KEY RESULTS AND PROGRAMMES

CLAIMING ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Where women flourish, so does the broader economy, yet too many women are still paid less for the same job, work under unsafe conditions, or are unable to access assets such as land and property. Closing the gaps is essential and urgent. UN Women backs economic empowerment to help women claim their rights, and make choices about where and how to live. From the smallest villages to the busiest cities, from agriculture to high-tech industries, women are taking their rightful roles, whether as entrepreneurs or labour organizers, factory workers or cultivators of crops that feed the world. The time is now.

MAKING A BETTER LIVELIHOOD

Olga Macz can remember the days when she had almost no income. Living in Alta Verapaz, the poorest region of Guatemala, every day was a struggle for survival for her and her four-year-old daughter.

Now she has a thriving business producing shampoo from local plants. She is comfortable with the language of marketing, speaking about her brand and how she has diversified her production from one type of shampoo to five. She sells her products in Guatemala City, the capital, and has been to Mexico to learn from other women entrepreneurs. Her voice bubbles with enthusiasm as she talks about plans to further invest what she has earned.

Macz’s move towards empowerment, overcoming entrenched poverty and marginalization, started with training and support from a UN joint programme for rural women. She and nearly 1,600 other women in Guatemala have learned to develop small businesses based on traditional practices—such as shampoo making—but applying modern production, packaging and marketing tools. The shampoo, once sold in reused cola bottles, now comes in clean, neatly labelled containers. Together, Macz and other women shampoo makers successfully lobbied the local municipal government for space in weekly markets; over time, they hope to own their own store.

“For me, personally, there have been many changes,” Macz says, ticking off a list that goes far beyond more income and the motorcycle she bought with her savings. “I learned about my rights. I learned that women shouldn’t allow men to give (them) orders. My husband agrees with me now because he knows I know more than him!”

Rural women around the world face some of the toughest barriers to equality and empowerment, held back by a mixture of limited options for livelihoods and access to markets, poverty and often deeply rooted forms of gender discrimination. Progress depends on acting on all of these fronts: the mission of the joint programme. It combines the considerable expertise of UN Women, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the World Food Programme to empower rural women in seven countries: Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda.

Since the joint programme began in 2014, over 40,000 women have transformed new skills and opportunities into benefits for themselves as well as over 260,000 children and other members of their households. Across some of the poorest and most marginalized rural areas in Egypt, UN Women has helped extend a financial lifeline. More than 17,000 women now have for the first time access to community-based village savings and loan associations. The associations go far beyond offering financial services that are otherwise limited in rural areas. Participation helps build women’s confidence and ability to act in other areas of their lives, such as making household decisions and setting up small businesses. Over 1,000 associations have been created since 2014. Weekly savings have tripled in many cases, demonstrating women’s growing confidence in managing their own capital. The model has worked so well that the Central Bank of Egypt and the National Council for Women have
agreed to scale it up, and the bank has included it in a major national finan-
cial inclusion advocacy campaign.

For years, women in Korhogo, in north-
ern Côte d'Ivoire, struggled to make a
living through traditional methods of
producing shea butter. Many barely
scraped by, although the country is
the fifth largest producer of the butter,
which is widely used for cosmetics
around the world. Traditional methods
were backbreaking and often yield-
ed poor-quality products, a struggle
increasingly compounded by the loss
of shea nut trees to deforestation.

Starting in 2017, UN Women began
training women’s cooperatives on
better manufacturing practices and
helping them secure equipment
for butter that meets competitive
standards. Other support comes from
improved financing and market access,
such as through an organic certifica-
tion valued by international buyers.

REALIZING PROPERTY RIGHTS
Without equal access to assets such
as land, women’s economic empow-
erment only goes so far. Achieving
equality typically requires passing
stronger laws as well as changing
minds and behaviours to put them
into practice. In Albania, women
have an equal legal right to land and
property. But only a tiny 8 per cent ac-
tually own land. Social norms dictate
that ownership is still the province
of men, including through marriage
and inheritance. Compounding these
discriminatory patterns is the fact
that women are often unaware of
their rights, or if they are aware, the
process of claiming them has been
complex and expensive.

Towards easing these multiple
burdens, UN Women advocated
regulatory changes that are simplify-
ing property registration procedures,
encouraging registration in the names
of both spouses, and ensuring women
know how they can gain equal access
to property, including agricultural
land. Information campaigns have
been coupled with training for 282
officials responsible for implement-
ing the new provisions. To concretely
demonstrate how women can pursue
their rights, and shift assumptions
about what’s possible, free legal aid
has assisted 150 women and girls in
property-related cases.

In Timor-Leste, UN Women joined
the civil society organization Land
Network and other women’s organi-
zations on a multi-year campaign for
women’s land rights. This finally paid
off in 2017 with parliamentary approv-
al of the Land and Expropriation Law.
It recognizes women’s equal rights
in land ownership, and prohibits any
discrimination in owning, acquiring
or managing land.

GAINING LABOUR
PROTECTIONS
In 2017 in Brazil, a longstanding push
for justice by the National Federation
of Domestic Workers, supported by
UN Women, culminated in the ratifi ca-
tion of ILO Convention 189 on Domest-
cic Workers. The process built on ongoing
exchanges of experiences and best
practices with countries across Latin
America and the Caribbean, and was
propelled by the leadership and com-
mittance of domestic workers, mostly
women and 7 million strong. For the
first time in Brazil’s history, they have a
legal guarantee of a full range of their
labour rights.

T "WE BELIEVE IN TRADE, NOT AID.”

SUNITA KASHYAP
Sunita Kashyap is the secretary and founder of Mahila
Umang Producers Company, (Umang), an organization
run by women farmers and producers in the Indian state
of Uttarakhand. In 2017, Kashyap participated in the
National Consultation held in New Delhi, India, organized
by UN Women, the National Commission for Women and
MAKAAM (Forum for the Rights of Women Farmers).

“Twenty years ago, during the founding of Umang, I was a high-school graduate
and a home-maker. Even though I was actively involved in farming with my
husband, I wasn’t seen as a “farmer”; my contribution was not considered on
equal terms. Things changed when Umang became a part of my life. I completed
a Bachelors and then a Master’s degree. I learned to manage the accounts and
oversee customer relations.

We believe in building a sustainable life and ensuring consistent income for rural
women. Umang provides us with opportunities to become entrepreneurs. The
fact that women are making and selling their produce, auditing the self-help
groups and keeping the books and accounts, makes this a sustainable model.

Today, Umang has 3,000 women who are involved in sustainable farming,
producing and selling their own goods. We are all shareholders in the company
and we use the money we earn for micro-credit, as a bank would. We managed
a turnover of around INR 4 crore (over USD 600,000) this year!

However, with the recent modifications in the tax system in India, we are
incurring huge losses. We have to pay tax before the product is sold, irrespective
of its sale. I am here at this conference to articulate the problems that we face.
At Umang, we believe in trade, not aid.”

Afaf Taha and more than 70,000 other women in some of Egypt’s poorest rural areas,
supported by UN Women, take part in village savings and loan associations that build
capital—and confidence to plan their finances.