling in the rural areas of Asia on all the three economic aspects- (prosperity), social (Inclusivity) and ecosystem (Balance with nature) prosperity.

## TOTAL NO OF WOMEN

## OUTREACH IN 2021



**1,53,439**

## A. PROSPERITY (ECONOMIC)

Despite the remarkable economic growth achieved in Asia in the last few decades, rising income inequality is one of the most profound challenges in the region. Inequality of opportunity is prevalent and is a crucial factor in widening income inequality. This inequality of opportunity is even more pertinent in the case of women. Women are not just devoid of equal opportunity to work but do not have control over their own earnings. Most of the time the transactions are done in cash and therefore money doesn't reach in the hands of women.

In order to give women an equal opportunity to work, some of the vital areas which need immediate and persistent efforts are knowledge and skills, access to resources, market linkage and financial linkage. Some of the models adopted by Solidaridad Asia to address the differential needs of women and improve their income are:

### 1. Collectivisation model

The power of collectives is getting recognized and it is assuming a huge potential for social and economic growth and development. Women collectives have been proven to be an established model to challenge the power relations that perpetuate the discrimination and exclusion. Collectivization and collective actions have proven to improve the agency of women and their ability to negotiate and address structural barriers. We have used this strategy and promoted various Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in many of our projects to remove the barrier and include more women in the project.

Solidaridad has been working towards integrating smallholder soy farmers into the formal value chain through collectivization of the Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) in Madhya Pradesh. The basic purpose envisioned for the FPOs is to collectivise small holder farmers for backward (linkage for inputs like seeds, fertilisers, credit, insurance, knowledge and extension services) and forward linkages (collective marketing, processing, and market-led agriculture production). Producers' organisations have not only helped farmers buy or sell better due to scale benefits, but also have helped lower transaction costs for sellers and buyers, besides providing technical help in production and creating social capital. Collectivization is allowing women farmers to overcome the social norms and build their confidence to participate in various trainings and agriculture activities. This model specifically has helped women farmers who are otherwise unable to participate in agricultural production due to their isolated embeddedness in both public and private sphere.

## Case



**Ms. Sangita Pal**

“Our farmers producer company, had started the Semi- automatic soy-based food processing plant a month ago, this semi-automatic machine will provide the soy tofu and soy milk etc” said Ms. Sadhana, one of the boards of director of the FPC. Before starting of this soy-based food processing unit, technical training had been provided to the members of FPO at “Central Institute of Agricultural Engineering, Bhopal”, so that they could take the production of tofu and soy milk from this plant. “Now we are working on marketing of the produce of soy-based food processing unit, to develop our business”, said BOD of Rakhsika Mahila Kisan Producer Company Limited.

Ms. Sangita Pal from Gunga village of Bairasia block district (Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh) said she had never imagined that she would ever be on the Board of directors of the company. But today, she is, and holding the key position of a Chairperson in the Rakshika Mahila Kisan Producer Company Limited which makes her feel confident and empowered.

“Rakshika Mahila Kisan Producer Company Limited” had been formed at Berasia block of Bhopal district, the word “Rakshika” Means the one who protects. The FPO has approximately 500 members. The members or shareholder of this company are largely members of Self-Help Groups (SHG) formed in target villages and facilitated by MPSRLM. These groups are engaged in farm and non-farm based collective livelihood activities.



## 2. Inclusion in formal supply chain

Although women participate in most of the agriculture and allied activities, they are hardly given any due recognition. On delving into the issue further it was found that women do not participate or have any say in two of the major activities in the overall cycle: during buying of input, and while selling the produce in the market. These decisions are majorly taken by the males and hence, women are devoid of the income and recognition they deserve. Having understood this, different strategies such as digital outreach, financial linkage where money of the sale goes directly into women's account, device mobilisation strategy to reach out to women farmers, house hold level sensitisation, collectivisation, market linkage where some additional benefit is provided if the farmer selling the produce is woman, are being used to include women in the formal supply chain.

### Case



**Nivedita Vishwas**

Solidaridad's strength to work in the supply chain and with entrepreneurs at the grass root level gives us an opportunity to work towards specific needs of women entrepreneurs and bring them to the formal supply chain. One such example is Inclusion in Supply Chain model which is being implemented in Bangladesh (in the districts of Jessore and Khulna), where over 12,000 women dairy farmers have been and continue to be formally included in the dairy supply chain.

One of the biggest challenges for women to actively take part in the formal supply chains has been their restricted mobility because of which they would not attend training and capacity building sessions and also not go to the milk collection centre for the sale of milk. Other challenges include their limited access to resources (skills/knowledge), literacy (functional, digital and financial), digital resources (especially mobile phones), social capital and unequal power relations.

To address these issues, we have used digital technology to nudge social norms and reach out to women farmers in the following ways:

- Reach out to women farmers through digital inclusion by providing advisory on good dairy practices
- Financial inclusion of women dairy farmers through digital technology
- Provide market connect for the sale of the milk produced

A progressive women dairy farmer, Nivedita Vishwas is mother of two kids and runs Milk Collection Centre (MCC) in Pariyali village of Jessore. She started her entrepreneurship journey from a small dairy input supply shop. Being a dairy farmer herself she says that sale of milk and quality input supply was an incessant problem which every dairy farmer of the village faced.

Through SAFAL project she opened up a milk collection centre and today runs it successfully with 350 women dairy farmers enrolled at her centre. The average fat at the centre is 4.2 (for cow milk) and 40 to 50 farmers pour milk every day.

She is an ardent supporter of the digital interventions promoted by Solidaridad through Women Connect Challenge project. She uses the digital application (I2I an app developed by Solidaridad) to send messages to the farmers about the quantity and quality of milk supplied and the money due for the sale of milk. The money for the sale of milk is sent to the Bkash account of women farmers once in a week. Farmers receives messages about the money sent on their registered mobile number. Along with the MCC she also runs a dairy input supply shop which is adjacent to the MCC. With the support from a distant relative (whom she pays salary) she is able to run both the business successfully and earns an average of 50,000 takka per month. "The transparent digital system has helped me to gain trust of the farmers and today all the farmers sell milk and buy input from my shop" says Nivedita.







Let's meet a few dairy farmers registered at the MCC of Nivedita  
(Note two of the farmers were clicking pictures... :)

On being asked why did they choose to sell milk at the MCC. Some of the reasons the group said are mentioned:

- The price of the milk is more than what they used to get/whatever other options they have in the village (earlier it was 30 takka and on the centre it is 50 to 70 takka depending on the quality of the milk.)
- Milk quality is measured daily and a message is sent to them, they use this to understand if there is any change in the quality and accordingly take measures to improve it. Earlier whoever sold milk would come and tell the fat percentage but it was not always correct and they couldn't depend on this information.
- Payment is now sent to their account and this has helped them to plan the income they get from the sale of milk.
- Now they can sell milk even when the weather is bad.
- They can buy input from the centre and pay from the amount received from the sale of milk.

## Digital services

- They get voice messages; text messages and calls on their phone regarding good dairy practices. Further they can also give a missed call to get a call back and know more about these practices.
- Could see the record for the milk supplied at the centre and payment received for the same on the I2I app.
- Able to analyse the data of quality of milk supplied and accordingly change the practices to improve the quality.
- Can see videos related to good dairy practices on the application.
- They get payment in their Bkash account. This has helped them to have independence and can take decision to use the money on their own.
- For the first time, they felt that their identity card was of some use (“I card was used to open Bkash account”).
- Every of the women present had some savings in their Bkash account.
- Most of the time they could do digital payments (electricity bill, mobile recharge, school fees) and only in rare instances they cash it out (generally to buy gold, lease land, buy clothes, buy cattle).
- They also receive government subsidies in their Bkash account.
- Could send money to family members. Order dairy input from upzila.

Some of them felt confident now to use Whatsapp and messenger to connect to their family members and to watch Youtube for entertainment and to acquire knowledge.



### 3. Entrepreneurship development

While there are many success stories, the potential of engagement of women in economic activities is far from leveraged. Main challenges faced by the women are dual roles of women, overlapping of responsibilities of business and family, illiteracy among rural women, less risk bearing capacity, lack of information and assistance, need of training and development, etc. While these are challenges faced by the women entrepreneurs, there is in general ignorance on how to engage and support women entrepreneurs.



**Ranjita**

The entrepreneurship model works to empower budding and existing women entrepreneurs who want to start, run and grow their business and enterprises and to create conducive conditions for inclusive, resilient and sustainable economies. It does so by addressing gender imbalances in enterprise development in order to scale women entrepreneurs' contributions to growth and sustainable development and to enable their meaningful participation in entrepreneurship ecosystems.

Ranjita's six-year journey from being a homemaker to a successful farmer began with her husband buying two local breed cows in 2017. After obtaining a Bachelor's degree and getting enrolled for Master's, she got married and started a family. Despite keeping busy with care work, she always wanted to be self-reliant and earn her own money. At that time, Solidaridad's intervention was initiated in her area. It helped her acquire skills in modern dairy technologies to produce quality milk and in marketing, which encouraged her to rear cows commercially. She then sold her local breed of cows and borrowed BDT 4,00,000 to buy two Friesian breed cows. The milk production now has increased to around 22-23 litres per day and she is able to earn BDT 29,000 per month from it. She has also opened a bank account in her name where she deposits her savings. Today, Ranjita has significant control on her income with which she makes responsible spending, savings and other financial decisions. Her husband has started consulting with her about family decisions. Her children are now being raised experiencing and observing collaborative household decision making systems through which we believe they will be able to uphold the agency of empowerment in the next generation. She is an inspiration for all other dairy farmers who wish to succeed as entrepreneurs as well.



## B. INCLUSIVITY (SOCIAL PROSPERITY)

Women face tremendous barriers as they seek opportunities that would set them on equal footing with men. The patriarchal mindset (of both men and women) doesn't allow women to challenge the norms and actively get involved in the economic activities and since women themselves are reluctant to be part of the established market systems, market also excludes them. It's more of a chicken and egg situation, wherein on one hand, one can say unequal access to economic opportunities leads to social exclusion of women, while on the other side, it can be said that due to the existing discriminatory practices and social norms women are not able to participate in the economic activities. Thus, it is important that an enabling environment is created so that women can overcome the social norms and start participating in the economic activities. To create such an enabling environment various methods have been used by Solidaridad in different context.

### 1. House hold level interventions

Since the journey of women's empowerment would invariably challenge the existing social mores and deep-rooted patriarchal structures, such Interventions are mostly faced by backlash from the society and the ones who hold the power. Through the experience collected over the years I have learnt that sometimes it is important to gain the confidence of the family members in order to work with the women from the house hold. This not only helps to speed up the process but also amplify the results. Some of the issues such as water and sanitation or health and nutrition, which is considered as the overall responsibility of women (due to gendered division of labour) can be taken as the starting point to gain confidence of the community. Once a relationship is established it becomes easier to work on other issues as well.

### Case



**Rozina Khatun (CNV) for the last four years**

The Community Nutrition Volunteers (CNVs) trained and developed by Solidaridad have emerged as rural entrepreneurs, providing much needed critical nutrition education and health services in the rural communities of Bangladesh. Most prominent services that producer households regularly take from CNVs include knowledge on improved food and consumption patterns, and information on hygiene, SRH, nutrition and feeding practice. CNVs serve several adjoining villages and make door-to-door visits. They provide basic healthcare (e.g., checking of blood pressure and blood sugar) along with counselling and information services on health, nutrition and food consumption behaviours.

Nutrition sessions and behaviour change campaigns led by the CNVs have raised critical awareness in the society. Child mortality rate in the areas where CNVs are actively working, have substantially decreased while the occurrences of early marriage and other social problems also are on the decline. Community people in general, and women in particular, are now getting highly sensitised on health-related issues. Adolescent girls actively take part in the quarterly nutrition sessions of the producer groups (PGs), which have paved the way for more awareness at the family level on health, nutrition and SRHR issues.

Now, after more than five years of their work in the community and regular interaction with the house hold, CNVs have gained respect and their suggestions/ advice is accepted by the community. Through them we have been able to create an enabling environment to involve women into other income generating activities, empowering them economically.



## 2. Knowledge and skills/ Access to information

The right of access to information and knowledge is a fundamental and universal right, necessary for economic empowerment and the fulfilment of other rights. However, it is often seen that women are not able to exercise this right with the same frequency, ease and rate of success as men. This situation becomes even bleaker when considering poor or indigenous women, or those living in rural areas. With more equitable access to information, a greater number of women would be aware of and be able to protect their other fundamental rights – to live free from violence, to make informed health decisions, and to advocate for the protection of their labour rights. Therefore, Solidaridad has worked with women and women led groups to facilitate access to information about various aspects related to their daily lived realities. This includes information on financial and digital literacy, sustainable agricultural practises, and safe health and hygiene practises.

### Case



**Indira Kadam**

Facilitating access to information, knowledge and skills is one of the main ways in which farmers' capacities and skills are built in the sustainable sugarcane cultivation intervention in Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. To promote OHS culture in sugarcane farming, a digital training module has been developed for Indian sugarcane farmers and farm labourers covering issues of general health, handling of agro-chemicals and farm machinery, healthy and safe workplace practice without discriminating against any age, gender, race, and ethnicity. It also aims to provide clear guidelines to farmers on how effectively they can manage/control the risk and utilise the appropriate PPE- Personal Protective Equipment. This will also help reduce occupational accidents and diseases, and create a conducive work environment. Similarly, a digital module on financial literacy has been developed in local and accessible languages that will allow sugarcane farmers, especially women, to build their understanding around skills related to earning, spending, budgeting, borrowing, saving, and using other financial services such as insurance and money transfers. It also disseminates knowledge on good planning, budgeting and record keeping as pillars to mitigate risks and motivates the community to adopt climate smart agriculture practises, a key to sustainable agricultural development and livelihoods.

Forty-two-year-old Indira Kadam is an anganwadi worker in Munoli village in Karnataka where she also owns half an acre of land that she had received as a part of her inheritance. Earlier, it was extremely difficult for Indira to grow and harvest any crop for profit in such a small plot of land. Indira attended workshops conducted by Solidaridad where she learnt about fertiliser scheduling, irrigation management, nutrient management, etc. and implementing them in practice has drastically brought in a change in the productivity of her land.

Indira's story is not just about her success in farming alone. It is about how she used her training to uplift an entire community, which went beyond farming. Many of the people in her village are small landholders who are barely able to make ends meet. As an anganwadi teacher, Indira has a strong sense of community responsibility. Training on financial literacy has allowed Indira to create an ecosystem around the farming community of her village to build alternative employment opportunities. Several self-help groups (SHGs) have been set up which support women to procure small loans with minimum interest rates. Many of these loans are used by women to start small businesses. Families in the area are also setting up flour mills in the region to monetise crops from around the area.



### 3. Nudge the social norms

It is not always easy to confront the norms which has existed in the society since ages. Women whom we want to work with are not outside this society and it would not be wrong to assume that they too subscribe and many a times are even the proponent of these societal norms. Having understood this, sometimes I feel it's better to come up with solutions that can nudge these norms instead of challenging them. Over the years women themselves realise how certain norms restricts them and hinders their growth and in turn take charge to change these restrictive practices.

#### Case



**Indira Kadam**

The women dairy farmers in Bangladesh face several challenges, including that of low yields due to poor cattle management, lack of quality feed and fodder, limited access to veterinary services and poor accessibility to markets. Limited mobility resulting primarily from the existing gender dynamics and power relations restrict these women's abilities to exercise equal access to and control over financial and other productive resources. To address these challenges, Solidaridad has 1. Developed milk collection centres (MCC) where milk can be sold 2. established two digital applications to reach out to the women dairy farmers and build their capacities on good dairy practices 3. Digital wallet system of payment for the sale of milk at the MCC. The project used digital applications to nudge and overcome the issue of limited mobility for women farmers. This has not just resulted in women being formally included into dairy supply chain but also reduce the gender digital divide in the community.

The I2I application collects data from the milk collection centres (quality and quantity of milk delivered and the sale price of milk thereof) and sends the information to the phone numbers of the women farmers. The MCC then transfers the money directly to the digital wallet of women. As a result of this the need for women to be physically present to receive the money for the sale of milk An Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system sends text and voice messages to women dairy farmers, providing information and training related to improved dairy farming practises, reinforcing the need for better cattle management. Since April 2021, the IVR system has since started broadcasting voice and text messages to 12,000 women farmers. Weekly themes — such as feed management, milking, artificial insemination, disease management, etc. — guide the IVR training over time, with content tailored based on the results of the human-centred design study.

“Digital Inclusion and Empowerment for Women Dairy Farmers in Bangladesh” has been working as a new platform for Sumita. She engaged herself as Community Mobilizer cum Women Dairy Farmer in this new project and built her understanding on Gender issues, Women Empowerment and MFS (Mobile Financing System), Money Management, Financial Literacy and Dairy Management etc. She installed APK in her mobile and received all data from izi apps and payment from BKash wallet. Today, she is able to recharge her mobile digitally, pay electricity bills as well as school fees for her children, transfer money to relatives and receive subsidies from Government in her digital wallet. She says that this saves her a lot of time as she doesn't have to go physically to make these payments. Interactive Voice Response (IVR) System helps her to get SMS and Voice Call regarding different Modern good dairy practices.

Recently Sumita Kar was selected as Joint Secretary of VSM Cooperative Ltd (SaFaL Nirapod Krishiponno Biponon Utpadonmukhi Samaboy Samity Ltd). During International Women's Day 2022, locally Sumita awarded for best successful Entrepreneur. Sumita now earns around BDT 30,000 per month. She says that this has also given her a better position at the house hold and now her views are also taken for any major house hold decisions.



## 4. Develop and promote women leadership

At Solidaridad, we understand that women’s leadership and effective participation has the potential to improve productivity, enhance ecosystem conservation, and to create more sustainable systems. This is also closely linked with theories of empowerment—where women play a role as active agents of social change. This includes decision making and negotiating power exercised by women as individuals and as groups. Development of leadership of women is also considered a necessary pathway for inclusive and sustainable development.

### Case



**Kokilavani**

One example of such intervention is based in Sri Lanka. The region in which the intervention is based was known for its contaminated water, lack of clean and hygienic WASH facilities, receding water table and increasing pollution as the population continued to increase. The responsibility for water collection and management in the village lies primarily with the women, and they have to use the available water very scarcely in their own households.

Leadership development and capacity building sessions have enabled women leaders to be part of various interventions, including as leaders of community-based organisations. They have played an important role in the practice of sustainable development and agricultural practises, development of local infrastructure, natural resource management, water conservation and food security. Solidaridad has been working together with the village community and its leaders on improving the water system infrastructure. The initiatives include replacing the existing pipeline, using more robust methods to secure the pipelines, providing new storage tanks at strategic locations in the village, and increasing distribution to reach families that do not have water connections. As a result, there is now increased access to safe and clean drinking water and clean WASH facilities. The Child Development Centre in the locality now has a new breastfeeding corner for the mothers. They are able to wash themselves, and even change clothes if they have to. These are very important initiatives that have been helping women to carry out their roles as mothers without compromising on their children’s needs.

Kokilavani, a strong committed woman, is the president of the Udayasooriyan Community Based Organisation (CBO) in Matale district (Sri Lanka) is. The 63 families living in that area used to access water by laying down pipes from a nearby spring to their homes. However, what they were not aware of was that the water received from the spring was raw, untreated and contaminated. Animals would graze around the spring and contaminate the water. Neighbouring farmers that spray chemical pesticides in their fields used the water to wash and clean their tools and themselves. It was only after Solidaridad’s interventions that they realised they had been consuming unsafe water for so long. Kokilavani and other members from the CBO have played an important role in mobilising the families to participate in capacity building sessions with Solidaridad and our partner Institute for Social Development on issues of safe drinking water, mechanisms to identify contaminated water, and good health practices. The families have now become well aware of the dangers of drinking contaminated water, including long-term diseases in people, especially in children.



## 5. Inclusive Market Connect

Without clear links to markets, any productivity gains will be limited in women's lowered market participation. Reducing this gender gap could generate significant merits for the agrarian society, including an increase in agricultural productivity, poverty reduction, enhanced food security, and regional economic growth. Along with interventions for sustainable income generation, at Solidaridad we have been working towards increasing access to markets for women to allow them to have increased control over their resources, including their income.

### Case



Through the course of our work and interventions at Solidaridad, we have seen that women most often have less access to productive resources such as education, land, labour, extension services, technology, and credit, resulting in women's lower market participation. Without clear links to markets, any productivity gains are limited. Reducing this gender gap could generate significant merits for the agrarian society, including an increase in agricultural productivity, poverty reduction, enhanced food security, and regional economic growth. Therefore, along with interventions for sustainable income generation, Solidaridad has been working towards increasing access to markets for women to allow them to have increased control over their resources, including their income.

Based on the assessment carried out in West Kalimantan and Yogyakarta in Indonesia, it was seen that women have some limited access to the market, with 40 to 54 percent of women accessing markets in West Kalimantan while a 100 percent of women in East Kalimantan are accessing the market independently. However, women there continue to earn less than men in many ways, or often their income from market access is used as subsidiary income; they barely use it for their own pleasure and leisure purposes. A series of training has been carried out for women and girls on Financial Capability in West Kalimantan, and Product Diversification in West and East Kalimantan in Indonesia. The training is to scale up the knowledge on economic prosperity of women in the respective areas and for the women to be able to draw up market linkages directly in order to sell their produce in the market. In East Kalimantan, women at Berau District had established their own small business enterprise and produced cocoa—based cookies and chips, selling them in the market and generating income for themselves. Solidaridad facilitated the group in accessing inputs on product diversification and packaging. The group today is able to produce 4 to 5 times monthly, and each member receive IDR 25,000 profit for each production time, which means in a month they will receive extra income of IDR 100,000 to IDR 125,000.



## 6. Inclusive service delivery system

It has been established through various studies and research that women are actively involved in the agriculture activities and it remains their primary livelihoods activity in the rural South Asian countries. However, when it comes to getting access to technical training women are mostly devoid of it. The agriculture extension services are mostly not designed to reach out to women farmers. Data suggests that increasingly agriculture is getting more dependent on women and so it becomes all the more important that women receive these trainings and are able to implement it.

### Case



**Nirmala**

Solidaridad has been working through a participatory model, acknowledging the need to develop leadership of people from the communities. Women are selected as lead farmers and community mobilisers whose capacities and skills are built in terms of good agricultural practices, on digital and financial inclusion, on health and nutrition and on the importance of collectivisation (unions, FPOs, etc.). These lead farmers and community mobilisers play an important role in reaching out to larger numbers. A woman as a lead farmer has shown various merits. Women farmers, upon seeing a woman as lead farmer, feels encouraged to ask questions and discuss with the lead farmers about issues that she faces. She is also encouraged to pursue good agricultural practices upon seeing her peers benefit from such practices. In this manner, through peer learning and encouragement, more women get involved, scaling up very organically.

Nirmala, who is from Yavatmal district in Maharashtra, grows cotton, tur and soybean on the 3 acres of land that is owned by her family. She is one of the enthusiastic women in our programme and is emerging as an innovative lead farmer. Not only does she prepare organic input for her own farm, but also provides it for other women farmers. She regularly attends the trainings, demonstrations organised by Solidaridad under the Smart-Agri program and shares the advice with other women farmers. She plays the role of an agri-entrepreneur and conducts demonstration sessions for women on organic input like jivamrut, nim ark, dashparni ark etc. in her village under the guidance of the Solidaridad team. She meets individual farmers and disseminates information about the project, the learnings of the training and other information received from Solidaridad.





## C. BALANCE WITH NATURE

Humankind has altered half of the earth's land surface, and this will likely rise to more than 70% in the next decades. As a result, biodiversity is endangered and there is a climate crisis that we are all experiencing right now. Many of the planet's natural cycles are at risk that are crucial to human survival, including purification of air and water, availability of nutrients for agriculture and fisheries, pollination of crops and regulation of our global climate. We need to balance sustainable economic development with the carrying capacity of nature and society.

### 1. Good Agriculture Practices

Good agricultural practices are a comprehensive set of actions and initiatives related to agriculture that will support farmers and producers in improving their social, environmental and economic performance. This means helping farmers and workers produce in balance with nature and optimize their farm management practices, so they can increase production and income. This is more so pertinent in the context of continuous climate change, depleting water tables, degraded soils, loss of biodiversity along with a staggered social and economic development—to name a few. Good agricultural practices will not only increase farmers' productivity and income, but also look at more sustainable practices that will be profitable in the long run and be mindful of not exacerbating the climate crisis.

### Case



Karimari



Through Solidaridad's interventions, continuous efforts are being put to support farmers to decrease their dependency on pesticides and antimicrobials, reduce excess fertilisation, increase organic farming, circularity and reverse biodiversity loss.

Karimari has 1 acre of land where she grows cotton. The Nanded district where her farm is situated receives average rainfall annually. However, there is still scarcity of water as the people in the region are not aware about water conservation, precision use of water and water harvesting techniques. Through capacity building sessions conducted by Solidaridad, Karimari has learnt about drip irrigation and has installed a drip irrigation system in her farm. She has learnt about the system's care and maintenance work, also a lot from the audio and text advisories shared by Solidaridad with the farmers. While she could earlier harvest only one cycle of crop during the Rabi season, she is now able to harvest two cycles of crop in the same land as the water availability during the Rabi season has increased. This has created a viable livelihood and income opportunity for her and her family.

Asha owns 1 hectare of land where she cultivates cotton, orange, tur dal and chickpeas. Through the guidance of Solidaridad, Asha has prepared an agriculture input on her own, practising sustainable agricultural practices. To support her and boost her confidence in organic farming, a vermi-bed was provided to her and since then, she has been actively carrying out vermicomposting. She has also participated in training and demonstrations organised on vermicomposting and on crop-specific topics. It has greatly reduced her input cost while improving soil health and increasing the production in her farm. She is now well aware of the importance of sustainable farming practices.



## 2. Certification

Solidaridad initiated fair trade labeling by introducing the Max Havelaar label for coffee in the Dutch market in 1988 and for bananas in 1997 and expanded the concept to other European markets. We have been identified by standard and from 1969 till date, we have been continuously working on the same. Standards and Certification has for long been one of the strong tools to promote sustainability and more specifically environmental sustainability.

TRINITEA is one such certification which was conceptualized to address the issue of exclusion of Small Tea Growers in the tea supply chain of India. Small Tea Growers are now an integral part of the supply chains of tea estates and leading tea packers. However, they lacked access to high-quality services and sustainability support to meet multiple challenges, including low production due to climate change, quality reduction of the crop, lack of market access, and poor price realization. The tea consumers, on the other hand, are demanding higher levels of sustainable practices and food safety compliance. The objective of Trinitea is to improve yield, ensure better price, increase access to market and finance, reduce crop loss due to pest and climate change and capacity building for better group governance.

### Case



**Karuna**

Karuna is an entrepreneur who has been working tirelessly in her tea garden since the untimely passing of her husband over 15 years ago. Initially hesitant to continue the farm that her husband had started, Karuna took over the reins in 2005 as it was previously handed over to the farm caretaker. One of the major hurdles Karuna faced at the very start of her enterprising journey was her lack of knowledge about tea cultivation.

Solidaridad has guided her into the intricacies of good tea farming practices and has been facilitating market and supply chain access for her. Since then, she has extended the farm area from 42 to 50 bighas. Karuna bikes her way to the garden every day, which is about 6 km away. Karuna now aspires of sharing her knowledge about environmental sustainability and good agricultural practices with the rest of the people in her village. She has bigger plans as well: “I want to set up my own factory so that I don’t have to depend on others for a decent price.” Karuna’s is a story of hard work and determination that every woman in India can draw inspiration from. From a novice to a rural entrepreneur in agriculture, she has been breaking the stereotypes every day for the last 16 years, raising her two sons and her farmland single-handedly with equanimity — and with her unflinching quest for a better life.



# KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS

## 1. Meaningful participation and involvement of women in plantation area

The assessment carried out in West Kalimantan is to identify various aspects related to gender based on the personal knowledge, understanding, and experience of the civil society members. Through this assessment, it is expected that the result will be able to guide Solidaridad Indonesia in creating and developing more gender inclusive programmes and activities. The assessment consists of 127 questions detailing gender-based village-related aspects, governance, leadership, economy, agriculture, workplace decency, access to education, land rights, assets ownership, conflict management, environmental issue, child labour, human rights issues, accessibility, and household-related issues. Participants were 67 women with age range between 20 to 65 years of age, and various educational as well as socio-economic-cultural background.



## 2. Gender Impact Stories



Solidaridad recognises the potential of men, women and youth for being the drivers of change towards an inclusive economy and society. In order to recognise the success of the women from the community a Gender booklet is published which contains the success stories of these amazing women.

## 3. Annual Survey Report

The Women Connect Challenge project has two impact level indicators to measure and track the performance of project throughout its life cycle. 1. Percentage of users (sex-disaggregated) demonstrating the increased capacity to understand, identify and pursue digital inclusion programming and 2. Percentage of female participants in the USG assisted program designed to increase access to productive economic resources. This study captures and measure the project particularly on these two indicators by designing proxy indicators directly related to measure the two impact indicators.



## 4. Gender Indicators Measurement Study (Sri Lanka Reaching the unreached project)

WASH initiatives impact women and men differently, as such the project Log Frame has 08 Indicators to especially measure the impact of women through the project. As the project is completing three years as of November 2020, SNA as the lead partner decided to measure the 08 Gender Indicators as stated in the Log frame to ensure the project activities are reaching the Gender targets and to measure of impact it has had on women. the principal purpose of this evaluation is to assess the results and outcomes of the project as required by SNA project log frame.



## 5. Study to find the Impact of MHM interventions for the Reaching the Unreached Project

The Reaching the Unreached (RTU) project is implemented in four districts Matale, Nuwara Eliya, Badulla and Monaragala in 235 selected locations including Villages, Estates and Schools. The project aspires to provide safe and adequate water to the selected communities/schools along with creating awareness and knowledge development in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene. A major breakthrough carried out through the 'hard' component, the hardware intervention carried out by Solidaridad Network Asia (SNA) is the provision of incinerators in schools to enable the safe and proper disposing of sanitary napkins. A short study was done to understand the impact of installing the incinerators and sanitary pads in the schools.



**Highlighted SDGs in the figure illustrates the ones Solidaridad Asia has contributed to through various gender inclusive actions.**



## WAY FORWARD

As me and my work gets more acceptance and recognition in the organisation, I feel the time is right to plan for more intensive engagements. With the advent of the new MASP last year, I had made certain commitments and I stand committed on my words to work towards achieving them in these coming years. In the journey I expect that we (you and I) would get new learning, face new challenges and meet certain changes in the existing context (from the time when five-year strategy was devised). I would be more than happy to learn and understand these nuances and accordingly make changes (addition or amendments) to the commitments that were made in the five-year gender strategy. Please feel free to share your thoughts and ideas to improve upon the gender strategy and action plan for the year.

**For the year 2022 the priority area of work that I have identified for myself are**

1. **Women in Supply chain:** The benefits of bringing women into formal supply chain is multifarious. Women, society, company and the overall economy of the village gets benefited from such an intervention. Having learnt from my experience to work towards inclusion of more women into formal supply chain, this year I am more determined to accentuate my efforts to work on this agenda. contribute to fair global agricultural supply chains.
2. **Policy Advocacy :** Policies (government and company) frame the guidelines to guide the implementation within a sector. It is important to ensure that the policies are gender inclusive. In this coming year more efforts would be made to raise the voice of women to influence the relevant policies.
3. **Digital Inclusion:** Digital inclusion of women has already proven to be a good strategy to empower women in various ways. Women who used mobile and digital technology (through our digital intervention) have shown that once they get an access to technology they use it get an access to various resource. In the coming year I would work towards reduce the digital gender divide and use the potential of digital technology to empower women.
4. **Inclusion in Programs :** New methods and frameworks are getting devised to mainstream gender into projects and program implemented by Solidaridad. In the last year we have tested and implemented a few (which has been presented in the report) of these methods and in the coming year more efforts would be taken to mainstream gender in a structured way into other projects and programs.



5. **Mandatory Standards:** Sustainability without gender inclusivity is a half baked cake, and hence would like to work towards analysing these sustainability standards and come up with recommendations to advocate for a truly inclusive sustainability framework.
6. **Internal Organisation policies:** As we write this report, we are in the process of revising the Human Resource Manual. I look forward to work along with the team revising the manual to look at it through a gender lens and make recommendations to make it Gender sensitive and inclusive.



**Solidaridad**

**NEHA**

A-5, Shankar Garden, Main Najafgarh Road, Vikas Puri,  
New Delhi - 110018 | Tel: +91 (11) 45134500

