JOINT PROGRAMME ON: Accelerating Progress towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment

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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

JUFAD





World Food Programme

Accelerating Progress towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda from 2014 to 2020: Final evaluation

Accelerating Progress towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment

in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda from 2014 to 2020: Final evaluation

Produced by he Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the World Food Programme (WFP), and Mokoro.

Required citation:

FAO, IFAD, UN Women, WFP and Mokoro, 2021. Accelerating Progress towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda from 2014 to 2020: Final evaluation, Rome.

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Photo: Rural women listen to the Sambal radio programme established through the JP RWEE. UN Women Nepal/2021

Acronyms

ADS	Agriculture development strategy
BALI	Business Action Learning for Innovation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Kinds of Discrimination against Women
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CSO	Civil society organization
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DEQAS	Decentralized Evaluation Quality Assurance System
EM	Evaluation matrix
EMG	Evaluation management group
EQ	Evaluation question
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFW	Food for work
FGD	Focus group discussion
GALS	Gender Action Learning System
GBV	Gender-based violence
GC	Global Coordinator
GCU	Global Coordination Unit
GESI	Gender and social inclusion
GEWE	Gender equality and women's empowerment
GTP	Growth and transformation plan
нн	Household
HQ	Headquarters
IDP	Internally displaced person
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IGA	Income generating activity
IP	Implementing partner
ISC	International steering committee
JP	Joint programme
JP RWEE	Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women
KI	Key informant
KII	Key informant Interview
MAGA	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food / Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganaderia y Alimenta- cion, Guatemala
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MDTF	Multi-donor trust fund
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MINECO	Ministry of Economy / Ministerio de Economia, Guatemala
MoALD	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, Nepal
MOPAN	Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network
MOU	Memorandum of understanding
MPTFO	Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office
MTR NAC	Mid-term review
	National advisory committee
NC	National Coordinator

NGO	Non-governmental organization
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
Nrs	Nepalese rupees
NSC	National steering committee
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ODA	Official development assistance
OEV	Office of evaluation
РО	Producer organization
PRODENORTE	Sustainable Rural Development Programme of IFAD for the Northern Region, Guatemala
QS	Quality support
RBA	Rome-Based Agency
RERP	Rural Enterprises Remittances Programme
RuSACCO	Rural savings and credit cooperatives
RWF	Rwandan franc
SA	Stakeholder analysis
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEPREM	Presidential Secretariat for Women
SEGEPLAN	Presidential Secretariat for Planning and Programming
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SHG	Self-help group
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
TAC	Technical advisory committee
TF	Trust fund
ТоС	Theory of change
TOR	Terms of reference
TWG	Technical working group
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNRC	United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UN-SWAP	United Nations System-Wide Action Plan
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls
USD	United States dollar
VFM	Value for money
VSLA	Village saving and loan association
WEAI	Women's Economic Empowerment in Agriculture Index
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WFP	United Nations World Food Programme

Introduction

This report presents the findings of the Global End-term Evaluation of The Joint Programme on "Accelerating Progress towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment" (JP RWEE). The JP RWEE is a global initiative that aims to secure rural women's livelihoods and rights in the context of sustainable development. Jointly implemented since 2012 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls (UN Women) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda, the JP RWEE builds on each agency's comparative advantages to improve the status of women in rural areas.

The main objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Evaluate the outcomes of the JP RWEE at the global and country levels and to identify lessons learned, capture good practices and generate knowledge from the first phase to inform a potential subsequent phase of the JP RWEE, including identifying what packages of strategies and interventions work well and those that need improvement.
- Assess the adequacy of the governance structure of the Joint Programme, including the quality of the inter-agency coordination mechanism that has been established at the global and country levels.
- Identify lessons to strengthen management of the JP RWEE and to assess the extent to which participating agencies, through the Joint Programme, have effectively positioned themselves as key players in contributing to the broader 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to make recommendations for addressing rural women's food and nutrition security, livelihoods, and participation in decisionmaking structures, as well as creating a gender responsive policy environment.

The evaluation is an important element of the overall accountability and learning framework of the JP RWEE, as listed in the Indicative Framework on "Strengthening Knowledge Management and Communication in Managing the JP RWEE". The end-term evaluation will provide a systematic assessment of JP RWEE across countries at the close of the current funding cycle. The results of this analysis will feed into the discussions between partner agencies and development partners as they assess the progress of their joint efforts through JP RWEE as well as inform the design and reach of a potential second phase of the programme.

Scope: The evaluation covers the implementation of the JP RWEE in seven countries over the period from October 2014 to 2020. Three of the countries (Nepal, Niger and Guatemala) are country case studies with primary data collection at the beneficiary level and the other four countries are desk-based studies.

Stakeholders: The Technical Advisory Board (TAC) and the International Steering Committee (ISC) members, which include representatives of the four agencies, countries, beneficiaries and the donors, are the main audience of the evaluation.

The JP RWEE was designed to tackle the inequalities experienced by rural women in the economic sphere. It was implemented in seven countries (Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Niger, and Rwanda), and was launched in October 2012.

The JP RWEE benefits from the technical knowledge and policy assistance of FAO in the area of food and agriculture, the experience of IFAD in co-financing rural investment programmes, promoting gender inclusion through community-based approaches,¹ and addressing gender at the household level, the innovations of WFP in food assistance, and the global championship of UNW in gender equality and its strong partnerships with global, regional and national mechanisms for gender equality and women's empowerment.²



¹For example, the implementation of the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) in IFAD-supported projects.

²The JP RWEE annual consolidated report 2019.

Methodology

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The evaluation design was theory-based, relying on several tools: a Theory of Change (ToC), the Stakeholder Analysis (SA) and the Evaluation Matrix (EM). The ToC was constructed to help the team to understand how the links between interventions and expected outcomes were envisaged and to identify the key underlying assumptions; the SA helped to construct lists of external and internal stakeholders at all levels: and the EM provided the structure for the evaluation, detailing the sub-questions and indicators related to the evaluation questions and included information about sources of information and tools used to collect and analyse primary and secondary data.

The evaluation objectives were evaluated against the following criteria: **Relevance**, **Coherence**, **Effectiveness**, **Efficiency**, and **Sustainability**.

The data collection process included a number of different steps: country and global level document reviews, key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussions (FGD) in the three country case studies (see details Table SI).

The evaluation used participatory

approaches: Engagement with relevant stakeholders was sought throughout the evaluation process and included stakeholder input in the inception report and feedback sessions. For all countries the evaluation team conducted presentations of initial findings and recommendations to each of the seven countries, as well as of global findings in a presentation to the TAC and ISC. This validated the initial findings before finalizing the PowerPoint presentations and writing the final evaluation report.

Gender equality and equity considerations:

The evaluation used a gender lens in answering the evaluation guestions ensuring as far as possible a gender balance in respondents. Gender equality and equity considerations were included by assessing the availability of sex disaggregated data, and the participation of men and women in the programme activities. During fieldwork the team respected social norms, whilst at the same time providing space for women to express themselves freely. This was achieved through organizing women only group discussions. Whilst organizing interviews with beneficiaries the team ensured the planning of visits at times and places culturally suitable for the beneficiaries.

Limitations on the evaluation process include:

Challenges:

- Travel constraints due to COVID-19 restrictions
- The 2020 hurricane in Guatemala led to revisions in the evaluation schedule and reallocation of roles within the evaluation team
- Poor connectivity in all countries for remote interviews, particularly Niger.

Limitations:

- High staff turnover amongst government staff and JP RWEE staff in some countries limiting historical insights, partly mitigated through project documentation
- Gaps in documentation and output and outcome data preventing robust trend analysis and comparison between countries or assessing effectiveness of different packages of interventions
- Results from the Women's Economic Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) study were not available and prevented the team from triangulating qualitative results on empowerment with quantitative results.

The data collection included a number of different steps																
	Global		Ethiopia		Guatemala		Kyrgystan		Libera		Nepal		Niger		Rwanda	
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Data and document review of the seven countries																
KII	15	5	3	7	24	13	15	6	4	7	20	28	12	33	6	9
FGD			<u>.</u>		67	0			<u>.</u>		78	22	69	78		<u> </u>
An online survey administered to UN agency staff, national stakeholders (government and partner agencies' representatives) with a focus on the governance of JP RWEE received 113 responses (54% response rate).																

Key findings

6%

Relevance

- The JP RWEE has been highly relevant. It has been aligned to the national policy framework in each of the countries where Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) is recognized as an objective or an important component of agricultural development. It is also very closely aligned to the needs of rural women involved in the programme.
- JP RWEE is aligned with the key national policies on gender equality and women's economic empowerment and plans at country level, as well as broader international commitments and frameworks, including the SDGs and Agenda 2030. The contribution of the JP RWEE to SDGs 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 16 and 17 is clear and demonstrates strong alignment. This alignment is seen as a key component for ensuring the success and ownership of participating countries.
- The JP RWEE was grounded in a participatory planning process at the global level, involving governments, UN agencies, civil society and other stakeholders, which ensured an understanding of the needs of rural women from the start. At the country level, the JP RWEE aligns with beneficiary needs, and programmes are designed through community engagement, needs assessments and with participation from wider civil society and government stakeholders.



Coherence

- Internal coherence: There has been strong internal coherence between the agencies and between the JP RWEE objectives and agency mandates. The JP RWEE is built on comparative advantages of each agency and addresses the multifaceted issues around WEE and is consistent with local demands and contexts. Working as one has been more challenging and took time to take off initially.
- During interviews at global, national and local level, the JP RWEE has been unanimously recognized as a force that created synergy between agencies, and between government organizations and local level community organizations, as exemplified by the case of Niger. This has been validated through the e-survey in which 42 percent of the respondents considered the synergy as a primary positive aspect of the JP RWEE.
- JP RWEE is built on the comparative advantages of each agency and addresses the multifaceted issues around WEE and is consistent with local demands and contexts. The evaluation found unanimity on the leverage of the comparative advantages of different institutions to achieve the results and address interlinked areas of women's economic empowerment in an integrated manner.
- External coherence: At the organizational level there is a good level of synergy with the agencies developing new partnerships with other United Nations (UN) organizations. However, this has not always translated into synergy on the ground between implementing partners. Though the four agencies target the same beneficiaries, implementing partners do not always work with each other: According to KIIs, implementing partners (IP) in Liberia, Nepal and Guatemala are sometimes working in silos.

Effectiveness

Individual level

- The JP RWEE has been highly relevant. On an individual level the JP RWEE has made a significant contribution to rural women's improved livelihoods in the project countries through improved agricultural practices, linkages to the market, awareness raising and leadership building. There are documented increases in vegetable and livestock production. diet and nutrition (outcome 1), and income gains in all the countries (Outcome 2). During field visits both women and men reported shifts in social norms such as women being allowed to take work outside the house, or husbands taking on some of the household chores. Women interviewed in the three countries also reported an increase in self-confidence and self-esteem (Outcome 3). Although there has been some progress, there is less evidence of systemic change as this takes longer (Outcome 4).
- Results from annual reports corroborated data gathered during key informant interviews at global, national and local levels by the evaluation team and more importantly during group discussions with rural women in Nepal, Niger and Guatemala, confirming positive results in the first three outcome areas. Activities under Outcome 4, influencing policy change, have been more varied in scope and effectiveness depending on the specific country. This outcome is one of the most difficult ones to implement and results take longer to take effect.
- Reports from all countries (including from beneficiaries themselves) have indicated that rural households with women involved in the JP RWEE programme have managed to be more resilient to the impacts of COVID-19 because of the increased availability of assets such as additional cash or access to revolving savings or the possibility of selling a goat (Niger) or chickens (Guatemala).

Organizational level

- Governance of the JP RWEE has consisted of global and country level steering and technical structures. The National Advisory Committee at country level has supported collaborative programme design, planning and information sharing, progressively ensuring unity and coordination amongst agencies. The global TAC has provided inputs into country-level planning.
- The Steering Committee at global and national levels in most countries, which is made up of the four agencies, government and service providers at country level, has had varying levels of activity in the different countries. Whilst it has met regularly it has not always been attended by the same government representatives (e.g. Rwanda) thus limiting the potential for knowledge dissemination and impact at the national level.
- Sufficient focus on learning at the national and global level is lacking. Evidence to demonstrate the value and to share good practice beyond the JP RWEE and the effectiveness of certain packages in specific national contexts has been limited. Though there have been briefing notes on lessons learned, in some cases these notes have been more descriptive than providing a robust analysis of the validity of the change pathways of the ToC.

Photo: Rural woman attends agricultural training in Guatemala. UN Women Guatemala/2021



Key results

TO DATE. THE JP RWEE HAS REACHED **80,000** RURAL WOMEN AND OVER **400,000** HOUSEHOLDS.

Data from the JP RWEE 2020 annual consolidated report show positive progress on all outcomes:



GENERATED FROM SALES AT INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP LEVELS



OVER 8.000

WOMEN AND MEN RECEIVED NUTRITION EDUCATION AND ATTENDED **AWARENESS RAISING SESSIONS**

NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS OF GUATEMALA AND LIBERIA SUPPORTED THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF GENDER **POLICIES IN THE AGRICULTURAL** SECTOR





Efficiency

- Agencies have worked together to decide on priorities and deliver against programme results. Nonetheless decision making and funding have remained insufficiently aligned with rhythm and needs of implementation. Differences in disbursement procedures reduced synchronization of delivery and capacity to deliver in line with needs. Working with multiple agencies and implementation partners has aligned with UN reform but efficiency gains could be made. Annual work plans have provided an opportunity for review and learning, with corresponding adjustments, but monitoring overall has suffered from significant weaknesses affecting knowledge management and communication of results.
- Though significant efforts were put into mobilization of funding at the start of the JP RWEE there was a significant (more than two-year) delay in mobilizing funds which produced a challenging start in all countries. The amount of funding secured fell considerably short of initial plans which created challenges in terms of rolling out the programme.
- Annual allocation of funding by donors, different disbursement rates and procedures, and lack of long-term visibility are found by this evaluation to have affected the achievement of results. Annual work plan cycles affected speed of implementation. These factors were found to have compromised a more coherent and planned response amongst Implementing Agencies and Partners on the ground.

- Monitoring of programme processes and results has been weak with duplicate systems producing additional inefficiencies. The JP RWEE programme document did not include a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) plan from the start and this has been a significant limitation. For agencies monitoring at country level this has been a double task with agencies having to report internally to their headquarters against corporate indicators and the requirements of their M&E systems and having to comply with the JP RWEE monitoring requirements once these were made clear.
- The JP RWEE prepared a work plan compliance guidance note which included expectations on resource use. In practice, a pragmatic choice was made to divide resources equally between agencies to overcome biases in resources allocation, in part in light of limited funding. In some countries, attempts were made to align funding with priorities of the workplan, although these were only moderately successful.
- The governance structures have been a critical component of the JP RWEE design and support to implementation. Technical coordination at global and country levels has improved and became more efficient over time, in part through dedicated staff positioned in the JP RWEE. National Steering Committees (NSCs) and the ISC have functioned below expectations in terms of providing guidance on expenditure and fund allocation. Analysis of costs and cost-efficiency has not received attention. Coordinating among four different agencies at technical level and in implementation results in transaction costs.



Sustainability

- Selected elements of the JP RWEE show signs of sustainability that are likely to continue beyond the duration of the programme. The savings groups that have been established through JP RWEE emerge as a powerful transformative element of the programme with considerable likelihood of being sustained. Sustainability remains challenging for activities that require sizeable investments, activities that remunerate women for their work, and those that require capacity to purchase inputs. In addition, sustainability is challenging where implementation partners have key roles and where government services cannot take over these roles.
- Replication of the JP RWEE has been occurring at a modest scale in most contexts. This has happened through elements of the programme being taken over by partners (including government). It has also taken place through the design of other projects that integrate lessons from the JP RWEE, as has been done by subgroups of JP RWEE partners. These efforts do not yet constitute a sufficient guarantee of sustainability.
- The extent to which activities are likely to continue beyond the duration of the programme varies by country and by activity. The extent to which government and other actors can provide a comprehensive range of services to support transformation remains fragile and is critical to sustainability.

- The operational arrangements for the programme have been set up specifically for the JP RWEE and have been replicated in other joint programmes as a good practice. While some ways of working have been adopted by partners, the governance arrangements have not been embedded in national structures that will continue beyond the duration of the programme. Opportunities exist to establish better linkages with existing coordination structures, both within government and within the UN reform.
- All JP RWEE countries are experiencing the effects of climate change, with some facing particularly high levels of vulnerability. Environmental practices have been selectively pursued in some of the countries and by some agencies but have not been consistently incorporated in the design of interventions.



Photo: Women use the milk processing labour saving technologies provided by the JP RWEE. UN Women Ethiopia/2018



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Key lessons

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The synergy, the complementarity and effective national coordination have been the main contributing factors to delivering results and sustainability. The main hindering internal factor has been issues surrounding funding which has impacted the delivery of activities, turnover of staff in some cases, and the capacity to invest in knowledge management and learning. Whilst a conducive policy and government interest have been contributing external factors, natural disasters (including pandemics) and political instability have hindered progress.

Lessons for relevance

- A conducive policy environment for joint programmes and WEE interventions is paramount.
- The inclusion of all stakeholders at the design stage ensures a higher degree of relevance. In countries where there has been higher involvement from the start, the outcomes in terms of agency synergies and partnerships with governments have been higher.

Lessons for coherence

- The role of the national coordinator to foster, nurture and facilitate coherence at the onset and then to maintain a fluid communication between the actors is critical. The JP RWEE national coordinator needs to be a full-time position dedicated to the programme.
- Despite commitment to UN reform, agencies which have different procedures and mandates face internal hurdles to work smoothly in a joint programme. Therefore, it is crucial to invest in developing relationships between agency staff – especially the JP RWEE focal points – to address these challenges openly.
- The importance of securing multi-annual funding has been demonstrated by the JP RWEE as it will stabilize staff and allow for more strategic, multiyear planning.

Lessons for effectiveness

- The approach to working through groups which can become legally recognized structures (e.g. cooperatives) and increasing women's participation in those groups is important to give women's work legitimacy and recognition. These groups can then become formal platforms for women to claim their rights, approach local government for support or have more visibility as economic actors.
- The synergy developed between agencies at the global and national level must translate into synergies on the ground

between implementing partners and between local actors and implementing partners. Mechanisms for coordination between implementing partners are needed to ensure benefits of joint programming/planning.

As social norms, gender imbalance and in particular men's perception of women's roles in society have been hindering factors to women's empowerment, involving men and boys is critical. Men should not feel threatened in their roles and they should see the benefits from changes in women's lives for themselves and their families.

Lessons for relevance

- Joint programming ensures efficiency if coordination work is shared and activities are not duplicated. This requires strong coordination and bottom-up planning.
- Annual funding cycles reduce efficiency, as recruiting new IPs or renewing their contacts is costly. Annual funding also stops programme staff from being able to concentrate on the longer-term vision of the programme. Insecurity of funding reduces employment security for staff and is more likely to result in a high staff turnover.
- An efficient way of allocating resources between the agencies is based on unit costs of activities and dependent on bottom-up planning.

Lessons for sustainability

- A clear vision of sustainability needs to guide the efforts of the programme from the start.
- Investing in government ownership at the sub-national level when implementing activities contributes to sustainability and needs to be fostered.
- Linkages between local actors local municipalities, line agencies, cooperatives or community-based organizations – are important to develop local ownership of the various processes.

Recommendations

The findings and conclusions of this evaluation led to the evaluation team making the following:

Recommendation 1

 At the start of the second phase, the JP RWEE should consolidate support to the same women and continue to strengthen outcomes. The second phase should also allow for the expansion of the approaches and strategies to a larger group of beneficiaries. This will create a critical mass of resilient and sufficiently empowered women who can become catalysts for change in their communities and will extend the benefits to other women and communities.

Recommendation 2

 The JP RWEE should identify and share best practices on building strong partnerships between UN agencies and within countries, to ensure stronger linkages and synergy between all actors.

Recommendation 3

 The JP RWEE country teams should focus on generating learned lessons and evidence and share between countries to have a targeted approach to influence policy.

Recommendation 4

The JP RWEE should mainstream and prioritize climate change across all activities, with a focus on capitalizing on the role that women play in leadership and advocacy on climate change to strengthen preparedness and recovery to climate related disasters.

Recommendation 5

During the design of future phases of the JP RWEE, longer-term strategic planning should be a priority that includes a stronger prioritization of value addition, market linkages to ensure the gains from the programme can be sustained and to enhance the transformative potential of the JP RWEE in the second phase.

Recommendation 6

 JP RWEE success should be secured by multi-annual funding to ensure that transformative results can be achieved and sustained. Senior management of agencies should advocate for the JP RWEE at headquarter level to prioritize JP RWEE fundraising, as well as at the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRC) in each country.the JP RWEE in the second phase.

Acknowledgements

This report is the outcome of the Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment (JP RWEE), a joint global initiative led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), he United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

The research was done by a team of researchers at Mokoro: Author(s) Marlne Buchy, Muriel Visser, Zoe Driscoll, Elizabeth Hodson, Liam Bluer, Sarah Candy and Jim Grabham and led by the JP RWEE Technical Advisory Committee. The authors are particularly thankful to Ashley Hollister, Evaluation Manager and Susan Kaaria, FAO, for providing oversight to this evaluation. The team would also like to thank the members of the JP RWEE Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), including Kawinzi Muiu (WFP), Libor Stloukal (FAO), Ndaya Belichika, Steven Jonckheere and Beatrice Gerli (IFAD), Carla Kraft and Venge Nyirongo (UN Women), and Catherine McCarron (JP RWEE Global Coordinator).

The report would not have been possible without the research undertaken by the JP RWEE country teams in the case study countries, particularly the JP RWEE coordinators, Alma Valdez (Guatemala), Rachana Bhattarai (Nepal), Halimatou Moussa (Niger) and also to the JP RWEE coordinators in Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, and Rwanda. Gratitude is also extended to the many JP RWEE partners who shared their insights and time with us both in-country and through remote interviews, including representatives of the Governments of Norway and Sweden.

Important expertise was provided for the in-depth country case studies by Antonio Adofo Alcántara Suárez (Guatemala), Amadou Diop (Niger), and Irada Gautam (Nepal).

Layout and design by Lauren Rooney.

The Joint Programme on "Accelerating Progress towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment" (JP RWEE) aims to secure rural women's livelihoods and rights in the context of sustainable development. Jointly implemented since 2012 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls (UN Women) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda, the JP RWEE builds on each agency's comparative advantages to improve the status of women in rural areas.

