



Solidaridad

**AFFIRMATIVE GENDER ACTIONS
AND INCLUSIVITY REPORT 2023**

Front cover: Aunty Geyong, nurse-turned-oil palm farmer in Sarawak, Malaysia.
(Photo credit: Law Chu Chien/Solidaridad)

Inner cover: Supia Atik, ISPO-certified oil palm smallholder in West Kalimantan, Indonesia.
(Photo credit: Abdul Latib/Solidaridad)



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



Hello, everyone!

It gives me immense pleasure to present the 5th edition of the Affirmative Gender Actions and Inclusivity Annual Report for Solidaridad Asia.

Last year we saw the introduction of the 'feminization of the supply chain' model and a year later, I am proud of the work we have done to establish it in Asia. We can already see anecdotal evidence of its early success. For the next few years, the model will be put to rigorous tests in the field to refine and sharpen our implementation strategy. Through our interventions we have learnt that it is important to incorporate a sustainability and climate-resilience framework into the model.

This integration will support women in agriculture and their communities to build resilience to the impacts of climate change. Given that women are disproportionately affected by climate change, it is crucial to include this perspective in our framework.

While we have started making strides toward transformative approaches on women's inclusion in the formal supply chain, we still have a long way to go. Highlights of the reports are:

1. A marked increase in our advocacy efforts to recognize women as farmers and create an enabling environment for them to participate in the formal supply chain.
2. Our private sector partners are realizing the importance of inclusive supply chains. We are working with 8 companies in 4 countries on making their supply chains inclusive.
3. Gender inclusion is making steady progress in Solidaridad Asia's industrial pathway. We are working with more than 30,000 women workers in the textiles industry of Bangladesh and devising a way to work with women workers in the leather sector in India.
4. The impact of the standalone gender project getting recognized and paving the way for inclusion of similar gender-specific actions in other projects.
5. The introduction of the feminization model into the palm supply chain through a new gender project; the learnings will help us integrate the model into other palm projects in Asia.

These numbers are a testament to the strength of the collaborative spirit of Solidaridad Asia. I express my heartfelt gratitude to Shatadru Chattopadhyay, Managing Director, Solidaridad Asia, for his vision and guidance on sustainability frameworks and embedding them in the feminization model.

I would also like to thank Nitin Rao for his invaluable insights and constant motivation – and co-creating and improving the feminization model. I also take the opportunity to thank the Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning team for their continuous support.

The early success of the feminization model is also a result of the support and hard work put in by the country managers, the programme and commodity leads, and their teams on the field.

This report would not have been possible without the women farmers and workers who trusted us with their partnership. They challenged the social norms, actively took part in various programme activities, and inspired their communities to invest in *change that really matters*.

ASIA GENDER TEAM



NEHA

As a Senior Manager of Gender at Solidaridad Asia, Neha brings over a decade of experience addressing a wide range of gender-related issues. In her current role, she is focused on integrating gender perspectives across all programmes and projects within Solidaridad Asia. Her efforts are directed towards developing transformational models within supply chains. By addressing systemic barriers and promoting gender-inclusive practices, she aims to create supply chains that are more resilient, sustainable, and just for women.

NITIN RAO

Nitin is the Planning and Innovation Lead for Solidaridad Asia. A development professional with close to two decades of experience, Nitin was the CEO of a consulting firm prior to joining Solidaridad. He is solution-oriented, and strongly feels that integrated and multiple methods are effective ways to achieve results.



ARJUN PHILLIPS

Arjun is the Gender Lead for Solidaridad India and has more than a decade's experience in the development sector. He believes in changing the status quo by bringing economic transformation and integrating sustainable practices for female farmers and workers.



KRITIKA BANERJEE

Kritika leads the Communications for Solidaridad Asia. She has more than 14 years of experience as a writer-editor across print and digital publications. She is passionate about storytelling and believes, when told well, a story has the power to spur people into desired action.



SUKSMA RATRI

Ratri joined Solidaridad Indonesia in 2015. Prior to that, she was working with local and regional organizations focusing on health, harm reduction, gender, and human rights of marginalized communities since 2006. She is currently leading the Communications and Gender portfolios for Solidaridad Indonesia, while ensuring adherence to inclusivity at all levels.



RUDMILA AHMED

While working at Solidaridad Bangladesh, Rudmila harboured a strong passion for becoming a development professional, particularly in the context of gender integration. She now actively contributes to gender integration across all projects in Bangladesh.

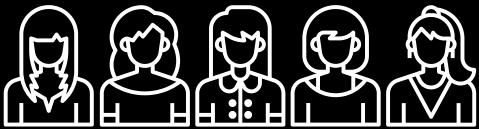


DRIVING GENDER INCLUSION IN ASIA

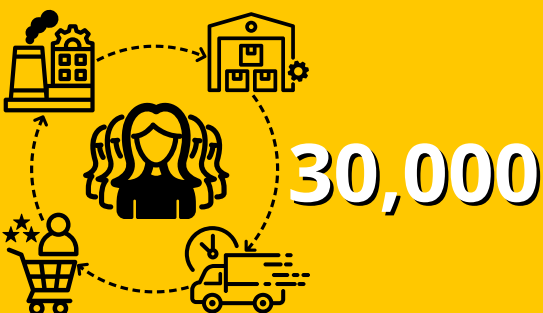


TOTAL NUMBER OF WOMEN
MOBILIZED INTO
FARMERS' GROUPS

8,412



TOTAL NUMBER OF WOMEN
CONNECTED WITH
FORMAL SUPPLY CHAIN



TOTAL NUMBER
OF FEMALE WORKERS
UNDER IMPROVED CONDITIONS

30,000





JAPAN

THAILAND

MALAYSIA

INDONESIA

-  AQUACULTURE
-  CASTOR
-  COTTON AND TEXTILES
-  FRUIT & VEGETABLES
-  LEATHER
-  LIVESTOCK & DAIRY
-  MEDICINAL PLANTS
-  PALM OIL
-  SOY
-  SUGARCANE
-  TEA





MD's PEN



When I look back into the year that has gone by, it is increasingly becoming clear that the pursuit of gender equality remains as crucial as ever, especially within the agricultural sector in Asia.

The Affirmative Gender Actions and Inclusivity Report 2023 prepared by Solidaridad Asia highlights some of the successes we have achieved while also acknowledging the challenges that lie ahead in making the world of work more inclusive and equitable. We have been publishing the Gender Report every year to demonstrate our commitment towards integrating women into the core of different supply chains that form the backbone of Asian economy.

The report assumes significance because it arrives at a time when the world is concerned about the slow progress we are making in creating gender parity in agriculture. For example, as per the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report of 2023, it will take 131 years to achieve full gender parity if we continue at the current rate of progress. While working with the farmers in different commodities, I have seen how women increasingly play a dominant role in farming. In most cases, farming is no longer dominated by men. They bear a disproportionate responsibility for securing food, feed, water, and fuel. Agriculture, a sector significantly affected by climate change, employs a large number of women who face increased workloads during periods of drought and erratic rainfall. In spite of their significant contributions in agriculture, women have continued to remain in the periphery and often deprived of access to latest technologies related to sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture.

This exclusion is not just a loss for women but a loss for the entire agricultural sector, which misses out on the full potential of its workforce. Women, who are often at the forefront of managing agricultural risks, must be equipped with the resources and knowledge to adapt to these changes. This includes access to climate-smart technologies, financial services, and leadership opportunities within their communities.

Like other years, this year's report showcases the ongoing efforts of Solidaridad Asia to bridge this gap through the 'Feminization of Supply Chain' model, which shows how gender inclusion in agriculture could be achieved. The stories within this report are powerful reminders of what can be achieved when women are given the tools and the support they need to thrive. From the single mothers in Malaysia who have come together to earn better livelihoods through high-value mushroom cultivation to the women in Indonesia who are leading the charge in sustainable palm oil production, these examples showcase the transformative power of collective action and gender-inclusive practices.

However, the road ahead is not easy. In many countries, traditional gender norms continue to act as a bottleneck. It limits women's access to land, credit, and markets. The successes highlighted in this report are just the beginning, and they serve as a call to action for all stakeholders including governments, private sector partners, and civil society to intensify their efforts in promoting gender equality.

As we look ahead, it is clear that the path to gender equality in agriculture will require sustained effort and collaboration. Solidaridad Asia remains committed to this journey, guided by the belief that empowering women is not just a moral imperative but a strategic necessity for achieving sustainable development.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all the women who have shared their stories and experiences in this report. All of you inspire me and our team with your resilience, determination, and leadership. I also extend my thanks to our team in Solidaridad Asia who have worked tirelessly to create this report diligently year after year.

I would like to invite the reader to engage critically with the report and share your insights with us. We hope that this report contributes meaningfully to the ongoing discourse in the field.



Dr Shatadru Chattopadhyay
Managing Director - Asia

Karuna Daimari, a small tea farmer from Udalguri district in Assam. From a novice tea farmer to a rural entrepreneur, she has broken stereotypes every day for nearly two decades.



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INTRODUCTION



Recent development indices and measurements do not paint a pretty picture of the state of gender equality across Asia and the world.

- It will take 131 years to achieve full gender parity, at the current rate of progress, according to the Gender Gap Report 2023.¹
- 80 percent of people displaced by climate change are women, according to the United Nations' estimates. This is a disproportionately high percentage, by all yardsticks.²
- In South Asia, the agricultural sector employs more than 57 percent of women workers, according to a joint report of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and Asian Development Bank (ADB).³ Yet they face significant inequalities in accessing land and resources.
- A number of countries in Southeast Asia feature in the lower ranks of multiple indices tracking gender-development metrics, such as the Gender Inequality Index, Gender Development Index, and Human Development Index.^{4 5 6}

The need of the hour is to build the agency and resilience of women. At Solidaridad, the focus is on the economic empowerment of women, by creating an enabling environment for them to actively participate in and benefit from agricultural and commodity-based supply chains.

ENTER FEMINIZATION OF SUPPLY CHAIN

In Asia, Solidaridad is guided by the **'Feminization of Supply Chain'** strategy, to introduce systemic changes in supply chains, from production to retail, to make them more inclusive and sustainable. In my opinion, it should be an essential component of our activities in our efforts to alleviate poverty among women, especially in rural areas. Addressing the unique needs of women, this concept embraces gender diversity to the fullest — recognizing their invaluable contributions and potential for driving sustainable change.

Pathways to progress

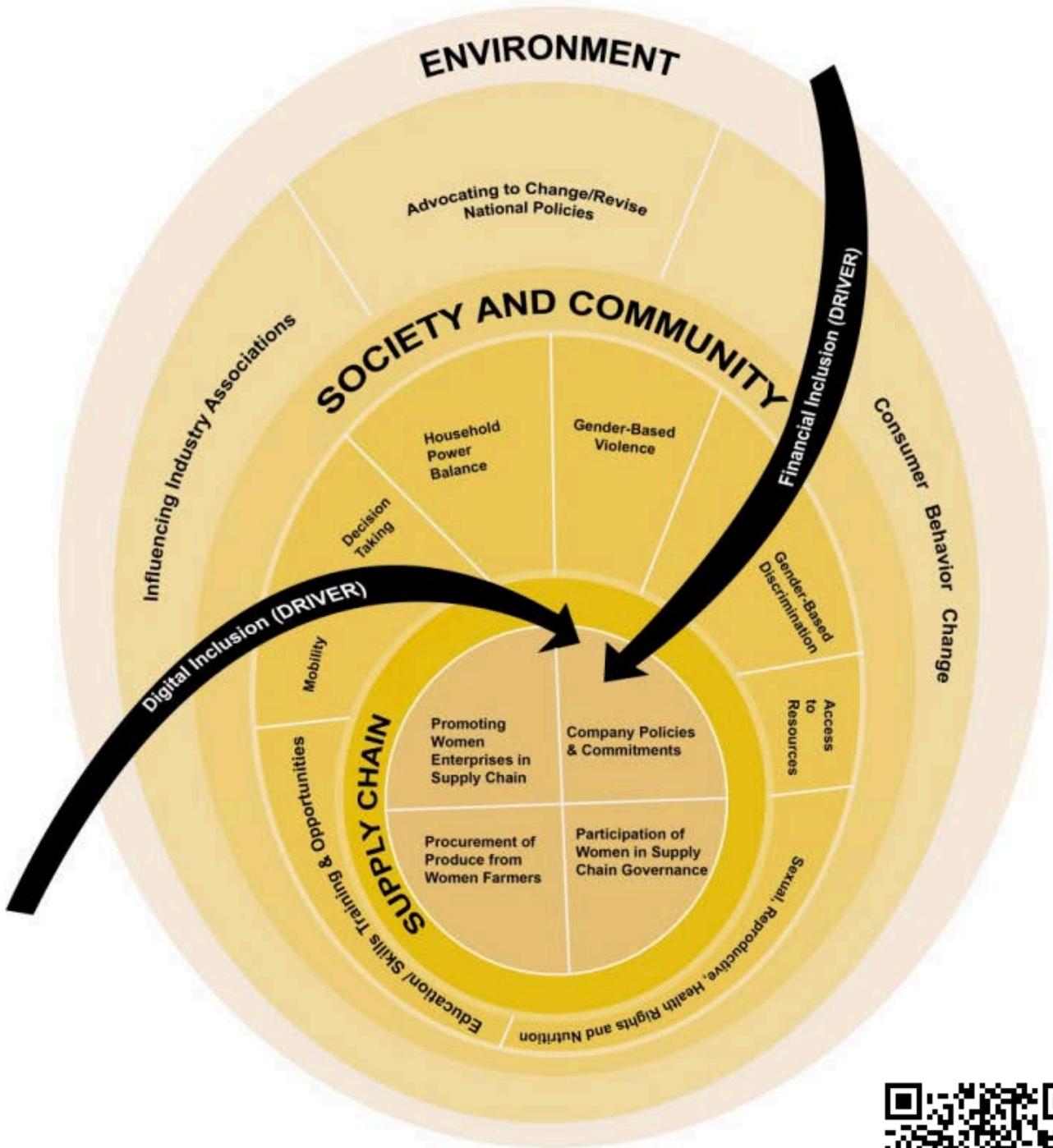
The 'Feminization of Supply Chain' model focuses on the following pathways:

- Establishing a production system that is both resilient and inclusive
- Driving inclusive service delivery to provide equitable access for all
- Fostering inclusive market systems that benefit all women



FARMERS' FIELD SCHOOL IN WEST KALIMANTAN (INDONESIA)
PHOTO CREDIT: EDI SETYAWAN/SOLIDARIDAD

APPROACH TO FEMINIZATION OF SUPPLY CHAINS



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FROM THE 'PROMOTING CIRCULARITY IN THE TAMIL NADU LEATHER CLUSTERS FOR SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT' PROGRAMME.
PHOTO CREDIT: INDIA LEATHER TEAM/SOLIDARIDAD

ASA OVERVIEW



Across Asia, we have impacted the lives of 250,000 women in 2023 — supporting them through integration into formal supply chains, promotion of livelihood diversification, sharing of knowledge on good agricultural practices for increased incomes, ensuring market linkages, and helping them transition towards entrepreneurship. As a result, more than 500 female farmers associated with Solidaridad Asia are now leading their own enterprises that are being successfully linked to the markets. They are also exploring alternative livelihood opportunities to prosper economically. As a whole, these interventions have been shown to close the gender gap and reduce economic disparities by a significant margin.

In **Bangladesh**, we have impacted women in the dairy, textile, fruits and vegetables supply chains. For instance, the i2i application, our seminal innovation for dairy farmers, has helped women earn fair prices for their produce by leveraging a digital application that helps measure the quality of the milk. A total of 5,812 women have been registered on the app, with 4,499 of them having received training on how to use a digital payment system, and knowledge on the benefits of digital financial inclusion.⁷ This vital intervention has helped women emerge as key players in the dairy value chain. Similarly, our work with the textile industry on occupational health and safety supports businesses in creating and sustaining a safe, conducive environment for women to work in. Our efforts to disseminate information on good agricultural practices in the fruits and vegetables sector have also helped women farmers stay informed on how to transition to regenerative agriculture.

In **India**, women have been supported with information on implementing good agricultural practices, improved market linkages and supply-chain interventions across a range of commodities — castor, dairy, soy, sugarcane, tea, and leather, among others. Women are also being encouraged to take up entrepreneurship.

For instance, in Tamil Nadu's leather clusters, our project 'Promoting Circularity in the Tamil Nadu Leather Clusters for Solid Waste Management' is working with local entrepreneurs such as Sher Banu to produce waste-to-value products (such as bags, wallets and clutches) that are highlighted at events such as fashion shows.⁸ Enterprises such as these generate green jobs and employment opportunities for women. The project also aims to train nearly 500 artisans, with at least 50 percent of women, before its conclusion. By building and strengthening the collective agency of women, we are unlocking their potential for leadership and marketing, thereby realizing one of the core visions of 'feminization of supply chain'.

In **Indonesia**, our interventions have aided in the increased participation of women in the tea and palm oil supply chains. In the tea sector, the efforts of Paguyuban Tani Lestari (an umbrella organization of more than 40,000 Indonesian tea smallholders in 14 districts), with assistance from Solidaridad and Business Watch Indonesia, have been instrumental in the creation of the 'Teh nDeso' brand.⁹

A similar scenario has unfolded in **Malaysia** where women oil palm smallholders are benefitting from livelihood diversification via alternative crops.

In **Sri Lanka**, women are receiving support primarily in the dairy sector. Since the dairy supply chain in the country is not yet formalized, efforts are being made not only to encourage women's participation but also to establish a community-based organization (CBO) that advocates for an inclusive dairy supply chain.¹⁰ In addition to this, women are also being encouraged to pursue entrepreneurship in the tourism industry through our sustainable tourism project.¹¹

Our efforts towards feminization of the supply chain in Asia received a nod in the form of the Diversity and Inclusion Innovation Award at the Food ingredients Europe event in Frankfurt, Germany, in November 2023.

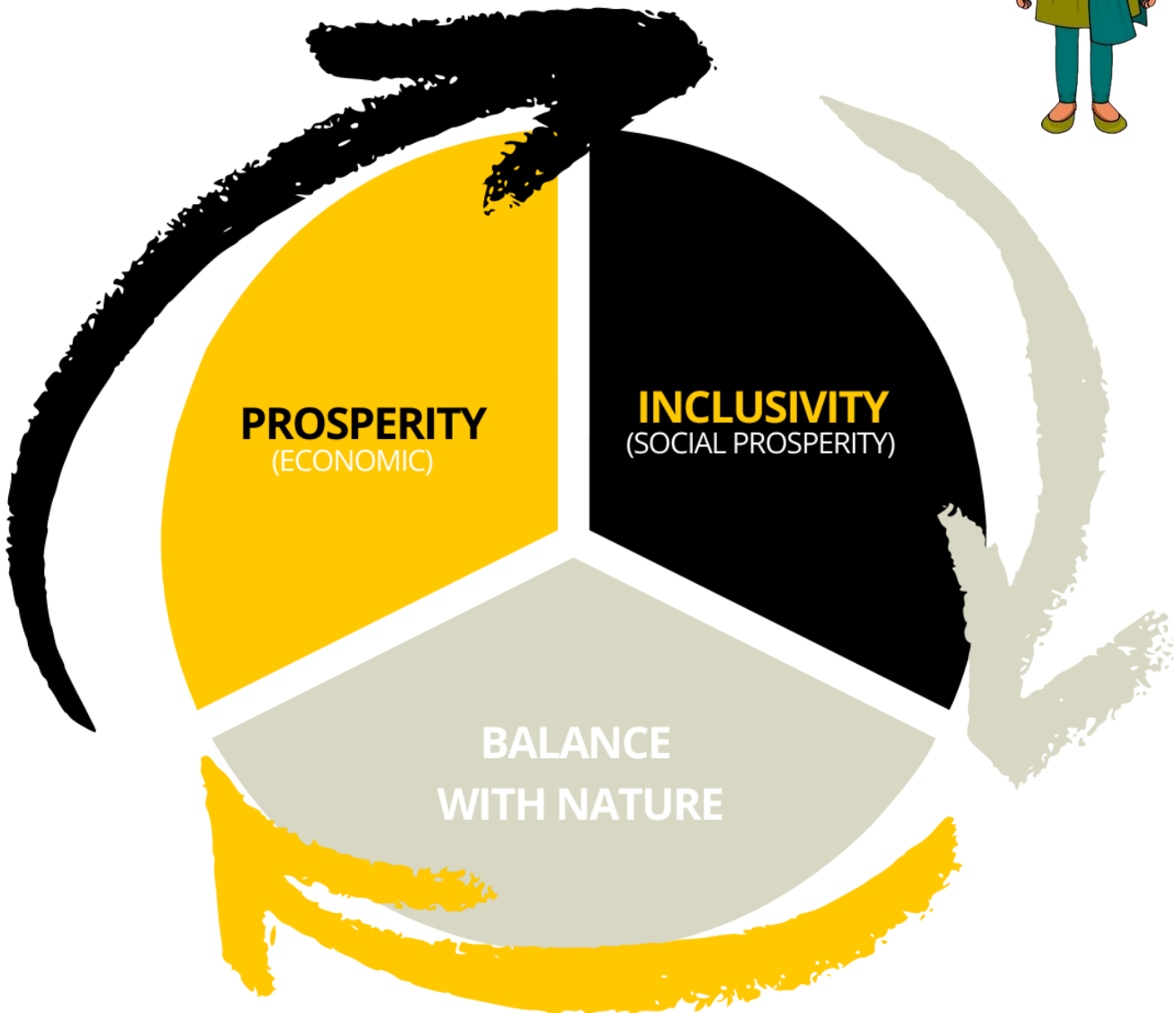


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THEMES

This report is organized around three overarching themes:

- Prosperity (Economic)
- Inclusivity (Social Prosperity)
- Balance with nature



This approach highlights how our interventions align with Solidaridad's vision. I hope you find it insightful and enjoyable.



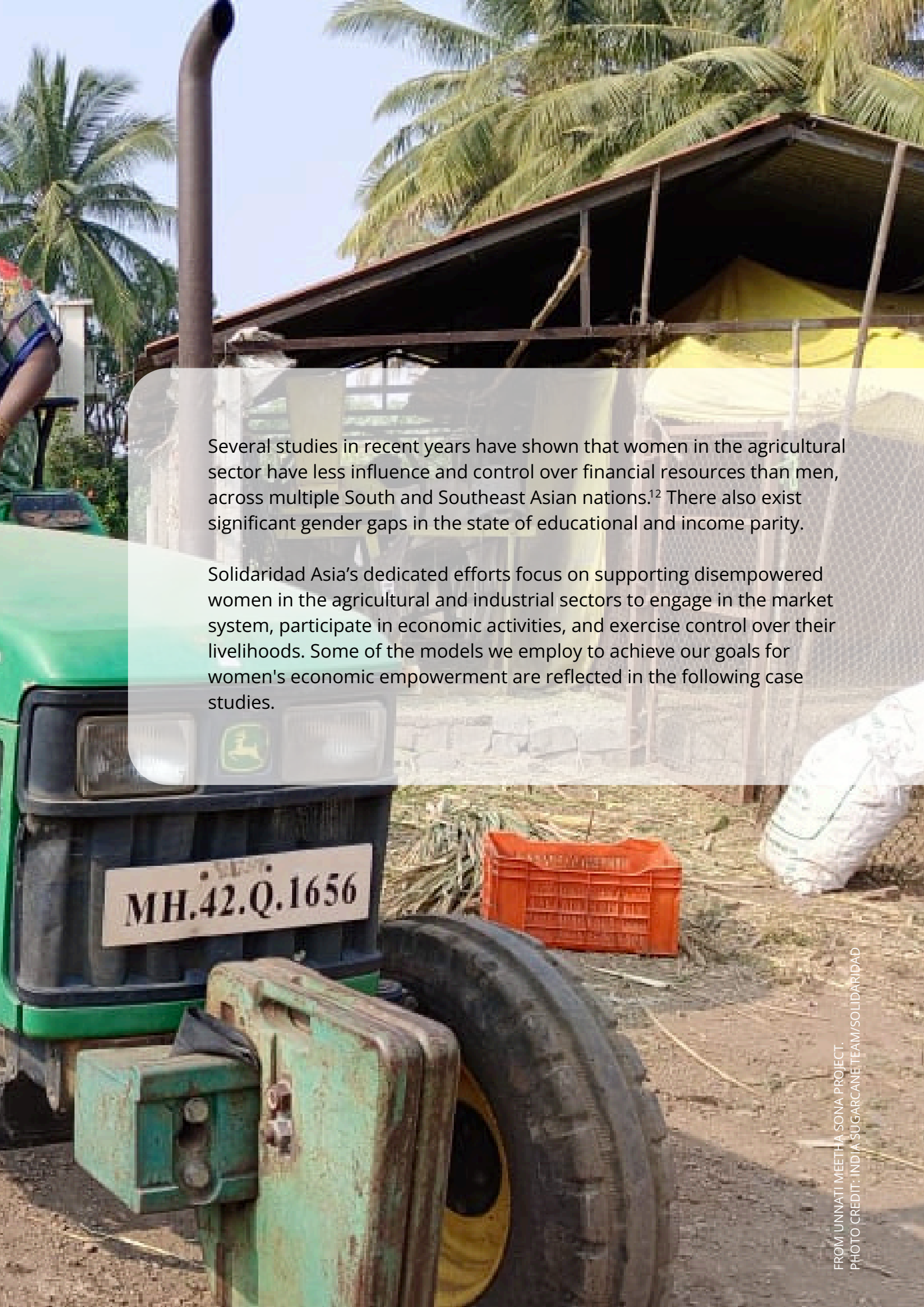
Rasika Vasant Rajpure, a regenerative sugarcane farmer in Baramati, Maharashtra. "I may not be literate, but I have realized that with the right education and guidance, you can turn around your fate and livelihood," says Rasika.



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PROSPERITY

E C O N O M I C



Several studies in recent years have shown that women in the agricultural sector have less influence and control over financial resources than men, across multiple South and Southeast Asian nations.¹² There also exist significant gender gaps in the state of educational and income parity.

Solidaridad Asia's dedicated efforts focus on supporting disempowered women in the agricultural and industrial sectors to engage in the market system, participate in economic activities, and exercise control over their livelihoods. Some of the models we employ to achieve our goals for women's economic empowerment are reflected in the following case studies.



"Since I started participating in this project, I can now improve my income by selling mushrooms to the villagers and not relying solely on oil palm to support my family. The Solidaridad Perak team always visits us to monitor our progress and solve any issue during the cultivation."

- Aminah Saadan -



COLLECTIVIZATION

I've observed from my experience that farmer collectives are a crucial bridge between individual farmers and markets. Such collectives can help farmers overcome barriers like access to subsidized inputs, training, and also connect them to markets. I, therefore, advocate for collectivization as a mechanism to support women farmers in their journey towards prosperity.

A MUSHROOMING SUCCESS

How single mothers in Malaysia have come together to earn better

Solidaridad has been working with women to enhance their oil palm cultivation skills and to explore livelihood diversification via alternative crops. In Sungai Siput, Perak, a group of single mothers, who are smallholders, were introduced to oyster mushroom cultivation. They received comprehensive training on the mushroom's life cycle and the necessary equipment to begin cultivation.

This initiative extends from an earlier oyster mushroom farming project in Bagan Datuk, Perak. As part of this project, 1,000 mushroom blocks were distributed to a group of single mothers. These women were trained in accurate data recording and monitoring. From their first cultivation cycle in March 2023, they harvested 545 kg of mushrooms and earned approximately RM 3,000 (around €588). After the profits were distributed equally among the members, they purchased an additional 400 mushroom blocks. Puan Aminah and Puan Habsah, two of the mushroom cultivators from this group, expressed their confidence in continuing mushroom cultivation due to its low maintenance and labour requirements, along with the additional income it provides.

"Since I started participating in this project, I can now improve my income by selling mushrooms to the villagers and not relying solely on palm oil to support my family. The Solidaridad Perak team always visits us to monitor our progress and solve any issue during cultivation," says Aminah Saadan.

"People now have a better perception, and I am no longer seen as a mere farm worker. By joining the Teh nDeso initiative as a micropreneur, I can now afford and ensure a decent education for my children."

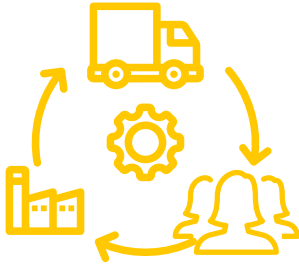
- Watini -



PHOTO CREDIT: BUSINESS WATCH INDONESIA



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INCLUSION IN FORMAL SUPPLY CHAINS

Men dominate the different stages of agricultural supply chains — from production to marketing and distribution — while women are usually relegated to the bottom of the hierarchy. Because a majority of markets are gender-blind, they have produced systems that prevent women from engaging in the formal sector. There is proof that the markets have contributed to the structural exclusion of women from formal supply chains. The goal of the ‘Feminization of Supply Chain’ concept, therefore, is to address the problem of women's exclusion from the supply chain.

CREATING LINKAGES

Teh nDeso initiative links women to local markets

The **Teh nDeso** initiative in Indonesia has developed a marketing scheme that enables 900 rural women (called micropreneurs) to sell tea products to households and local shops. By employing a farm-to-cup approach, initiatives such as these are not only building a direct connection between producers and consumers (through means such as QR codes), they are also supporting farmers with higher yields and incomes, through training on and implementation of regenerative practices.

The lack of a connection between consumers and producers often leads to declining brand trust. To counter this, Teh nDeso tea packages come with a QR code that connects the user to a webpage detailing the tea's origin, a profile of Teh nDeso farmers (in the form of short movies), cultivation practices, plus the environmental benefits of supporting local and sustainable agriculture. The aim is to amplify smallholder voices and enhance the visibility and marketability of tea produced by them.

*"Those who once doubted my business
now seek my guidance
to become entrepreneurs themselves."*

- Aklima Begum -

PHOTO CREDIT: MD. SABBIR HOSSAIN, MONITORING AND EVALUATION OFFICER, SAFAL FOR IWRM, JASHORE/SOLIDARIDAD



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ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT

As I reflect on my own journey working among women in the agricultural sector, fostering an entrepreneurial spirit among women is a purpose that deeply resonates with me. At Solidaridad, our entrepreneurship model not only provides training to women to build their entrepreneurial capacities, from the ground up, it also provides support in the form of improving their access to monetary and material resources for them to help kickstart their businesses. At every stage of the entrepreneurs' journey, Solidaridad continues to support them with the necessary advice and inputs they need to thrive.

AKLIMA'S ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

A story of growth and impact

Married at the tender age of 15, Aklima faced daunting challenges while raising her two children on a modest income. Life took a fortuitous turn when Aklima and her husband inherited land suitable for vegetable cultivation. They also came to be associated with Solidaridad's transformative 'Sustainable Agriculture, Food Security and Linkages (SaFaL)' project in Bangladesh. Inspired by the project's emphasis on entrepreneurship, Aklima eagerly enrolled in 2017, marking the beginning of her remarkable journey.

With Solidaridad's steadfast support, Aklima ventured into selling agricultural inputs from her shop located in Jashore district. This initiative not only provided her with a stable income but also empowered her to reinvest in her business and her family's future. Today, Aklima earns approximately 35,000 BDT (€300) every month — a substantial increase from her previous earnings.

Buoyed by her success, Aklima utilized her earnings to expand her assets, purchasing additional land and establishing permanent structures, such as a sturdy house, as well as sheds for cattle and poultry. Her entrepreneurial spirit has not only transformed her own circumstances but has also inspired others in her community. "Those who once doubted my business now seek my guidance to become entrepreneurs themselves," Aklima proudly shares.

Aklima continues to expand her influence, not just as a successful entrepreneur but also as a beacon of hope and inspiration for those around her. Her story reminds us that with perseverance and the right support, dreams can indeed blossom into reality, creating a ripple effect of positive change within communities.


Minari Begum, a paddy farmer in Narail district, Bangladesh. Minari is now training and encouraging other women in her village to take up agriculture.



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INCLUSIVITY

S O C I A L P R O S P E R I T Y

A woman wearing a vibrant red and yellow sari is shown from the side, holding a large bundle of harvested rice plants. The background is a lush green rice field. A semi-transparent white box with rounded corners is overlaid on the upper part of the image, containing text.

For women, being independent and engaging in market activities has, historically, been challenging — due, in large part, to social norms that tend to bind women to fixed roles and spaces. Solidaridad addresses these challenges by creating a conducive, enabling environment that ensures minimum resistance from communities and societies towards women's pursuit of independence and emancipation.

There are several key ingredients in our approach to ensuring greater social inclusivity for women in agriculture.



PHOTO CREDIT: ARYA RIZKA, ENDY NABIL/SOLIDARIDAD

"My hope is that I will be able to earn a higher income for my household through oil palm cultivation and horticulture. I also wish that my fellow farmers in the Paser district continue to receive greater support in the future."

- Suci Ratni -



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HOUSEHOLD INTERVENTIONS

In my experience, challenging societal norms and entrenched patriarchal systems is often crucial, even though it invites pushback from those in power.

As a woman myself, I have also faced restrictions at various periods, such as being prohibited from working outside the home and being limited to household tasks. In the field, I have learned that gaining support from our families and building trust within the community are pivotal for women's development. Establishing this trust starts with addressing topics that resonate well with society. Once this bond is forged, tackling other important issues related to women's empowerment becomes much more feasible.

SUCI'S RESILIENCE

Embracing motherhood and sustainable agriculture

Suci Ratni, a resilient female farmer from Kerta Bumi village in East Kalimantan, Indonesia, adroitly juggles the roles of a mother and farmer, while also managing household responsibilities. Even though she is keenly aware of gender-based challenges in her field, Suci has demonstrated remarkable determination and resilience to contribute significantly to her family's livelihood.

Initially specializing in palm oil farming, Suci expanded her agricultural pursuits to include horticultural activities, aiming to diversify and increase their household income. Together with her husband, Suci implements sustainable farming practices, such as using compost made from chicken and goat manure. These efforts not only enhance crop yields but also underscore their commitment to environment-friendly farming.

For Suci, balancing farm work with maternal duties has been a constant struggle, with little time for personal breaks. "My day starts even before I visit the oil palm plantation. First, I drop my children at the school, before embarking on a labourious trip to the plantation. During the afternoon, I take my children home, before going back to the farm. Once my work at the farm is over, I make my way home where other household duties await me for the evening," says the hardworking Suci. Nevertheless, she firmly believes that empowering women is essential for advancing the agricultural sector in Indonesia.

“Moving forward, I wish to improve my knowledge of organic cultivation techniques and practices. I also want to learn technology-based solutions for tea processing and marketing, to increase sales of my tea in India and abroad.”

- Vimala Morchan -



PHOTO CREDIT: VIKASH ARI, COONOR, INDIA/SOLIDARIDAD



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ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Solidaridad Asia has launched programmes to alleviate the problems caused by restricted access for women to education and information. These include digital platforms tailored to women's needs and preferences, so that they can access essential agricultural information.

THE SMART ROAD TO SUCCESS

Vimala's inspirational journey

Vimala Morchan, a small tea grower owning two acres of an estate in the village of Beragani in the Kotagiri taluk of the Nilgiris district in Tamil Nadu, is an exemplary farmer. In 2022, Vimala started training with Solidaridad to increase her production, earnings, and explore further avenues for marketing. For her farm (which has also been identified as a demo plot), she receives digital crop and weather advisories from the Smart Agri Project as well as field visits by scientists to advise her on the best practices for sustainable production and maximizing output.

The positive effects of these interventions have been evident. The yearly tea production in Vimala's estate has grown steeply: 30 kg in 2021, 100 kg in 2022, and 250 kg in 2023. Her earnings from tea farming have also increased manifold — from ₹35,000 (€377) per annum in 2021 to ₹250,000 (€2,697) in 2023. Vimala's efforts to promote sustainable farming and handmade teas have won her awards and certificates from Tea Board India (in 2022 and 2023), Tamil Nadu's Horticulture Department (in 2023) and Solidaridad (during the India International Small Tea Growers' Conference in Kolkata, 2022).

"My daily routine consists of taking care of my vegetable and tea fields. Making homemade, organic, specialty teas [with support from Solidaridad] is what has allowed me to thrive in life," Vimala says. "Moving forward, I wish to improve my knowledge of organic cultivation techniques and practices. I also want to learn technology-based solutions for tea processing and marketing, to increase sales of my tea in India and abroad."



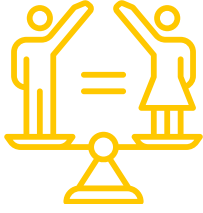
PHOTO CREDIT: MD. FARUK HOSSAIN RAZI/SOLIDARIDAD

"I was unable to send my children to school, and I soon realized that I would have to step outside the house to earn extra money. But my husband and family weren't pleased with the prospect of a wife working outside the home. It needed a lot of convincing from my end to finally start farming."

- Khadiza Begum -



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NUDGING SOCIAL NORMS

Women's empowerment can lead to a gradual shift in societal norms, leading us to challenge outdated conventions over time. Solidaridad has devised creative ways to involve women in influencing or changing these standards.

KHADIZA'S TRIUMPH

Ensuring a sustainable livelihood

Khadiza's journey to becoming a thriving farmer was not an easy one. With her husband frequently ill, she started managing the household and caring for her children by herself. The pandemic complicated matters further, and Khadiza had to rely on agriculture as a means of subsistence. However, she had to face two overwhelming challenges — severe water scarcity and resistance from the community around her.

However, the turning point came with the implementation of Solidaridad's SAFAL for IWRM initiative, which revitalized the Gangulia canal flowing near her village, ensuring improved access to water resources for the villagers. This helped Khadiza diversify her crops across three cycles in a year, producing an array of commodities ranging from rice and pointed gourd to banana, garlic, onion and turmeric. The increased cultivation helped her scale up monthly earnings to ₹10,000 (€108) — more than double her previous income, even before the pandemic. She also cultivates other crops such as tomatoes, coriander, radish, among others, partly for her family's consumption, with the rest being sold at the local market.

Resilience and determination define Khadiza's journey to becoming a self-sustaining farmer. "When my husband fell ill," Khadiza says, "it was a tough time for us all." "I was unable to send my children to school, and I soon realized that I would have to step outside the house to earn extra money. But, my husband and family weren't pleased with the prospect of a wife working outside the home. It needed a lot of convincing from my end to finally start farming," she adds. Indeed, this change in perception among her family members and fellow villagers has been Khadiza's biggest triumph. "Today, my wife knows all about farming, and running the household — and I am really happy with this. Any decision on spending the money earned from agricultural activities is taken jointly by my wife and me," says Salauddin Sardar, Khadiza's husband.

“Earlier, a lot of women here did not know about the basics of sustainable oil palm cultivation — from the safety norms to be observed to the kind of fertilizers to be applied or sprayed.”

- Im Fatul Hasanah -



PHOTO CREDIT: RIFQY FATHURRAHMAN/SOLIDARIDAD



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DEVELOP & PROMOTE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Solidaridad prioritizes the development of women's leadership and entrepreneurship as a critical area of action. Encouraging and enabling women to become lead farmers, community mobilizers and entrepreneurs has been shown to drive significant social transformation, especially in the rural areas we work in.

IM FATUL HASANAH

The worker's champion

Im Fatul Hasanah, a proficient and sustainable oil palm farmer hailing from the East Kalimantan province, Indonesia, was recently nominated as the province's Gender Champion for 2024. Central to this recognition are her earnest and steadfast efforts to campaign for the implementation of decent and safe working conditions for women, especially for those working in oil palm plantations.

Currently serving as the Internal Control System (ICS) Manager in the Makarti Multipurpose Cooperative, Im Fatul has already obtained the Indonesian Sustainable Palm Oil (ISPO) sustainability certificate. "Due to this certification, we women feel safe and protected in the fields and in other workplaces," she states. The ISPO certificate also holds the potential for economic transformation, as her oil palm plantation adheres to sustainability standards, following the adoption of environment-friendly agricultural practices.

"Earlier, a lot of women here did not know about the basics of sustainable oil palm cultivation — from the safety norms to be observed to the kind of fertilizers to be applied or sprayed," she says. "These deficiencies have now been overcome thanks to the rigorous training sessions and field visits regularly organized by Solidaridad experts."

Her role as an ICS Manager represents a significant step towards social transformation, and serves as an inspiring message to her fellow women to step up to the challenge of overcoming the prevailing dominance of men in both the cooperative and the larger palm oil industry.



PHOTO CREDIT: INDIA LEATHER TEAM/SOLIDARIDAD

"I have been provided high-quality equipment and machines that have helped me immensely. Furthermore, the production samples we designed out of eco-particle boards were showcased at an international leather fashion show, and this has provided us an opportunity to reach out to a bigger market."

- Sher Banu -



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INCLUSIVE MARKET CONNECTION

Gender equality and women's empowerment hinge on inclusive market connectivity. By leveling the playing field and facilitating market linkages, Solidaridad aims to increase women's economic independence and overall well-being.

SHER BANU

Creating wealth out of waste

The 'Promoting Circularity in the Tamil Nadu Leather Clusters for Solid Waste Management' project is employing innovative technologies to transform leather waste from tanning processes into fashionable utility articles and items. In this approach, leather waste is converted into eco-particle boards (EPBs), which are used to make bags, clutches, wallets, and other such items. Not only does the approach generate green jobs, it also provides employment to leather artisans, craftspeople, and entrepreneurs, many of whom are women.

Sher Banu is one such entrepreneur who heads Libua Fashions in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Formed in 2023, the enterprise currently employs 15 people, 10 of whom are women. Sher Banu considers EPBs to be a means to create "wealth out of waste". She also acknowledges Solidaridad's support in the provision of machinery and training to the artisans, and in the creation of market linkages which, in her words, "are a boon for entrepreneurs". "I have been provided high-quality equipment and machines that have helped me immensely. Furthermore, the production samples we designed out of EPBs were showcased at an international leather fashion show, and this has provided us an opportunity to reach out to a bigger market," she mentions. Realizing the immense business potential of empowering more entrepreneurs (like Sher Banu) and educating leather craftspeople, the project has committed to a plan to train 500 artisans — 50 percent of them will be women — before its conclusion.



“This programme has led to a visible change in my life, economically and socially. I became very stable, financially, as I was able to increase my daily milk output (from 4 litres to 6.5 litres on an average). Socially too, I feel I am better recognized now than before. Today, I also have a role to play on behalf of other female farmers in the dairy society.”

- Karunawathi Jayasundara -

PHOTO CREDIT: SRI WIJERATNE AND NERANJANA, SUSTAINABILITY OFFICERS,
DEREC PROJECT, SRI LANKA/SOLIDARIDAD



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INCLUSIVE SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM

While women form the backbone of agriculture, the extension services are not designed with a gender lens and hence do not reach out to women.

Solidaridad is working diligently to address this issue by creating service delivery systems that take into account women's needs. Through our initiatives, we aim to break down the barriers, provide tailored assistance, and foster an inclusive agricultural sector that benefits everyone.

KARUNAWATHI JAYASUNDARA

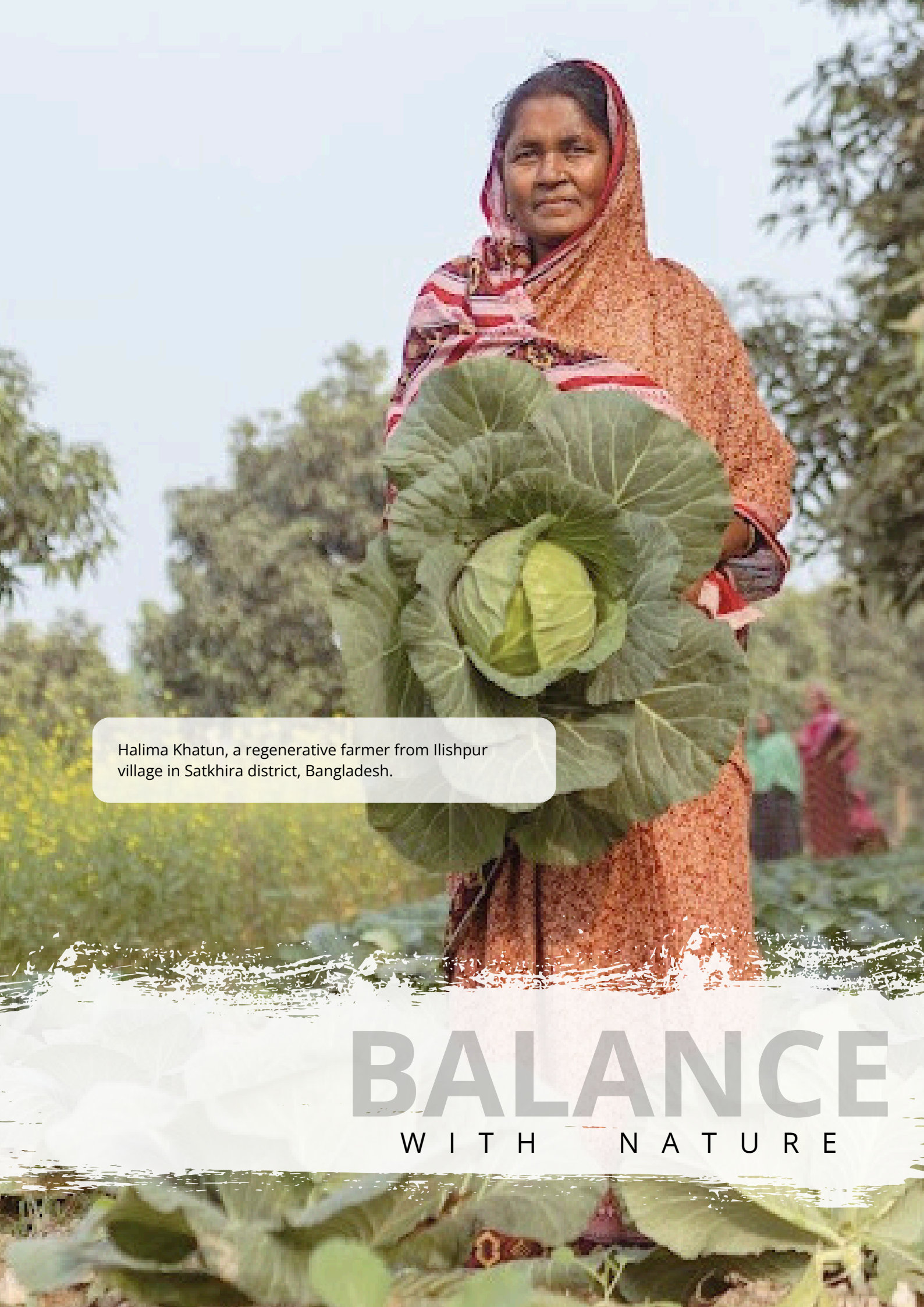
An independent farmer, community mobilizer, family breadwinner

Despite being in the business for nearly 20 years, Karunawathi Jayasundara, a dairy farmer from Sri Lanka's Uva province, never received any training in modern and good practices, relying instead on the outdated practices she had learned from her father. She also lacked knowledge on budgeting and financial management.

It is hard enough being a dairy farmer in Sri Lanka — it is a sector that faces chronic problems, such as high production costs, low farmgate prices, poor extension services, among others. For Karunawathi, the circumstances were particularly harsh, as she was the sole breadwinner in her family, taking care of the needs and education of her three children, while operating on a shoestring budget.

The 'Feminization of Formal Dairy Supply Chain for Economic Empowerment of Women Farmers' project (2022–2023) changed the fortunes of Karunawathi and more than 100 other women like her. The project supported farmers like Karunawathi by improving access to formal markets via digital technology (more specifically, a QR code system) and improved peer-to-peer business development support (through the formation of a cooperative society, Peranaguma Vurthiya Kantha Kiri Govi Samithiya, that promotes knowledge sharing, enhances bargaining power, ensures bulk purchasing, cost savings, and setting up a revolving fund for members). Solidaridad's partner, Pelwatte, provided services such as door-to-door milk collection, fair prices, easy access to cattle feed and over-the-counter medicines, and resources such as a milk chiller.

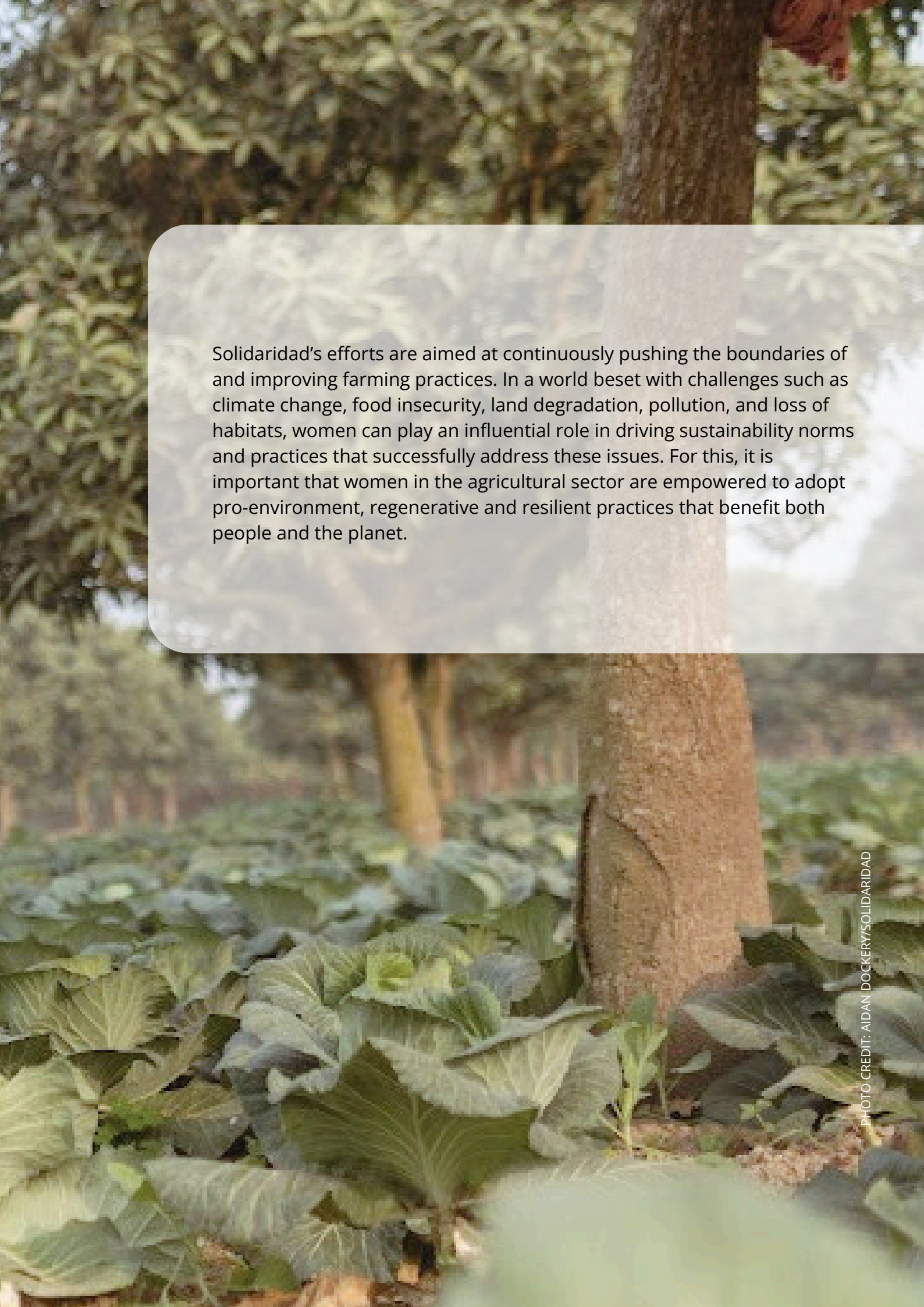
Today, Karunawathi earns 150,000–170,000 Sri Lankan rupees (LKR) (€458–€520) per month from the 30 litres of milk she sells daily to the milk collection centre (MCC) set up under the project. She single-handedly manages the expenses of her entire family, and also fulfills her role as a community-leader and -mobilizer with the cooperative where she is a treasurer. Karunawathi says she always feels proud when reflecting on her journey to becoming an independent, sustainable farmer.

A woman wearing a brown shawl and a red headscarf stands in a field, holding a large green vegetable. The background shows trees and a clear sky. The image is used as a background for a text overlay.

Halima Khatun, a regenerative farmer from Ilishpur village in Satkhira district, Bangladesh.

BALANCE

WITH NATURE



Solidaridad's efforts are aimed at continuously pushing the boundaries of and improving farming practices. In a world beset with challenges such as climate change, food insecurity, land degradation, pollution, and loss of habitats, women can play an influential role in driving sustainability norms and practices that successfully address these issues. For this, it is important that women in the agricultural sector are empowered to adopt pro-environment, regenerative and resilient practices that benefit both people and the planet.

“Knowledge of regenerative agriculture was a boon to farmers like me. In particular, training on aspects of integrated pest management (IPM) such as pheromone traps and sticky traps helped us protect our orchards and allowed it to thrive.”

- Chaina Katun -



PHOTO CREDIT: MD. FARUK HOSSAIN RAZ/SOLIDARIDAD



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CERTIFICATION

In my experience, the introduction of various certifications and standards has, to a large degree, expedited the process of adoption of good practices among farmers.

What I have also observed is that women benefit much from the implementation of such standards, especially as they are able to enjoy better access to markets and better prices for their high-quality produce. In its pursuit of ensuring the betterment of farmers and improving the soil quality, regenerative agriculture was introduced with the 'regenagri' certification scheme in Asia. Regenagri supports farms transitioning to holistic farming, increasing soil health, encouraging biodiversity, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and sequestering carbon dioxide.

CHAINA KHATUN


A regenerative farmer with a difference

Chaina Khatun's association with Solidaridad dates back to 2016, when she was going through a period of personal turmoil. The strong-willed farmer from Satkhira district, Bangladesh, however, overcame the crisis — and in 2022, she became one of the 500 mango farmers to be regenagri-certified.¹³ "Knowledge of regenerative agriculture was a boon to farmers like me. In particular, training on aspects of integrated pest management (IPM) such as pheromone traps and sticky traps helped us protect our orchards and allow it to thrive," China recalls. "As a result, the mangoes we produce are not only of a high quality, they are also sold in markets abroad."

What sets Chaina apart from her peers is her vision for the future. Today, she practises multicropping with commodities such as fodder grass, turmeric and ginger. She has also ventured into livestock- and poultry-rearing. Furthermore, she also runs an agri-input shop where she provides farmers fertilizers according to recommendation charts provided by the government, besides instructing the farmers on regenerative agricultural practices.

It has been an impressive turnaround for a farmer who was introduced to the world of regenerative agriculture for the first time in 2016. "Obtaining the certification was tough, as we were tested thoroughly on our knowledge [of regenerative agriculture]," Chaina mentions. "However, in the end, it was worth it. Not only did it provide me with a solid foundation to venture into other activities, it also made me financially independent. Earlier, I used to depend solely on my husband's earnings for my livelihood. That is no longer the case. Thanks to Solidaridad's tireless efforts, I can now manage my own livelihood and jointly discuss household finances with my husband," she adds. Indeed, it is a transformation which Chaina's husband has been most happy and proud to observe, from the sidelines.





"I am thankful that my husband and I stuck to oil palm cultivation in the early days, even when the price [of FFBS] was really unstable and low (around 300 IDR/kg or €0.02/kg)."

- Hartati Rufiah -



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GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

In many ways, knowledge of good agricultural practices (GAPs) is a basic necessity for people like me who work closely with women in agriculture.

The broad range of activities that comprise GAPs not only improve soil health but can also help small-scale farmers build resilience to climate change impacts and earn sustainable livelihoods. For this, it is essential to educate and train farmers and workers on producing in balance with nature, as well as optimizing farm management techniques.

KEEPING THE FAITH

Hartati Rufiah's journey as a resilient, sustainable farmer

In her journey as a sustainable oil palm farmer, Hartati Rufiah, a 47-year-old woman from Banyuwangi, East Java, who moved to Berau District, East Kalimantan, with her husband and two children in 2015, has come a long way.

"I am thankful that my husband and I stuck to oil palm cultivation in the early days, even when the price [of FFBS] was really unstable and low (around 300 IDR/kg or €0.02/kg)," Hartati tells us. "Despite our fellow farmers insisting on giving up the practice, we invested in learning eco-friendly oil palm cultivation practices [via Solidaridad]. The price I am receiving now (1,200 IDR/kg or €0.07/kg) has enabled me to not only bear the expenses of my son's education, but also set a portion aside for daily expenses on food and other necessities."

Today, Hartati's daily routine begins early in the morning when she heads out to her 2-hectare oil palm plantation, a legacy from her husband. Fortunately, this inheritance has been a lifeline for her family, providing funds for her son's education and daily living expenses. After participating in mentoring and training sessions of Solidaridad, she is able to manage her plantation, producing 2-3 tons of fresh fruit bunches (FFBs) every 15 days. With steadfast dedication, Hartati still attends training sessions on sustainable and environment-friendly oil palm cultivation.

Even during the early years, she worked tirelessly to assist her husband in selling vegetables from their village to faraway markets — a journey of approximately 40 kilometres, often along muddy roads. “My parents used to leave home at 1 AM every day to set up shop at the market,” says Hartati’s son. In addition to these challenges, she also had to cope with a spinal injury sustained in a fall.

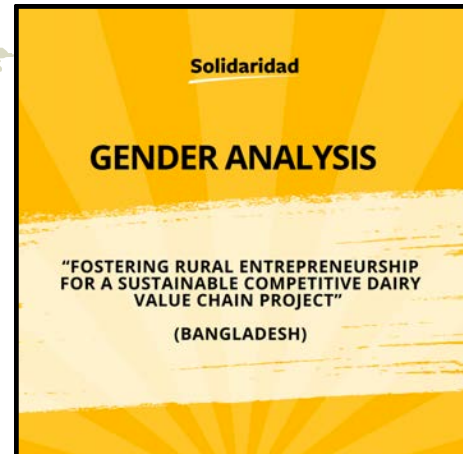
However, her resilience was truly tested after her husband passed away a few years ago. Despite her grief, she remained unwavering in her efforts to independently finance her son's studies in Egypt, without the aid of a government scholarship. This is an extraordinary feat for a small-scale farmer, especially considering the expense of overseas education. “She is truly one of the strongest women I know,” states her son, who has now graduated and returned home to support his mother.



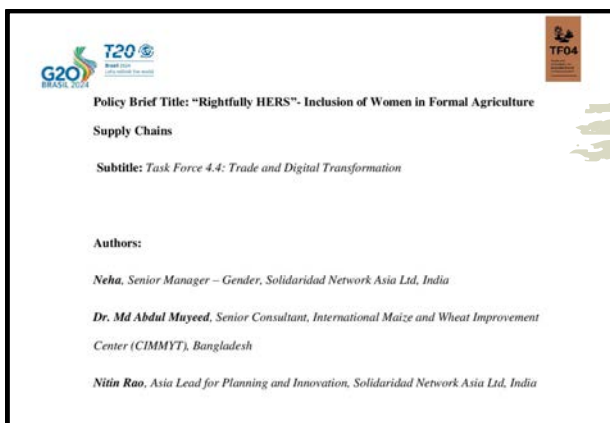
KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS

Gender Analysis for the “Fostering Rural Entrepreneurship for a Sustainable Competitive Dairy Value Chain Project” (Bangladesh)

The “Fostering Rural Entrepreneurship for a Sustainable Competitive Dairy Value Chain Project,” implemented by Solidaridad Asia, undertook a comprehensive gender analysis in 2023, focusing on 3,050 dairy farmers in Dumuria *upazila*, Khulna district, Bangladesh. This study delved into the intricate dynamics of gender roles within the dairy value chain, examining opportunities, constraints, and the socio-economic empowerment of women engaged in the sector.



To achieve the objectives of the study, a gender-analysis framework was adopted which integrated multiple dimensions and underscored the need for holistic interventions to bridge gender gaps in asset ownership, financial control, and technology adoption. Initiatives promoting financial literacy, leadership development, and entrepreneurship can drive transformative change in women's empowerment within the dairy sector. However, while women actively contributed to dairy farming, disparities persisted in asset ownership, financial control, and awareness of climate-smart technologies.



“Rightfully HERS”- Inclusion of Women in Formal Agriculture Supply Chains

Our policy brief for T20 Brazil, 2024, titled “Rightfully HERS” - Inclusion of women in formal agriculture supply chains, calls upon the G20 to promote gender inclusivity in agricultural supply chains by taking policy steps that will provide an enabling environment to ensure the inclusion of women in the larger, formal economy.

Our key recommendations include:

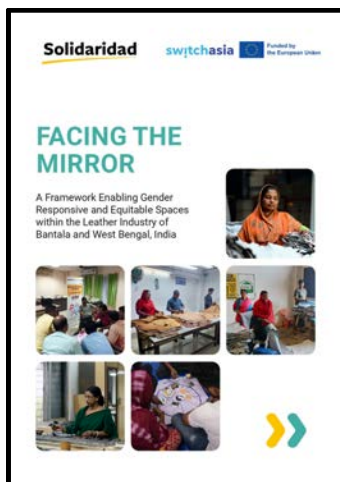
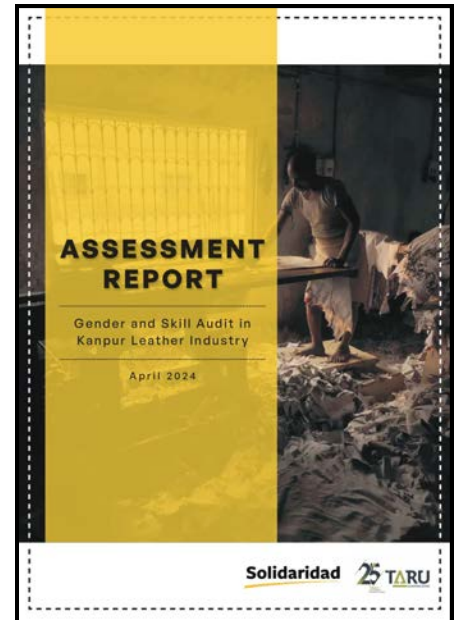
1. Redefining who a farmer is
2. Setting up a quota for women in public and private procurement systems, creating a G20 fund for the inclusion of women in market systems
3. Amending the CSR Section of the Companies Act of G20 member countries to include women members
4. Establishing a ‘Research and Learning Center for Agriculture Products and Services for Women Farmers’, which will work with an objective to innovate, design and develop agriculture and allied products, services, tools, machinery specifically for women farmers

Gender Skill Audit for Women Artisans in Kanpur Leather Cluster

A comprehensive **Gender Skill Audit** was undertaken by Solidaridad in the leather cluster of Kanpur. The Assessment Report, published in April 2024, is a seminal piece of research that extensively covers the needs and analyses of women artisans who have been supported by our project ever since the Kanpur Leather Cluster established its footprint.

The scope of the study seeks to understand the challenges women face in upskilling, and showcase tangible solutions that can aid their progress in moving up the value chain.

Moreover, the study unpacks various models of initiatives aimed at collectivization, and gives a strategic direction for implementation. It provides insights that can guide us in designing future interventions promoting sustainability and gender inclusivity in the leather sector.

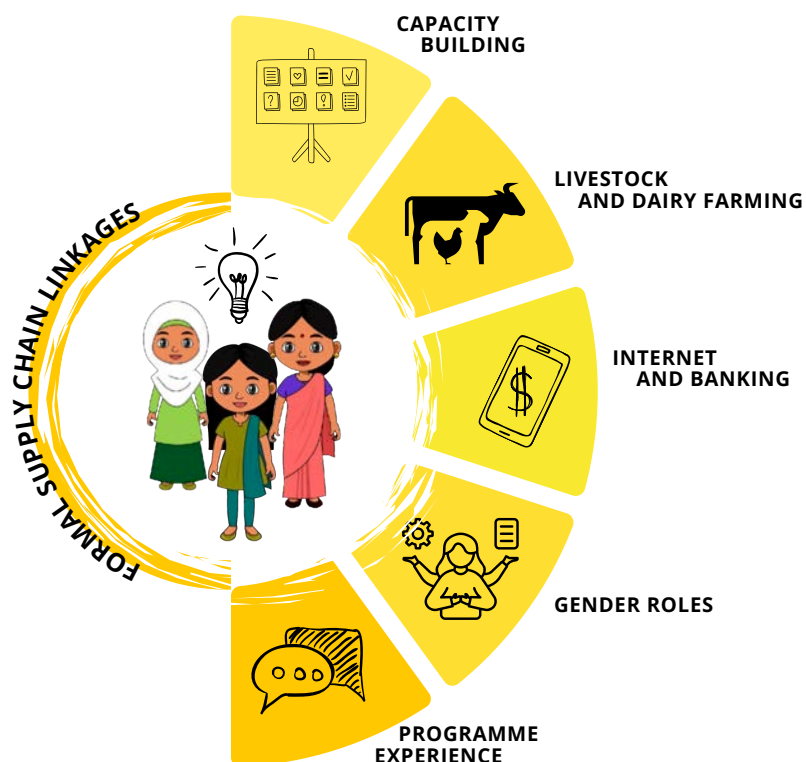


Facing the Mirror: A Framework Enabling Gender Responsive and Equitable Spaces within the Leather Industry of Bantala and West Bengal, India

Facing the Mirror: A Framework Enabling Gender Responsive and Equitable Spaces within the Leather Industry of Bantala and West Bengal, India is an attempt to develop a structure that will guide and help the leather sector management to develop and apply gender perspectives in their work — and, more specifically, to mainstream gender by reflecting on their policies and work practices. The Framework can also be useful for other sectors and private-sector partners to rethink their policies and apply its recommendations.

The Framework advocates for the implementation of the following principles to overcome challenges: Gender Equity, Inclusion, Participation, Safety, Openness to Learn-Review-Response and Change, Collaboration, Social Wellbeing, Courage. For the adoption of these principles and to ensure a gender-inclusive workplace, the report suggests interventions of three types: Individual Intervention, Mindset-Change Intervention, and Systematic Intervention.

Impact Report on “Inclusion through Integration - Women in Formal Dairy Supply Chain” Project



This study was conducted in 2023, as part of an endline evaluation of interventions implemented through Solidaridad Regional Expertise Centre India’s “**Inclusion through Integration**” Project in the contiguous districts of Kanpur, Kanpur Dehat, Auraiya, Fatehpur and Unnao in Uttar Pradesh. The interventions were targeted at women dairy farmers in the region, and aimed to integrate small and marginal women dairy farmers to formal dairy supply chains, through linkages with village-level collection centres (VLCCs) and dairies. It also spread digital and financial awareness among women farmers and assisted them in making use of digital technology for their livelihood and personal finances.

SDGs MAPPING OF GENDER INCLUSIVITY

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





OIL PALM PLANTATION AND BUKIT KUJAU, WEST KALIMANTAN
PHOTO CREDIT: YOHANES KOKO/SOLIDARIDAD

THE ROAD AHEAD

In the coming years, our focus will be on significantly scaling up and strengthening efforts to build the agency of women, particularly through innovative supply chain models. By integrating gender-inclusive practices at every stage of the supply chain, we aim to create more opportunities for women to participate actively and benefit equitably. This includes (but is not limited to) providing targeted training programmes, fostering leadership roles for women, ensuring fair wages and working conditions, promoting entrepreneurship and advocating for inclusive supply chains within the public and private sectors.

Our goal is to build a robust framework that not only supports women's economic empowerment but also enhances the overall efficiency and sustainability of our supply chains. Through these concerted efforts, we aspire to drive systemic change that uplifts women and strengthens communities in Asia. We plan to implement the following interventions:

1. **'Mainstreaming'** the figure of the woman in agriculture (be they smallholders or small-scale ones) through the consistent execution of the 'feminization of supply chain' concept
2. **Creating** funds for mainstreaming women in supply chains
3. **Promoting** enterprises (led by women, or exclusive to them) in the entire supply chain
4. **Advocating** for change in company policies — for instance, in procurement, sustainability and CSR matters
5. **Influencing** government policies in order to incentivize companies to adopt gender-inclusive strategies
6. **Identifying** and defining the role of women in climate adaptation

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REGENERATIVE COTTON FARMER IN MAHARASHTRA,
PHOTO CREDIT: SARPAJ DIXAN, VAGPUR DISTRICT
COORDINATOR/SOLIDARIDAD



AUNTY GEYONG, A NURSE-TURN-OIL PALM SMALLHOLDER FROM
MALAYSIA. PHOTO CREDIT: LAW CHU CHIEN/SOLIDARIDAD



WOMEN AT WORK IN OIL PALM NURSERIES IN ELURU,
ANDHRA PRADESH. PHOTO CREDIT: SAPTAK
CHOUDHURY/SOLIDARIDAD



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ABOUT SOLIDARIDAD ASIA

Solidaridad Asia provides scalable and economically effective sustainability solutions in agriculture, mining, and leather and textiles sectors in collaboration with governments, businesses and the community. We enable farmers and workers to earn a decent income, shape their own future, and produce in balance with nature by working throughout the whole supply chain to make sustainability the norm.

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