



WOMEN AND THE WORLD OF WORK INNOVATION GRANTS INITIATIVE

2025 Year in Review



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Economic Empowerment Section

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Photo: UN Women Pakistan



INTRODUCTION

UN Women's Economic Empowerment section launched the **Women and the World of Work (WOW) Innovation Grants Initiative** in 2024, designed to provide UN Women country and regional offices with seed funding of up to USD 25,000 to pilot creative and innovative projects that promote transformative ideas and strengthen partnerships, which progress women's opportunities in the world of work and beyond. This initiative advances the implementation of UN Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy and the UN Women Strategic Plan by promoting decent work and entrepreneurship for women, including in the intersection of climate and environmental resilience and the care economy.

In its inaugural round, 67 proposals were submitted from 44 regional and country offices, of which 14 were selected and 9 had successfully implemented their projects by the end of 2025.¹ The 2025 grant proposals were reviewed and selected by a cross-thematic team from the Economic Empowerment section based on the following criteria:

1. Creativity and innovation
2. Alignment with UN Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy
3. Potential impact
4. Feasibility
5. Value for money

This report presents impact stories from the nine projects implemented in 2025, offering an overview of their innovations, partnerships and results, to inspire

continued progress. Across diverse contexts, the Innovation Grants Initiative created enabling conditions for **women's decent work, entrepreneurship and increased employment**, providing skills, resources and access to technology to not only boost productivity and enhance economic participation, but also to contribute to women's agency, autonomy and well-being.

The initiative further enhanced women's knowledge and practices in **climate-resilient agriculture** and supported efforts to transform care systems and **reduce women's unpaid care, domestic and communal work**, including in the context of climate change.

Notably, the Innovation Grants used multidisciplinary approaches through the fusion of technology, art and activism, contributing to improved women's livelihoods and greater participation in the world of work.





ARGENTINA

INDIGENOUS WOMEN
IN THE GRAN CHACO REGION
LEADING AGROFORESTRY
PRODUCTION



ARGENTINA

Indigenous Women of the Gran Chaco Region Leading Agroforestry Production

Background

The Gran Chaco is the largest continuous tropical dry forest in the world, spanning Argentina, Bolivia, southern Brazil and Paraguay. As in other regions, the Argentine Gran Chaco is experiencing increasingly severe environmental crises largely due to land use change, deforestation and a changing climate.

Between 2007 and 2022, the region lost 3.7 million hectares of native forests.² These pressures, combined with more frequent droughts, wildfires and floods, disproportionately affect Indigenous and rural communities, with Indigenous women bearing the brunt of the damage.³

Despite these climate and environmental shocks, Indigenous women sustain the local economy and build resilience, primarily through artisanal handicraft production, community leadership and innovation. However, persistent gender inequalities and unequal access to productive land and markets limit their full participation in value chains.

UN Women Argentina established a partnership with the N'tetaxan-axaqui ("Weaving") Civil Association, a collective of Qom women leading craft production and community projects, to enhance women's capacities to advance agroforestry production and food security in Miraflores, Chaco.

Activities

Together, the N'tetaxanaxaqui Civil Association and UN Women supported Qom women's leadership to advance agroforestry practices.



Photo: Fundación Gran Chaco

Between July and November 2025, more than 20 women were trained, combining Indigenous knowledge of forest ecosystems with new technical, digital and commercial strategies.

Strengthening their digital capacities, the women produced a short documentary, *Voces del Monte*, recounting their collective experiences and cultural worldview.



In parallel, agroforestry modules, including integrated land use systems combining trees with crops or livestock, contributed to diversifying production, creating income streams through both crop and native tree cultivation to enhance soil health, thus improving the community's environmental and economic outcomes.

These efforts were complemented by the development of a local commercialization strategy, which actively engaged the community in selling their harvests as well as processed foods in local shops, community fairs and cultural events.

The project also facilitated mentorship and peer-learning exchanges with women's groups across the Gran Chaco, which have boosted women's confidence and administrative and technical capacities.

Impact

The impacts of this project have led to significant change. While just over 20 direct participants were targeted, many other women and households in Miraflores benefited from transformative results. For example, the N'tetaxanaxaqui Association independently submitted a formal request to the local municipality to improve water access, including the maintenance of community reservoirs, an initiative that reflects their strengthened organizational capacity. The Association also strengthened its internal organization, administration, communication and production over a very short period, in turn increasing women's productivity and surplus sales.



Photo: N'tetaxanaxaqui Association



Photo: N'tetaxanaxaqui Association

UN Women seeks to continue meaningful collaboration with the N'tetaxanaxaqui Association by supporting more women in Miraflora and its environs to better manage production cycles through seasonal crop rotation, pest control and irrigation, among other techniques, as well as by documenting results to guide scaling and knowledge transfer. In this way, UN Women Argentina aims to support women and their families to collectively cultivate adaptive, agroecological solutions.

This project wove innovation into ancestral practices, complementing Qom women's crafts with agroforestry as a pathway for income generation and sustainable food production and resource management. Rooted in Qom ancestral knowledge and collective organization, project activities strengthened women's economic outcomes and enhanced their visibility as community leaders.

“We are very happy – people from outside are starting to see what we do.”

Indigenous woman from the N'tetaxanaxaqui Civil Association, October 2025



CHILE

STRENGTHENING STEM EDUCATION
AND DECENT EMPLOYMENT
FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS
IN MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES



CHILE

Strengthening STEM Education and Decent Employment for Women and Girls in Marginalized Communities

Background

The fields of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) are critical for innovation and productivity, yet women account for only 35 per cent of all STEM graduates globally. In Chile in 2019,⁴ women represented only 22 per cent of STEM enrolments and just 7 per cent of graduates—the lowest rate among OECD countries.⁵ A study by UN Women Chile shows that 81 per cent of tech companies report having less than 40 per cent women in their teams, highlighting severe underrepresentation that limits women's access to high-growth sectors and reinforces gender biases in innovation and entrepreneurship.⁶

UN Women Chile partnered with the European Southern Observatory (ESO) to implement a project to promote women's participation in astronomy and engineering by strengthening STEM education and decent employment opportunities. Pilot project activities supported young women and girls from vulnerable and rural communities in Antofagasta, a city in Northern Chile.

Activities

The initiative covered three key areas to maximize results. The first component provided **employment skills and mentorship**, offering training to 25 women graduates from technical and vocational institutions

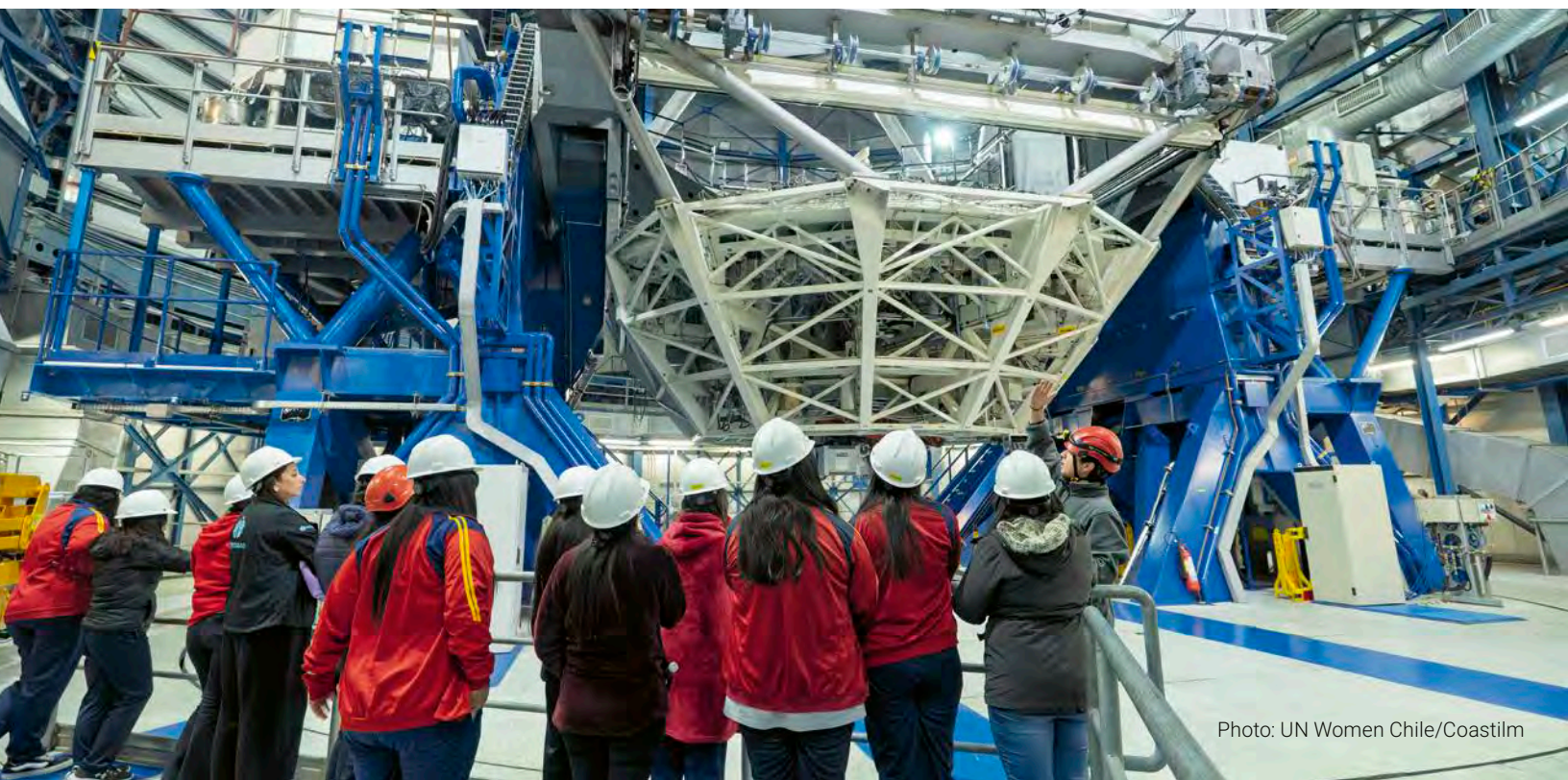




Photo: UN Women Chile/Coastilm

and facilitating peer networks with professionals in scientific observatories and the mining and energy sectors. Job placement and monitoring of career development were also included.

The second component centred on empowering **young women and girls** through **STEM awareness and leadership development**. Motivational STEM workshops and leadership sessions were conducted in five schools, with accomplished women speakers from science and engineering disciplines and reaching 150 participants. Additional workshops engaged parents and community leaders to foster supportive, gender-responsive environments.

The third component involved strengthening capacities within schools by training both **teachers** and **educational communities** on topics related to gender bias, inclusion and pathways in STEM. The activities led to a STEM gender-awareness toolkit, which has been successfully disseminated in schools and by civil society organizations in communities.

Impact

The outcomes of this project have **advanced gender-responsive STEM ecosystems** and strengthening the capacity of civil society to **establish gender-focused STEM school clubs**. This initiative led to the creation of a network comprising over **274 girls participating in STEM education** and leadership development activities. UN Women also conducted two targeted webinars designed to train both mentors and mentees, thereby deepening their understanding of **gender-responsive mentoring** practices and providing practical tools for effective engagement.

The project has also helped **strengthen STEM pathways for young women**, leading to 15 participants enrolling in technical disciplines traditionally dominated by men and taking part in a structured mentoring programme. Engagement of four women scientists from the European Southern Observatory (ESO) as mentors and role models in STEM disciplines enhanced participants' career direction and boosted their confidence.

UN Women trained over 40 educators from the rural locality of Sierra Gorda on gender equality in STEM and digital violence, helping create more inclusive and informed learning environments. Additionally, more than 12 teachers helped develop STEM clubs.

The project's growing public presence is challenging gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms regarding women in STEM. Information about the initiative has been widely shared through local and national media—including prominent radio shows and popular social media channels—raising awareness and visibility throughout Chile and across the region.



“For me leadership is about a group of people **sharing ideas**, thoughts, and solutions, being united in harmony, and respecting one another”



Marlén Vera

Escuela Carlos Condell
Tocopilla



CHINA

WOMEN CARE WORKERS
ART FESTIVAL AND
MULTIMEDIA CAMPAIGN



CHINA

Women Care Workers Art Festival and Multimedia Campaign

Background

Demographic shifts in China have increased the demand for care. At the same time, smaller families have a reduced capacity to provide and care for their members. The paid care sector largely relies on migrant women from rural areas. In 2024, 37.6 per cent of China's some 300 million migrant workers were women, who typically move from rural and less developed regions to urban centres.⁷ In 2022, the domestic services industry employed more than 30 million workers, most of whom were women.⁸

Though rural women migrate to cities for paid care work, these jobs remain low status and are poorly protected. Moreover, the value of care work remains unrecognized by the public, and care-related policies

are fragmented across different sectors. Women continue to shoulder most unpaid care and domestic work, spending an average of 3 hours and 29 minutes per day on unpaid work, 1.9 times more than men.⁹ Many migrant women juggle unpaid care and paid work responsibilities and experience career interruptions or leave the workforce, limiting their economic, social and leadership opportunities.

Activities

UN Women China organized a series of activities blending art and activism to challenge the unequal social norms surrounding women's care responsibilities and highlight the agency of caregivers, including migrant women and domestic workers, together with local partners, the Beijing Hongyan Social Work Service Centre and Inno Community Development Organization.



Invisible Care Workers Exhibition
Photos: UN Women China/Yuxing Peng





- **#SeeInvisibleCareWorkers Campaign.**

A highly successful Domestic Workers Stand-up Comedy performance was organized to engage the public with humour to socialize care work and amplify migrant women's voices. An exhibition and cross-sector dialogue titled, "See Invisible Care Workers", were hosted in Beijing. Using visual storytelling, the exhibition invited the public to reflect on sustainable care systems. Some elements of the exhibition expanded to Guangzhou and Shenzhen and will continue to travel to other cities to broaden public awareness.

- **#DomesticWorkHasValue Campaign.**

The project also implemented activities in migrant communities in Guangzhou. Stand-up comedy and original songwriting workshops have allowed migrant women to express their care experiences through art, inspiring public dialogue on shared care responsibilities. Moreover, a digital campaign across the main Chinese social media platforms raised awareness about the value of care to the economy and society.



"Domestic Work Has Value" campaign video cover page.
Photo: Inno Community Development Organization

**"In that moment, I realized that our voices
and expressions truly have the power
to inspire others to speak up too."**

**A migrant woman participant in the "Domestic Work Has Value"
stand-up comedy show**



Impact

More than **90 migrant women and care workers** directly benefited from participating in the public events and community activities, increasing their visibility and voice. **Two original songs** were written and produced. The stand-up comedy shows and exhibitions drew more than **2,200 visitors** and the media coverage and digital campaigns reached **800,000 viewers**. This contributed to shaping local care narratives in alignment with the 5R Framework for Decent Care Work and spotlighted women, especially migrant women, as paid care workers and unpaid caregivers.

Through collaboration with civil society organizations and by convening the media, academia, practitioners and the private sector, UN Women was able to strengthen alliances for gender-responsive care systems and private sector blended financing.

Finally, the project was able to capture key messages from cross-sector dialogue, amplified by national stakeholders, and it produced thought pieces that communicated grass-roots experiences to national and regional actors.



On the evening of 23 August, 2025, at Tiaohai Bar in Sanyuanqiao, Beijing, a stand-up comedy show by a group of domestic workers was warmly received by the audience. Photo: Oriental Outlook

“What this stand-up show brought me was a lasting, step-by-step transformation. It was never just about getting on stage to tell a few jokes. After a month of preparation, we learned how to turn our hidden frustrations and reflections about housework into stories that carry power—stories that make people laugh and sometimes cry.”

A migrant woman who participated in the “Domestic Work Has Value” stand-up comedy



INDIA

WOMEN ARTISANS
OF CHANGE



INDIA

Women Artisans of Change

Background

Handicrafts have long served as an important alternative source of employment in rural India, especially for women, and are the second-largest employment sector for women after agriculture. Among these crafts, textiles and hand block printing have stood out as enduring ancestral practices, with roots dating back to the 12th century.



Photo: UN Women India

However, despite its cultural significance, hand block printing faces significant challenges in the modern era. Mass manufacturing techniques such as digital and screen-printing, due to their speed and lower cost, have rendered traditional methods less competitive. This has led many artisans, in pursuit of profit and efficiency, to abandon natural dyes and ancestral techniques in favour of cheaper, quicker alternatives. This transition has greatly intensified environmental degradation, contributing to chemical contamination, water pollution, and heightened health risks for both artisans and their communities.

To address these challenges, UN Women India, in partnership with the National Institute of Fashion Technology and the Development Commissioner (Handlooms) of the Ministry of Textiles, supported the initiative, Women Artisans of Change (WeACe), which involved capacity development for hand block printers on innovative water management systems and affordable and sustainable techniques for water recycling processes.

Activities

The project focused on strengthening the sustainability of block printing communities through the training of hand block printers on existing innovative water management systems, and disseminating recommendations for new ways in which water recycling processes can be more affordable and sustainable.



Moreover, through collaboration with a leading design school, young fashion design students are currently undergoing a Fellowship to research and develop the culturally appropriate revitalization of block prints and new product designs, working with distinct motif directories and applying ecofriendly techniques. The students will apply their training to mentor local women artisans, and codevelop sustainable production methods, new design concepts and entrepreneurial skills.

With a focus on strengthening market access, the products created through the project will be displayed at planned fashion shows or in collaboration with established fashion weeks. Through leveraging UN Women's network, artisans will connect with international buyers and have access to major digital commerce platforms and government-supported marketplaces to promote and sell their own products.

Impact

At Bharat Tex, India's largest textile event, the project spotlighted the role of women artisans through an industry-government seminar, successfully positioning gender as a priority within the textile ecosystem.

This was followed by a hands-on capacity development workshop, where 10 women artisans from multiple block-printing communities, many of whom were meeting collectively for the first time, received training on innovative clean water and recycling technologies.

The workshop enabled women to jointly explore sustainable solutions essential for safeguarding their craft, livelihoods and communities.

Overall, the project strengthened institutional support through a strategic partnership with the Ministry of Textiles, signing an MoU with the Development Commissioner (Handlooms) to collaborate on skills

development, enterprise growth and on leadership opportunities for women weavers and artisans.

In parallel, the Design & Product Development Fellowship, in partnership with the National Institute for Fashion and Technology, launched its second cohort to engage 12 young women fashion, textile and product designers in innovation and product development. These designers work directly with local artisans in their villages to exchange knowledge on techniques and co-develop new, market-ready product ideas.

In partnership with the Ministry of Textiles, the project is scaling up to deliver leadership workshops for women, supported by commitments from the fashion company & Other Stories.

The initiative's next phase will deliver training for 1,000 women weavers, a fashion show, and workshops that combine market access and design rethinking. The current training workshops have reached 70 women artisans.



Photo: UN Women India



Photo: UN Women India



LEBANON

WOMEN FARMERS'
ACCESS TO GEOSPATIAL DATA
FOR POST-CONFLICT
AGRICULTURAL RECOVERY



LEBANON

Equalizing Information Access of Women Farmers to Geospatial Data and Rehabilitation Strategies for Post-Conflict Agricultural Recovery and Sustainable Agricultural Practices

Background

Between October 2023 and November 2024, Lebanon endured a prolonged military campaign that displaced around 1.2 million people at its height. The conflict claimed over 4,000 lives¹⁰ and inflicted severe economic damage, with direct losses estimated at USD 5.1 billion and total losses, including infrastructure, reaching USD 8.5 billion.¹¹

Much of this damage was concentrated in the agrarian regions of the country's south and in Baalbek-Hermel regions. Aerial strikes, artillery, white phosphorous and other munitions caused great damage to residential homes and basic infrastructure, as well as to agricultural and forest areas.

2024 was Lebanon's worst fire season on record, with a total of 16,437 hectares burned.¹² This has had a significant impact on the communities who rely on agriculture and related value chains for their livelihoods. Damage to the land varies, with some areas requiring remediation from chemical residue due to white phosphorus. As a result, different methods of rehabilitation will be required for each affected area.

Gender inequality is entrenched in Lebanon's agricultural sector. Women play a significant role in the agricultural sector, comprising up to 43 per cent of the

work force,¹³ but remain largely unrecognized and are poorly paid or unpaid.

Gender inequalities are also particularly evident in land ownership and inheritance, which are dominated by men. These compounding inequalities limit women's ability to access information, extension services, markets, credit and decision making within the agricultural sector.

To help ensure that rural women are empowered to exercise decision-making in the post-conflict recovery and reconstruction process, UN Women Lebanon collaborated with the National Centre of Scientific Research (CNRS) to support women to use satellite imagery to assess the condition of their land after the conflict and allow them to respond effectively.

Activities

CNRS has developed a land-damage categorization approach using Geographic Information Systems (GIS), remote sensing and other technologies to assess post-conflict conditions and guide appropriate rehabilitation strategies. The project connected this ongoing analysis directly with affected farmers, supporting them to understand the extent of land damage and map suitable rehabilitation methods based on the distinct impacts to their plots.



The project trained women farmers on soil management, olive tree care, pruning, grafting and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). Through participatory sessions using satellite imagery, participants were able to compare pre- and post-conflict images to identify the type and extent of damage to their villages. For almost all participants, they were seeing satellite images of their villages for the first time. Participants also learned about crowdsourcing techniques for agricultural planning and post-conflict damage assessment.

In addition to the workshop, CRNS developed a crowdsourcing app, which allowed farmers to report damage observed on the ground, enabling CNRS to validate and further inform the satellite-based analysis. By combining technical training with practical tools and inclusive methodologies, the project strengthened women's participation in decision making on farming, equipping them with critical information that was previously inaccessible.

Impact

As a result of the project, sustainable agricultural practices contributed to land rehabilitation efforts

in post-conflict Lebanon, incorporating a gender-responsive approach.

The project strengthened agricultural knowledge and practices among 82 farmers (44 women, 38 men) in soil characteristics, treatment and management, while 77 farmers (48 women, 29 men) gained skills in best practices for olive tree care, including pruning, grafting and the safe use of PPE.

Through participatory sessions using satellite imagery, participants were able to compare pre- and post-conflict images to identify the type and the extent of damage to their villages. Overall, 128 farmers acquired the capacity to assess and categorize conflict-related land damage, improving their ability to make informed decisions on how best to rehabilitate the land, and increasing their access to and use of digital technologies.

Further impact will be measured through upcoming pre- and post-test analysis, with the aim of scaling up the partnership with CNRS to inform more gender-responsive best practices to apply technology in Lebanon's agricultural recovery.

Photo: UN Women/Lauren Rooney





Photo: UN Women/Lauren Rooney

“I had no idea satellites could detect things like crop diseases ... or for example, damaged buildings or areas that are inaccessible ... We surveyed maps before and after destruction, using colour codes on the maps; red is for trees, blue for forests and yellow for houses.”

Project participant

A stylized map of Liberia is shown in the background, rendered in a light green color against a darker green gradient. The map outlines the country's borders and internal regional divisions.

LIBERIA

EMPOWERING WOMEN
IN RENEWABLE ENERGY
FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE



LIBERIA

Empowering Women in Renewable Energy for Climate Resilience

Background

Rural women's economic empowerment in Liberia is impeded by heightened climate vulnerability, extended periods of demanding labour, and restricted access to clean energy resources. UN Women recognizes the critical intersection between **women's empowerment, climate change and technological advancement**, emphasizing that empowering women is essential for effective climate action.

The Empowering Women in Renewable Energy for Climate Resilience (RENEW) project was focused on enhancing women's access to and use of renewable energy technologies, thereby improving productivity, generating income, strengthening climate resilience and fostering sustainable green enterprises.

Activities

The RENEW project began with a participatory methodology for selection and baseline activities, commencing with the identification of **20 women-led farming cooperatives** in Lofa, Bong and Nimba counties and **100 women champions**, 5 from each group. This was followed by an assessment of their energy needs, agricultural methods and climate-related vulnerabilities.

The project then implemented an innovative strategy that integrated women's empowerment, climate resilience and technology within agriculture. This approach fostered increased **community ownership**, as members of the women's cooperatives recognized the potential of renewable energy as a means of empowerment.

In the project's second phase, the women-led farming cooperatives received solar equipment and training. Solar-powered dryers and mills suited to local agricultural needs were installed at various locations, followed by hands-on training covering operation, maintenance and how to integrate these technologies into daily farming routines.

In the third phase, the project officially established 10 women-led green enterprises. Concurrently, job creation initiatives were expanded through targeted awareness campaigns and comprehensive capacity development sessions which focused on enhancing renewable energy access among rural women.



Impact

The RENEW project has yielded transformative results, with women in Bong county reporting a significant **reduction in post-harvest losses** and **improved crop preservation** following the introduction of solar dryers and mills.

Across the various project sites, **20 cooperatives** have been equipped with renewable energy technologies, resulting in reduced manual labour and increased operational efficiency and **100 women champions** have received training and are now leading climate-smart agricultural practices and renewable energy use. These initiatives have produced significant economic benefits, as participating cooperatives noted **improved income and productivity**.

The adoption of renewable energy technologies, such as solar dryers and mills, led to a notable **reduction in workload and time**, as these innovations significantly decreased manual labour and the hours spent on farming tasks. This allowed women to engage in other income-generating opportunities, assume leadership positions and contribute to community development.

The project also **increased women's visibility and leadership** within the renewable energy and agriculture sectors, challenging discriminatory social norms in communities that had previously resisted women's leadership in technology fields.



Photo: UN Women Liberia



Photo: UN Women Pakistan/ Osama Taqi



PAKISTAN

EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN
THROUGH AI-POWERED
PROSTHETIC LIMBS
FOR AGRICULTURE AND
HOME-BASED WORK



PAKISTAN

Empowering Rural Women Through AI-Powered Prosthetic Limbs for Agriculture and Home-Based Work

Background

Rural women in Sindh in Pakistan are the backbone of agriculture and home-based crafts, sustaining families and communities. However, unsafe farming tools, especially traditional fodder-cutting machines, have caused frequent accidents and the loss of limbs. These injuries rob women of their mobility, income and confidence, and increase their vulnerability and isolation. Gender inequality, poverty and disability stigma further compound exclusion, leaving many women invisible in economic and social life.

In Pakistan's rural areas, prosthetic arm solutions are not widely available, particularly for women involved in agricultural work. UN Women Pakistan addressed these challenges by providing customized prosthetic arms to five women, empowering them to return to work and regain their economic independence. Beyond providing the device itself, the initiative integrated physiotherapy, psychosocial support, digital literacy, vocational training and access to financial services, ensuring long-term benefits and sustainability.



Photo: UN Women Pakistan



Activities

In collaboration with Bioniks, a prominent social enterprise based in Karachi, Pakistan, known for its expertise in developing advanced AI-driven prosthetic limbs, the initiative connected women with prosthetics which were specifically designed to facilitate their daily tasks at work and home and their full participation in community life.

Communications materials in local languages were developed to engage rural communities and raise awareness on disability inclusion, rehabilitation and prosthetic use, including through campaigns in local institutions and communities. Once beneficiaries were identified, their measurements were taken through 3D scanning. After the manufacturing and fitting of AI-powered limbs, women received both counselling sessions and peer mentorship by current and previous AI-powered limb users.

The project utilized a gender-responsive approach, recognizing that women's roles in agriculture and household activities differ from men's. By designing prosthetics that are functional for agricultural tasks, such as using hand tools or operating machinery, the project ensured that these women could fully engage in the economy.



Photo: UN Women Pakistan

“My biggest joy is now I can carry my children in my arms. I can cook food by myself and I can feed my children with my own hands.”

Habiba



Photo: UN Women Pakistan

Impact

In total, five women were successfully fitted with AI-powered prosthetic limbs. More than 200 women and men community members were engaged through advocacy and capacity development and 25 new cases of amputation were identified and added to the database to be considered for prosthetics in the future, a significant number.

A documentary highlighting the women's stories was developed to support advocacy and increase visibility. Women reported improved self-confidence, emotional health and social reintegration.

The initiative showcased how digital and assistive innovation can create inclusive, decent work pathways and enable women to re-enter local economies with dignity. By addressing the specific needs of women in agriculture and home-based work who have lost limbs, the project fostered a more inclusive and equitable society. The project has already inspired others who are interested in replicating it in other communities. UN Women's Project Coordinator, Zarqa Khan, was shortlisted for a UN Secretary-General's Award under the theme of disability inclusion for her leadership on this project.

"I never thought I could smile again after losing my arm, but now when I use my new hand, I feel life returning to me."

Shehla Raza



PAPUA NEW GUINEA

WOMEN AND THE WORLD OF WORK:
A VISUAL JOURNEY OF
EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ART
– MURAL PAINTING PROJECT



PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Women and the World of Work: A Visual Journey of Empowerment and Resilience of Women through Art – Mural Painting Project

Background

On 27 September 2023, Papua New Guinea ratified ILO Convention No. 190 (C190) and its accompanying Recommendation No. 206 (R206) which recognize the

right of everyone to a world of work free of all forms of violence and harassment.¹⁴ By ratifying the convention, Papua New Guinea affirmed its commitment to progress on building safe and inclusive workspaces and achieving gender equality.



A collection of mural paintings by student artists attending the University of Papua New Guinea, depicting lived experiences of women in the world of work. **Left:** *I can be her* by Annieossieller Turi. **Centre-top:** *Hardworking Women in Papua New Guinea* by Emmanuella Davis. **Centre-middle:** *The Women in Workforce* by Annieossieller Turi. **Centre-bottom:** *Rural Women in Papua New Guinea* by Ephraim Wanduponge. **Right:** *Bikpla Pisin* by Norris Tipa.



Yet despite notable steps taken to realize the rights of all workers, structural inequalities coupled with a constantly evolving world of work pose new threats and challenges to women's well-being and economic opportunities. An estimated two out of every three women in Papua New Guinea experience at least one form of violence in their lifetime, the most common being intimate partner violence (IPV).¹⁵ The direct and indirect costs of violence against women increase women's economic insecurity and dependence. Violence against women often leads to economic strain due to out-of-pocket health expenditures and hospital visits to treat injuries, reduced productivity, absenteeism and reduced earnings as a result. In Papua New Guinea, family and sexual violence cost companies about 10 working days per employee annually.¹⁶

Women's heightened risk of violence in the public and private sphere intersects with their economic vulnerability. Across all jobs, the unadjusted gender pay gap is estimated to be 20 per cent, with women salaried workers earning 80 cents for every dollar a man earns.¹⁷

UN Women Papua New Guinea, the University of Papua New Guinea, the Office of the National Capital District Governor, the International Labour Organization, the Small and Medium Enterprise Corporation, the National Youth Development Authority and the Papua New Guinea Trade Union Congress jointly implemented the Women and the World of Work Mural Painting Project to bring visibility to the challenges faced by women in the world of work.

Artist: Taiki Deka Harada.



Activities

The mural project sparked critical discourse on gender inequality in the world of work through a fusion of art, storytelling, advocacy and media engagement.

With UN Women's support, 12 young artists explored storytelling grounded in promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment on canvas. Their mural paintings addressed the diverse experiences of rural women, Indigenous women, informal workers, women with disabilities, young women and single mothers in the world of work—bringing greater visibility to women's unseen labour and care work, the motherhood penalty and the continuum of violence and sexual harassment across communities at large.

For some artists, the murals mirrored their own lived experiences of violence and sexual harassment at work, including the stigma and secondary victimization women grapple with as a consequence of reporting incidents.

The exhibitions created a space for intergenerational dialogue and grounded discussions of discriminatory laws and harmful social norms that disproportionately affect women.

Impact

This creative initiative broadened the scope of UN Women's work in Papua New Guinea, using artistic expression to contribute to UN Women's cross-thematic work on advancing women's economic empowerment and ending violence against women.

The non-conventional approach presented new opportunities for multi-stakeholder engagement and garnered media coverage. The project's success can be credited to strong youth engagement and alignment with progressive work done by key stakeholders, such as the Department of Labour, the Trade Union Congress and the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Permanent Parliamentary Committee.



Photo: UN Women Papua New Guinea/Joanna Oala



Furthermore, the project aligned with the government's public launch of a zero-tolerance policy on violence and harassment against women in the workplace, affirming UN Women's important role in advocating for gender-responsive laws and policies at the national level. During the 16 Days of Activism, the Department for Personnel Management and the State-Owned Enterprises pledged to integrate the policy into their institutions as a condition for employment for state workers and contractors to adhere to the codes of conduct and promote gender equality.

UN Women Papua New Guinea has furthermore built momentum by raising awareness through TV and radio programmes, with a target of over 5 million people. This has been complemented with the implementation of a billboard campaign, both digital and analogue. Advocacy materials have been displayed in major intersections in Port Moresby as a call to action to transform social norms in the world of work. In addition, the project enhanced the capacities and entrepreneurial skills of young artists and leaders.

“Approaching the discourse on women and their experiences in the world of work from a non-traditional method through the lens of art garnered more conversations and media coverage and fostered a catalytic approach to new engagements for the country office.”

**Tosin Akibu, Deputy Representative,
UN Women Papua New Guinea**



Photo: UN Women Papua New Guinea/Alice Vuna

**“We’re not just painting canvases,
we’re shifting mindsets.”**

**Student artists from the University
of Papua New Guinea**



SIERRA LEONE

CULTIVATING CHANGE:
EMPOWERING WOMEN
THROUGH CLIMATE-SMART
AGRO-ENTREPRENEURSHIP
AND MEDIA STORYTELLING



SIERRA LEONE

Cultivating Change: Empowering Women through Climate-Smart Agro-Entrepreneurship and Media Storytelling

Background

The agricultural sector remains a key driver of Sierra Leone's economic development. The sector employs two thirds (approximately 60 per cent) of the labour force—with women accounting for up to 70 per cent of the agricultural workforce—and contributes 35 per cent to the national gross domestic product (GDP).¹⁸ In rural areas, agriculture is the backbone of economic activity and household sustenance. Over 80 per cent of Sierra Leone's rural population heavily rely on subsistence farming.¹⁹



Photo: UN Women Sierra Leone/Mohamed Kargbo

However, the agricultural sector is riddled with many challenges, including poor infrastructure, low productivity due to limited agro-technologies and access to quality seeds, and weak policy enforcement to support domestic production. The impacts of climate change, such as erratic rainfall and extreme temperatures, exacerbate both food and economic insecurity. Despite these challenges, rural women play a crucial role in food production, climate resilience and value addition. Yet, their innovation remains underrecognized and undervalued.

In this context, UN Women Sierra Leone, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, collaborated with rural women entrepreneurs who are defying barriers to advance climate-resilient agriculture.

Photo: UN Women Sierra Leone/Mohamed Kargbo



Activities

The first component of the project sought to increase agricultural production. To this end, UN Women worked closely with a group of 37 women to introduce climate-resilient agricultural practices through the provision of solar-powered irrigation and eco-friendly storage equipment, as well as improved seeds.

A second component aimed to boost rural women's economic empowerment and thereby boost local community economic outcomes. Through ongoing training sessions, UN Women improved participants' entrepreneurial and financial skills while supporting value addition and expanding women's access to markets.

The third component centred on multimedia storytelling. UN Women produced a compelling video story to showcase the journey of Madam Mariama Kalokoh, whose resilience and success has inspired many in her community.

Impact

The solar irrigation and storage equipment provided has significantly improved productivity among women farmers, leading to higher surplus sales. Moreover, women farmers reported greater confidence and willingness to integrate climate-resilient technologies into their farming practices.

The video story of Madam Mariama Kalokoh's farm transformation and mentorship programme was broadcasted nationally on International Women's Day, reaching thousands of viewers and screened at an inter-district validation workshop on accessing agricultural value chains, attended by 74 participants from 7 districts (Bombali, Karene, Kenema, Pujehun, Moyamba, Bo and Kailahun). It fostered greater awareness of women's invisible labour and facilitated dialogue on transforming harmful social norms among participants, many of whom expressed interest in joining similar mentorship programmes and documenting their own transformation.

Mariama Kalokoh

Photo: UN Women Sierra Leone/Mohamed Kargbo





Moreover, targeted entrepreneurship and financial management training equipped 37 women (each representing cooperatives of 25 to 30 members) with practical skills to strengthen their economic resilience and expand income-generating agricultural activities.

UN Women Sierra Leone will build on local partnerships to strengthen buyer–supplier networks and connect women entrepreneurs with markets across rural districts, thus bolstering economic opportunities and growth. UN Women will apply evidence-based programming to maximize impact and mobilize multi-stakeholder engagement to ensure sustainability.



Photo: UN Women Sierra Leone/Mohamed Kargbo

“Start with the stories of women. When their lived experiences guide our interventions and are paired with the right input, support and mentorship, innovation flourishes. Real, lasting impact is created when solutions grow from their realities, their strengths and their creativity.”

**Kadija Isata Jalloh, Programme Specialist, Women’s Economic Empowerment,
UN Women Sierra Leone**



CONCLUSION

The wide array of thoughtful, innovative and high-impact projects delivered over the past year through the Women and the World of Work Innovation Grants, implemented through UN Women country and regional offices, demonstrates the catalytic potential of modest seed funding to foster creativity, innovation and leadership. Despite the small scale of investment and relatively short time frame, this initiative has yielded valuable lessons and good practices.

First, the Innovation Grants showcase UN Women's diverse approaches to promoting decent work and entrepreneurship around the world. Projects were selected and funded in every region, reflecting a commitment to inclusion and addressing a range of needs and priorities. UN Women's unique position, bridging global frameworks with local needs, enabled the grant recipients to employ existing knowledge, networks and relationships through community-based participatory approaches, centring women's experiences and resulting in innovative solutions that brought about tangible impact for women and their communities.

For example, in **Papua New Guinea**, artistic expression served to build community awareness through the creation of public art depicting women and the world of work. In **China**, migrant women told their own stories through stand-up comedy to transform care systems. In **Chile**, mentorships between young women students and astronomers were made possible thanks to UN Women's relationship with the European Southern Observatory. In **Sierra Leone**, women showed the value of climate-resilient agriculture from their own

perspectives. The projects show that supporting women and the world of work goes beyond supporting women to be productive and increasing incomes. It also encompasses building sustainable markets and institutions, transforming care systems so that economies can function and thrive, and taking climate and environmental action to protect people and the planet.

Second, the Innovation Grants highlight how technology, work and social relations intertwine in women's lives and shape their economic opportunities and outcomes. These grants also demonstrate that innovation comes in diverse forms. In **Argentina**, innovation was shaped by Indigenous knowledge, channelling ancestral wisdom to create a sustainable future. In **Lebanon**, women learned how to use satellite imagery to rehabilitate their agricultural land after conflict. In **Liberia**, renewable energy was harnessed to improve women's livelihoods and contribute to sustainability. In **India**, ancestral printing techniques were coupled with sustainable water management technology to create economic opportunities for women. In **Pakistan**, a partnership with a social enterprise employed the power of artificial intelligence to provide prosthetic limbs to women, transforming their material well-being and ability to participate in the economy.

Third, the Innovation Grants have demonstrated that investing in creativity can achieve transformative results. In its inaugural year, the Innovation Grants initiative received 67 proposals from 44 UN Women country and regional offices.



WOMEN AND THE WORLD OF WORK INNOVATION GRANTS INITIATIVE

Because of growing interest and the impressive results from the 2024–2025 cycle of projects, the Economic Empowerment Section has launched a new call for Women and the World of Work Innovation Grants to be implemented in 2026: 89 proposals have been received from 50 country and regional offices, indicating the need and desire for this type of seed funding within UN Women and its partners.

By fostering the exceptional creativity and innovation of UN Women's country and regional offices, the Innovation Grants have catalysed transformative programming that supports the implementation of UN Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy.

The initiative proved to be an effective and efficient investment. Although projects have adopted distinct, contextualized strategies to promote women's access to decent work and entrepreneurship, similar key lessons emerged. Foremost among them was the critical importance of aligning innovation with women's actual needs and actively involving women as leaders in the development of creative solutions.

The next round will undoubtedly yield transformative results and further strengthen UN Women's progress in innovation in the world of work to improve the material lives of women and their communities and ensure that women's economic empowerment becomes a lived reality for all.



Photo: UN Women Pakistan/Ammar Saleem



ENDNOTES

1. Four other projects will be completed in 2026 and one project was withdrawn due to operational challenges.
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UN WOMEN EXISTS TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS.

UN Women exists to advance women's rights, gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

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

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



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