

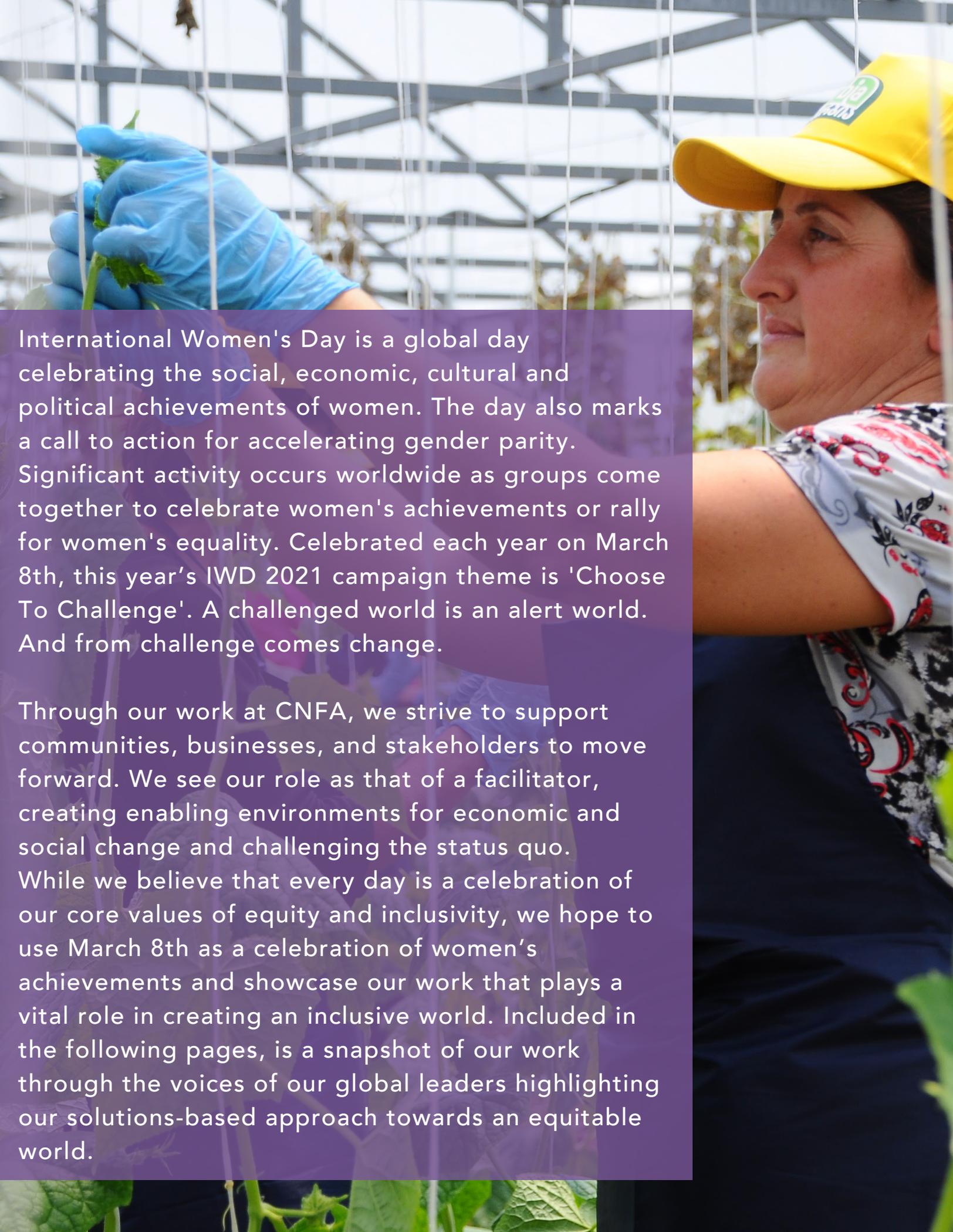


**CNFA**  
Cultivating New Frontiers  
in Agriculture



# CHOOSE TO CHALLENGE

CULTIVATING NEW FRONTIERS IN AGRICULTURE (CNFA)



International Women's Day is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity. Significant activity occurs worldwide as groups come together to celebrate women's achievements or rally for women's equality. Celebrated each year on March 8th, this year's IWD 2021 campaign theme is 'Choose To Challenge'. A challenged world is an alert world. And from challenge comes change.

Through our work at CNFA, we strive to support communities, businesses, and stakeholders to move forward. We see our role as that of a facilitator, creating enabling environments for economic and social change and challenging the status quo. While we believe that every day is a celebration of our core values of equity and inclusivity, we hope to use March 8th as a celebration of women's achievements and showcase our work that plays a vital role in creating an inclusive world. Included in the following pages, is a snapshot of our work through the voices of our global leaders highlighting our solutions-based approach towards an equitable world.



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# Choose To Challenge

By Sylvain Roy

Each year on International Women's Day, CNFA joins in the global celebration of the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women.

In doing so, we salute the strong and dedicated women we serve through our initiatives in countries around the world — women who manage households, work as entrepreneurs to produce food for their families and serve as leaders to drive change in their communities.

Throughout CNFA's history, we have witnessed first-hand the strong and undeniable relationship between the advancement of women in the agricultural sector, and the achievement of greater and more significant impacts in agricultural productivity, economic growth, and nutrition.

And in fact, our efforts to improve the wellbeing and food security of rural populations draw much of their success from the hard work of the determined and disciplined women with whom we partner.

That's why our organization's programs to support communities, businesses and stakeholders are designed in large part to facilitate the creation of environments in which women can more effectively participate, exercise their knowledge and skills, drive economic and social change, and strengthen their leadership roles in rural communities.

This International Women's Day we honor the women-owned and -operated farms and businesses in rural communities around the world who, armed with the tools they need to forge their own destinies — access to agro-inputs, agricultural technologies, and finance — have become the creators of the sustainable benefits enjoyed by their families and communities, and gained the ability to retain control over the income they earn as the result of their efforts.

We celebrate the courage and fortitude of these women who, in numbers that grow by the day, ensure the economic and nutritional security of their families and villages by boldly expanding beyond their traditional roles to become dairy entrepreneurs in Ethiopia, potato farmers in Georgia and grain dealers in Pakistan, to name just a few.

In fact, these women personify this year's International Women's Day theme: "A challenged world is an alert world and from challenge comes change. So, let's all choose to challenge."

They have bravely challenged the status quo. They have alerted others by showing them the way. They are changing and improving the quality of life around them.

And they have inspired CNFA to work even harder to provide a solutions-based approach that helps to forge a gender equal world, to lay the groundwork for the small changes that drive bigger changes in societies around the world, and to continue to challenge ourselves as we work to accomplish our mission.

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*The author is president and CEO of CNFA*





# Driving Change with Actionable Steps

By Sheryl Cowan

I am not one of those people who has always known what they wanted to do with their lives and then achieve it (I envy those people!). However, by the time I got to college, I did have a general idea that I wanted my future to have meaning and purpose. I wanted to help people in some way, and to see the world.

But the real catalyst for my career was becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer. In 1991, I left the United States (U.S.) for Lesotho as an agriculture volunteer.

Does the Peace Corps still use the expression "the toughest job you will ever love"? It is really an appropriate slogan. The Peace Corps is tough, but I really did love it. And as it turned out, over the next three years, I did far more than achieve my vague

goal of helping others and seeing the world. I learned who I am and what I am capable of — in large part thanks to the women I met and worked with.

During the early 1990s, more than 70 percent of Lesotho's adult males worked in the mines of South Africa, coming home to visit only once or twice per year. This meant that most homes were female-headed households.

I had entered a world where — for a large share of the population — many traditional gender-based roles had been pushed aside by economic realities; a world where, given the opportunity, women rose to the challenge, and continued to raise and care for their families even as they tackled new responsibilities in their homes and communities. And it was a world where they even continued to enjoy life.

These women and other members of their community were catalytic in shaping my career and life. They taught me to abandon preconceptions as well as the importance of taking action to drive transformative change. And they taught me that successful development requires meeting people where they are, building upon what they know, understanding what they are motivated to do, and having them be active participants in their own development.

I spent 19 years living and working in seven African countries, and am currently back in the U.S. where I have worked with Cultivating New Frontiers in Agriculture (CNFA) for the past six years. And I continue to use my learnings from Lesotho.

Through our work, CNFA partners with

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communities, the private sector and the public sector around the world to create enabling environments for economic growth and social change. And I see that same strength in the women CNFA works with around the world — the women in Niger turning their backyard chickens into a profitable collective; the women agribusiness leaders in Pakistan hosting radio programs that promote the role of women in agriculture; and the women in Liberia taking their cassava processing business to the next level through mechanization, to name a few.

We have a long way to go, but with actionable steps, we are driving change arm in arm with women who meet the challenge and transform their lives and the lives of those around them.

*The author is senior vice president, programs at CNFA*





# From Boston, to Togo, to DC: Learning Leadership with Women

By Lenoure Recanatini

This week the world observes International Women's Day to honor the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women.

I celebrate those achievements every time a young woman who aspires to make the world a better place asks me how I got started in international development.

And I am always delighted to tell them that it was a woman who set me on my course.

When I was about five, my mother took me to the Boston Children's Museum, where they had an exhibit showcasing African markets. I had so much fun negotiating with the Market Mamas from West Africa that I instantly fell in love with their energy. Later, my mother also gave me a children's book

about anthropologist Margaret Meade, further fueling my fascination with other cultures. And by the time I reached 11 — thanks to my mother’s efforts to expose me to the world — I already preferred the international culture exhibits at Epcot Center over the Disney rides that drew in other kids.

This pull toward other cultures continued through college, where I took courses on anthropology and development along with my major. After graduation, I came home from a summer job one afternoon to find a newspaper ad for the Peace Corps that my mother had saved for me, circled in thick, black permanent marker. I applied and was thrilled when I was invited to serve in a small farming village in Togo. I spoke Togo’s national language, French, and apparently, the Peace Corps thought my experience growing up working on a horse farm made me a good fit for promoting environmentally sustainable agriculture.

I loved everything about the village of Kollo — the people, their culture, and our mission together. While the village did not have running water or electricity, what stood out was the generosity and work ethic of the people who lived there. They worked hard in the fields by day, and then went hard to work with me at night to plan village

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development initiatives.

I even wrote my first proposal with them, often by lantern light, with goats and children running in and out of the meeting room. Working with the people in Kollo and other nearby villages to articulate and achieve their goals helped me learn and grow professionally. Together, we also planted organic gardens, built stoves that required less firewood, planted community fields to raise money for the village, and pursued other income-generating activities. And amidst all of this, we found time to eat, dance, and giggle through our language barriers.

The acumen of the women and girls in the village inspired me, along with their grace, integrity, and confidence. I also developed my skills in the art of negotiation with the Market Mamas on their home turf in the cities — 20 years and thousands of miles from the Boston Children’s Museum. I learned so much from these shrewd entrepreneurs about business as a woman in a male-dominated world.

Now, with 20 years of experience in various sectors in development, I am entering my fifth year at Cultivating New Frontiers in Agriculture (CNFA), where we support agriculture in villages just like the one I called home for two years.

My work alongside the determined, resilient women in Kollo gave me an appreciation for the work that CNFA does. My career still focuses on designing programs, and to this day, the most rewarding part of my job is designing programs in partnership with leaders, entrepreneurs, and communities

in the countries where CNFA works. Our programs always include opportunities to promote equity for women in the agriculture sector as a step toward establishing a level playing field in business and society. These opportunities empower women to participate more profitably in markets and thrive, rather than merely survive.

*The author is is associate vice president, program development at CNFA*



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# Creating Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs in Cote d'Ivoire

By Marc Steen

Recently, many countries on the African continent have seen high rates of growth in women-run businesses[1]. But these businesses often face more social restrictions than businesses run by men, limiting their rate of growth. Often women have less access to capital, less collateral, less time in school, and have more difficulty accessing information and building business relations than their male peers. In some cases, women are excluded from sectors altogether. These barriers hamper the development of women-run businesses and the development of society.

In Côte d'Ivoire, where Cultivating New Frontiers in Agriculture (CNFA) implements the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food for Progress-funded Maximizing Opportunities in Cocoa Activity (MOCA),

women face particularly high levels of discrimination. Improving equity for Ivorian women would grow the country's GNP between \$6 billion and \$10 billion in the long term [2]. This highlights one way that discriminating women is a lose-lose situation for everyone. Eliminating these inequalities between men and women is key to the country's economic growth and future development.

CNFA's approach through MOCA invests in women entrepreneurs and producers so that they can achieve their vision and mission. To equip women entrepreneurs against market challenges and inequalities, MOCA provides training, mentorship, access to finance, and in-kind grants to support women entrepreneurs invest in their businesses, helping them overcome gender-specific barriers.

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Two out of MOCA's four Farm Service Centers — a CNFA model of one-stop shops that retail quality inputs such as seeds and fertilizers, and services like machinery rentals and output marketing — are run by women. Outstanding entrepreneurs, they established their input businesses in an environment of gender inequity and proved that, despite this environment, they were able to heed an opportunity in the market

and invest in themselves with support from MOCA.

CNFA has applied this same approach in Ethiopia, where women face similar levels of discrimination, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Agricultural Growth Program-Livestock Market Development (AGP-LMD). As part of the AGP-LMD project, CNFA amplified the work of 285 women entrepreneurs, providing them with management and leadership training, experience sharing, and business skills. By the end of this coaching program, the women who participated had increased decision-making power over the use of their own time and the average monthly income from their businesses tripled, benefitting the women and their family members.

By investing in women entrepreneurs who choose to challenge the gender norms that limit the growth of their businesses, our projects have created opportunities for women, amplifying their work and supporting their efforts to overcome gendered barriers to business success.

[1] African female entrepreneurship RATES highest in world. (2017, September 07). Retrieved March 09, 2021, from <https://disrupt-africa.com/2017/09/08/african-female-entrepreneurship-rates-highest-in-world/>

[2] Women: The Hidden figures Behind Cote D'IVOIRE'S ECONOMIC EMERGENCE. (n.d.). Retrieved March 09, 2021, from <https://blogs.worldbank.org/nasikiliza/women-the-hidden-figures-behind-cote-divoires-economic-emergence>



*The author is the chief of party of the USDA funded-MOCA and was the chief of party of USAID's Agricultural Growth Program-Livestock Market Development Program, also implemented by CNFA*



# Breaking Barriers: Women Entrepreneurs in the Georgian Agriculture Sector

By Louisa Namicheishvili

As a biophysicist who had just finished a doctorate at Tbilisi State University, I did not expect to join the agricultural development world. But then I heard about a program that the Millennium Challenge Corporation was launching with the Georgian government and I decided to take a chance. It was one of the most critical decisions of my life.

I was fortunate to join the Agribusiness Development Activity (ADA), implemented by Cultivating New Frontiers in Agriculture (CNFA), which allowed me to pursue a career in international development. Starting as an office manager, over a span of next fifteen years, I had the opportunity to work in many different roles and eventually in a leadership role with CNFA. This journey gave me an opportunity to translate my work into real, positive impact for others.

However, not all women in Georgia have the same opportunity. As in many countries, Georgian women face gender segregation in job opportunities, often working in care or service-focused jobs, unpaid family care, or subsistence farming.

As chief of party for the USAID Agriculture Program, implemented by CNFA, I not only have the opportunity to challenge gender norms, but also to provide similar opportunities to the women on my team and the women that participate in our programming.

The USAID Agriculture Program supports women across its activities — helping to challenge the status quo by facilitating employment opportunities, improving the productivity of women-led farms and agribusinesses, building capacity, and providing access to finance through grants and partnerships with the private sector.

For example, the USAID Agriculture Program and its predecessor, the USAID Restoring Efficiency to Agriculture Production (REAP) project, supported women entrepreneurs and agronomists by facilitating job opportunities at local Farm Service Centers (FSCs). Established by CNFA in Georgia in 2006, FSCs are one stop shops that help area farmers access affordable, quality inputs, and advice to improve their agricultural productivity.

With support from our team and USAID Georgia, Shorena Osepashvili, a leading agronomist and plant protection specialist from Kakheti, now manages the Telavi FSC, magnifying the impact of her expertise in agronomy to more than ten thousand farmers throughout the

region in eastern Georgia.

Similarly, when Manana Anjaparidze, a leader in bio-agriculture in Natakhtari, Georgia, struggled to find virus-free strawberry seedlings to improve the quality of her strawberry product, our program connected her to Italian breeder, Franco Zenti, who provided guidance on selecting high quality seedlings.

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Additionally, female students from the regional universities have the same opportunity to explore the agricultural development sector as I did, joining the program through internships. For example, in 2020, six student-interns from Batumi and Kutaisi universities participated in a pilot monitoring program for several harmful pests in Georgia. A joint activity with the National Food Agency (NFA), this program enabled young women to excel as professionals and supported them as they sought jobs in the public and private sectors.

While these may seem like a drop in the bucket, together, these tactics help women entrepreneurs add value to their products, increase incomes, meet international standards, and compete in new markets — expanding their participation and potential in the

agriculture sector. And this leads to a trickle-down effect. Those trained by our program then train others, helping women entrepreneurs build stronger relationships and construct an enduring community of knowledge.

When women like Osepashvili, Anjaparidze, and myself succeed, we are committed to reinvesting our gains and expertise back into our communities. Anjaparidze passes on the best practices she learns in trainings to her community. Osepashvili gives back through Agro-Art Clubs, an innovative initiative funded by our program that integrates disciplines including photography, landscape design, and more into the practice of cultivating, processing, and distributing agricultural products to urban and peri-urban areas.

Georgian women choose to challenge gender norms in agriculture by setting an example for future generations. Together we aim to achieve an equitable world!

*The author is the chief of party for the USAID Agriculture Program, implemented by CNFA in Georgia*





# Rwandan Women Farmers: Leading the Way to An Inclusive World

By Dan Gies

In the hills of Rwanda, which I call home for the past four years, women are an integral part of the agriculture industry and represent 63 percent of the agricultural workforce[1]. Too often, however, Rwandan women do not have the opportunity to take charge of their land and run their farms like an enterprise due to reproductive work such care-giving and domestic housework roles, including cleaning, cooking, childcare, and the unpaid domestic labor force.

With the goal of enabling women to transform their farms from subsistence to commercial production, the Feed the Future Rwanda Hinga Weze Activity works to provide women the tools and opportunities they need to improve productivity, facilitate access to finance, peer meetings and find nutritious ways to feed their families — all

while knocking down gendered social barriers and engaging men as allies in the household. For example, in the past 3.5 years, 39,286 women who cultivate nutritious, orange-fleshed sweet potatoes, high-iron beans, and other fruits and vegetables joined programs that connect them to productive economic resources. To help their crops achieve maximum yield, we support these women to gain access to agricultural best practices and productivity enhancing inputs like lime, fertilizer, and improved seed varieties.

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And these women are not just supporting their families. They are building a strong foundation for the future generation of women in agriculture, leading by example as they work hard to provide nutritious foods for their families and improve equitable household decision making and division of labor. For example, Seraphine Nyirarubanza from the Rurembo sector along with her cooperative members, and 164 cooperatives like theirs, worked

with Hinga Weze to establish improved irrigation systems and fertilization practices to build and enhance terraces. The over 72,000 households that took part saw 50 percent yield increases. Nyirarubanza, in particular, described a twofold increase, surmounting previous obstacles to her productivity. “I used to harvest only 200 kgs on my 20-acre plot,” she noted, “but after Hinga Weze showed me how to terrace and apply the appropriate inputs, I am now able to harvest 400 kgs.”

Many Rwandan women also face barriers to accessing finance. Through the Activity, women business owners like Phoebe Nyirafeza, CEO of DAZI maize processing factory, gained access to credit from microfinance institutions, enabling her to scale up business operations, repair infrastructure, and stock inventory to increase output and revenue. In 2018, Hinga Weze supported Nyirafeza to connect with INKUNGA Micro-Finance and she received credit worth over \$100,000 (106 million RWF) to enhance her business. “From the first installment of 20 million RWF, I managed to restock raw materials and repair machines,” she observed to Hinga Weze. “Production has already improved.”

To date, Hinga Weze has facilitated \$1.14 million in financing for women in the agriculture sector in Rwanda. Using a grant facility with cost contribution, the Activity has also enabled women business owners to adopt the CNFA Farm Service Center model, a one-stop-shop providing inputs and crop and animal health advice for farmers. Our partnerships with local tech companies like BK TechHouse, who works to scale up the Government of Rwanda’s Smart

Nkunganire System, link men and women farmers alike with agrodealers through an integrated digital service platform.

While our activity works to create an enabling environment to support these entrepreneurial women, Rwandan women farmers are taking charge of their present and their future — growing their farms into successful enterprises and engaging families with saving groups to earn more income. With their hard work, grit, and determination, they are challenging gender norms, breaking barriers and forging a way to an inclusive world.

[1] Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey, Gender Thematic Report of December 2018

*The author is the chief of party of the Feed the Future Rwanda Hinga Weze Activity implemented by CNFA*





# Burkinabe Women Build Resilience in Agriculture

By Djimasbe Ngaradoum

As the son of a farmer, I have been inspired by the work of women and youth farmers and entrepreneurs as they strive to provide for their families the same opportunities that my parents could for me. In Burkina Faso where I work, women play a variety of roles in agriculture markets. They are the farmers who supply markets with crops and animals, market actors who process and sell agricultural goods, and consumers who purchase food for their families.

In many West African communities, I have seen how women's efforts contribute to high levels of agricultural production and receive external investment. Yet, too often, their communities also have high levels of poverty and malnutrition.

Barriers to women and youth entrepreneurship

and decision-making in household management and finances contribute greatly to this problem, especially as regions of Burkina Faso near the borders with Mali and Niger face a double crisis: the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing insecurity and displacement.

**As the son of a farmer, I have been inspired by the work of women and youth farmers and entrepreneurs as they strive to provide for their families the same opportunities that my parents could for me.**

The activity I work on, USAID Yidgiri, partners with communities to tackle these challenges with a focus on nutrition through agricultural practices and training opportunities and by supporting and equipping women and youth with skills in production, business management, financial literacy, and networking.

To improve production of agricultural crops, we established practical solutions like demonstration plots for cowpeas, a legume which is high in nutrients, and provide farmers with information about improved technologies that can increase their yield. In the 2020–2021 agricultural season, 83 percent of the farmers who attended the demonstrations were women — women who reinvest this knowledge into their practices and profitably and sustainability feed their families and communities.

We also collaborate with local communities to support dynamic women and youth-led agribusinesses through our Youth and Women Entrepreneurship

and Rural Innovation (YWERI) program. YWERI equips participants with business best practices and access to finance, providing the resources, income, and knowledge for women and youth to feed themselves and their families nutritious foods and to go on to be healthy farmers and entrepreneurs. The program aims to catalyze commercial growth for businesses owned by women and youth in the Burkinabe agriculture sector. This will lead to a new generation of farmers and build more resilient communities.

With backing from USAID Yidgiri, women can also better access finance and acquire literacy skills through the activity's "tontine" groups. These groups serve as savings and lending associations for local communities, strengthening women's confidence, access, and resources to participate in markets, negotiate, and apply for loans.

By investing in women and youth, the Yidgiri team is working with Burkinabe communities to foster women's decision-making power so they can manage savings and build resilient households, improve incomes so they can feed their families with nutrient rich foods, and strengthen markets so they can access finance and do business with confidence. While the path to increasing resilience is tough, with Burkinabe women leading the way, practical steps towards that goal will ensure a sustainable and stronger socio-economical future for Burkina Faso!



*The author is the chief of party for the USAID Yidgiri Activity implemented by CNFA in Burkina Faso*



# Pakistani Women Farmers Access Income-Boosting Technologies

By Dr. Faheem Abbasi

When the USAID-funded Pakistan Agricultural Technology Transfer Activity (PATTA) offered me an opportunity to join their team, I didn't hesitate to accept a role as Deputy Chief of Party, and later as Chief of Party. I have worked in development in Pakistan for over 24 years on programs varying from education to water, sanitation and health, and energy to public affairs, and I felt that agriculture, the backbone of Pakistan's economy, was an important element I could not miss. Over the past two years, my work with PATTA has strengthened my belief that the development of Pakistan's agriculture through new technologies and supportive policymaking is essential to bolster our nation's economy, farmers and women agricultural workers in particular.

Women farmers in Pakistan participate in a

range of agricultural activities — from sowing and harvesting fields, to preparing food and managing livestock. But despite their critical role in the country's agricultural sector, social and cultural barriers often limit women's access to relevant, income-boosting agricultural technologies and information.

To facilitate relationships that build local capacity, help expand access to business opportunities, and increase incomes for women entrepreneurs, PATTA collaborates closely with women farmers and agribusiness professionals sharing new technologies and practices that boost income and promote equity in agriculture.

And these collaborations help overcome hurdles and deliver results. For example, in Punjab, when Solve Agri Pak Limited, a women-led agribusiness offering dairy and livestock products and services, experienced challenges to access local dealers and expanding their business, we worked with them to increase their capacity and leverage new investments. The company was able to expand, opening its very first franchise called "Darwaish and Sons" in 2019, increasing opportunities for women entrepreneurs.

And our work doesn't end there. We also offer opportunities for smallholder farmers to connect with buyers to purchase or rent technologies such as mini-tractors, grass cutters, spray machines, and improved fodder and vegetable seeds for enhanced accessibility to expensive but impactful equipment and machinery. With a goal to strengthen connections between various associations, investors and businesses in the agriculture sector, we

deliver advice and best practices via trainings, peer-to-peer learning, agricultural events and demonstrations. These practical trainings offer much-needed support to increase smallholder incomes and commercialize their farms.

**To date, PATTA through gender-inclusive technology demonstrations, workshops, and radio programs across Pakistan has reached over 48,106 women farmers and entrepreneurs. PATTA has also increased access to productive economic resources and a community-based enterprise development model to 5,949 women farmers and entrepreneurs.**

After attending a PATTA demonstration on improved fodder seeds, Naila Bano, a dairy farmer and member of the women-led Dairy Farmer Association Gilgit Baltistan — which focuses on women farmers' issues in Baltistan, adopted the Emmerson Ryegrass seed — a unique, fast-growing, and cost-efficient variety of highly nutritious animal fodder.

"After learning about this innovative seed technology, I was successfully able to produce an additional ton of nutritional fodder per month. I am also able to sell the surplus fodder to other farmers," she noted after adapting the new variety.

Even throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we engaged women representatives of partner agribusinesses like Solve Agri Pak in

their “tele-demonstration” radio series, providing them with a platform to promote agricultural technologies to women farmers while increasing the visibility of women working in agriculture.

To date, through gender-inclusive technology demonstrations, workshops, and radio programs broadcast across Pakistan, PATTA has reached over 48,106 women farmers and entrepreneurs. The project has also increased access to productive economic resources and community-based business development to 5,949 women farmers and entrepreneurs.

With these practical and tangible steps, our hope is to accelerate gender parity to provide an equitable environment for Pakistani women farmers and agribusiness leaders. The time to take actionable steps is now. The need is immediate.



*The author is the chief of party for the USAID-funded Pakistan Agricultural Technology Transfer Activity implemented by CNFA*





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