



# South-South Series: Empowering and Growing Women-led Business

Session 7: Women pioneering in  
the blue and green economies

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Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
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INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE  
**WOMAN FARMER**

2026

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**Women pioneering  
in the blue and  
green economies**

The work of FAO

# Women at the heart of blue and green economies

- Women are **key actors** across blue and green agrifood systems – as farmers, fishers, processors, traders, forest-product collectors, and entrepreneurs.
- In 2019, women made up **38%** of agricultural workers across crops, livestock, fisheries, and forestry. In fisheries and aquaculture, they represent about **50%** of the pre- and post-harvest workforce, and around **23%** in forestry and tree-based value chains, mainly in collection, processing, and trade.
- Women are **overrepresented in local, informal, or lower-value chains**, where market roles often mirror domestic responsibilities. Even in high-value, male-dominated chains, their contributions may be hidden, unpaid, or undervalued, with limited control over income.



# FAO priorities to empower women entrepreneurs in blue and green economies

- **Strengthen access to productive resources and services** by ensuring women have equitable access to land, water, finance, inputs, technology, and gender-responsive extension services, including digital tools for blue and green economy sectors
- **Build capacity and skills** through technical, entrepreneurial, and leadership training across value chains, including business management, climate-smart practices, financial literacy, and organizational skills
- **Enable supportive policies and institutions** by designing and implementing gender-responsive policies, investment strategies, and legal frameworks informed by sex-disaggregated data to allow women-led innovations to scale and thrive
- **Foster networks of public and private actors and knowledge exchange**, linking women entrepreneurs with peers, mentors, and markets to share best practices and strengthen innovations in blue and green economies

# FAO-IAFN Accelerator Mentorship Programme for Women-led SMEs in Africa

- In 2022, FAO and the International Agri-Food Network (IAFN) joined forces to launch a **pilot Accelerator Mentorship Programme**.
- **Provides one-on-one mentorship** with leading women entrepreneurs and experts from around the globe
- **Offers capacity development and tailored training**, including mandatory and optional courses, access to knowledge products, and practical tools
- **Facilitates workshops and interaction with global leaders**, promoting peer learning, networking, and guidance on accessing finance and developing business plans
- **Strengthens women's leadership, innovation, and impact** in sustainable agriculture, food systems, and local communities
- **Results:** over **150** women entrepreneurs supported since inception, reaching more than **750,000** people through job creation, value addition, and sustainable agrifood innovations



# Sal Leaves to Scale: Women-Led Eco-Enterprises in Dangisharan, Nepal

- The **Rajakot Multi-purpose Cooperative**, with FFF, FAO Nepal and FECOFUN, supported Indigenous, Dalit, women and youth entrepreneurs in producing Sal-leaf plates, bamboo crafts and woven products.
- The initiative combined skills development, women-tailored machinery, market linkages, business networking, eco-awareness and agroforestry restoration to expand climate-resilient green enterprises.

## Results

- There was a significant increase in production across all product lines (Sal-leaf plates **+225%**, bamboo products **+167%**, Dhakiya weaving **+233%**).
- **60+** women now in enterprise leadership roles.
- Women's representation in governance increased to **57%**.
- Women's income increased more than fourfold.
- Women's role in household financial decisions rose to **75%**.
- **1,800+** Sal trees planted and **10.46** ha restored.



# Fish waste to fashion project in cabo verde

- The "**Fish Waste to Fashion**" project in São Vicente, Cabo Verde, is an innovative FAO-led initiative that tackles environmental, social, and economic challenges through bioeconomy innovation.
- The project prioritizes women's economic inclusion, training them in production and market linkages to strengthen their role in the textile supply chain.

## Results:

- Converts 37,900 tonnes of discarded fish skins annually into sustainable, biodegradable leather—**reducing waste, deforestation, toxic chemicals, and greenhouse gas emissions.**
- Creates **skills development and income-generating opportunities** in fish leather processing, strengthening women's economic autonomy and community resilience.
- Links environmental sustainability with gender equality, offering a replicable **bioeconomy model** for inclusive and greener coastal economies.



# International Year of the Woman Farmer 2026: a global accelerator for change

- The United Nations declared 2026 the International Year of the Woman Farmer (IYWF 2026) to spotlight women's essential but often unrecognized contributions across agrifood systems, from production to trade.
- IYWF 2026 offers the **opportunity to raise awareness, mobilize action**, and close gender gaps, improving women's livelihoods and opportunities worldwide.
- The Year provides a strategic platform to **scale up proven approaches, strengthen partnerships, and amplify women-led innovations** that drive inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agrifood systems.

## How to join the Year:

- Share your stories and successes
- Participate in local and global events
- Connect with networks and promote women-led innovations
- Download posters, banners, and digital assets from the IYWF Digital Media Hub (see [Visual Identity Guidelines](#))
- Share free #YearOfTheWomanFarmer materials via the [Trello Board](#)
- Consult the [Communication Handbook](#) to guide your engagement and outreach



Thank you!

Contact us

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# Thank you

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