

Issue N°2

# IDF WOMEN IN DAIRY REPORT

EMPOWERING GLOBAL IMPACT



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## About this publication

The Women in Dairy Report by the International Dairy Federation (IDF) explores efforts around the world to empower women within the dairy sector. This publication provides insights into how women are supported to thrive and address challenges in transformative food systems. It highlights various initiatives and research linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. The report covers a broad range of activities across the dairy value chain—from farming and processing to research and education, and policy and governance—showcasing the sector's commitment to advancing gender equality and fostering sustainable development worldwide.

## Reference statement

International Dairy Federation. (2024). IDF Women in Dairy Report - Empowering global impact (Issue N°2).

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# FOREWORD

The International Dairy Federation (IDF) is dedicated to raising awareness about the significant contributions of women within the dairy sector. Our goal is to underscore how women's empowerment is essential for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), particularly SDG 5 which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Through the IDF Task Force on Women in Dairy, we are committed to advancing gender equality and enhancing women's roles across the sector. IDF initiatives are designed to increase awareness of their impact in various domains, including farming, industry, science, policy, and governance. Resources such as the IDF Women in Dairy Knowledge Hub are integral to this mission, showcasing women's achievements and providing inspiration and role models across different contexts. These efforts aim to elevate the visibility of women's work and foster greater appreciation and support for their essential roles within the dairy sector.

As part of these efforts, the second edition of the IDF Women in Dairy Report celebrates the transformative role of women in the global dairy sector, highlighting how this sector contributes to their empowerment across multiple dimensions. From improving nutrition and enhancing livelihoods to boosting family incomes and advancing educational opportunities, the dairy sector plays a pivotal role in uplifting women and fostering gender equality.

It features 16 case studies from across all continents, including two examples with a global reach. These cases illustrate the diverse ways in which dairy is driving progress, from local communities to international platforms. Women in dairy not only contribute significantly to the sector's growth but also drive improvements in community well-being and sustainability.

Looking ahead, our vision is to continue advancing SDG 5 by deepening our engagement with women in dairy, showcasing the evidence linking women's empowerment and food systems transformation and continuing to inspire women around the world.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to all contributors and advocates who are making a difference. Your dedication ensures that women and girls continue to thrive within the dairy sector and beyond.

**Laurence Rycken**

IDF Director General



# Messages from the Co-Chairs of the IDF Task Force on Women in Dairy

I am blessed to have been surrounded by people in both my personal and professional life that strive for positive change. Not always knowing that their actions would make such a big impact, but simply doing what they believed was right.

We can't rely on chance to ensure change will happen. Sometimes as global citizens, we have to decide to define a problem and collectively take steps – both big and small - to turn it into a positive movement and create momentum for change.

Since it was established in 2022, the Task Force on Women in Dairy has brought together a wide range of women and men from around the globe, who have a strong desire to understand the role of women in the dairy value chain, to identify the range of initiatives across global dairy that will help in meeting SDG 5 and to help IDF become a source of knowledge and inspiration.

As the famous Marian Wright Edelman said: “You can't be, what you can't see” I believe it's our responsibility to share what we know with each other, to celebrate successes big and small, and to be clear about what remains to be done.



Publications like this report are crucial in showcasing initiatives from around the world which focus on helping women in dairy. My sincere thanks to all those who have shared their stories in this report and here's to ever greater progress in the future.

## **Dr Judith Bryans**

Chief Executive, Dairy UK



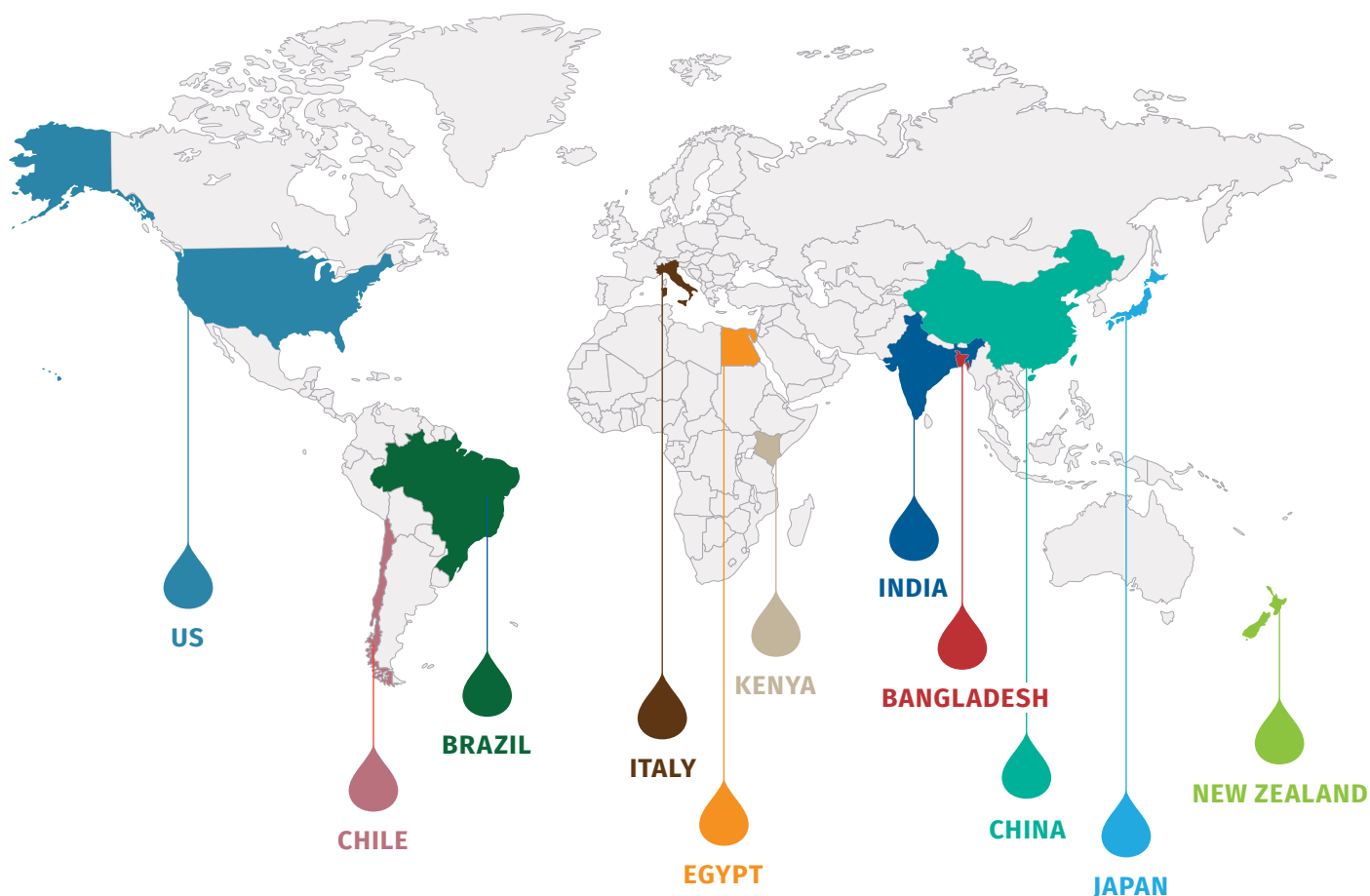
In a world where change is inevitable, and progress is sometimes not visible, it's imperative that we keep striving for positive improvements in all that we do. Sometimes that is simply a smile or words of encouragement, and other times much deeper work is required. The IDF Women in Dairy report is a combination of both these things - recognition of the incredible work happening throughout the dairy world, alongside the Task Force on Women in Dairy focus to better understand how to support the global dairy industry in achieving SDG 5 – gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

My experience in life and career has shown me that the dairy industry can be a vehicle for driving improvements for all, and especially women, in terms of nutrition and health, socio-economic situations, basic human rights such as land ownership and bank account access, career development, through to leadership and governance positions that have the possibility of driving significant progress for gender equality. SDG 5 is a global goal that I am committed to personally, and professionally, and will never give up on this during my lifetime.

I have deep gratitude to the many people who have contributed their time, energy and experience, to share their insights with the global dairy industry. It is my hope that this is just the beginning of the IDF Women in Dairy task force snowballing towards a future that will bring empowerment for all women and girls, through a multitude of focal points.

## **Ms Lynda McDonald**

Project Manager Dairy Development, Tetra Pak



## GLOBAL

CFS - Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls Empowerment

ISO - Driving Gender Equality Through International Standards

- Female Dairy Entrepreneurs Defy Odds in Bangladesh
- Justiceiras Project
- Women in Action: Technology, Collaboration...and Friendship!
- Empowering Women With Functional Nutrition Stimulating Dairy Products With 'Her Power'
- Alban Baladn
- Diversifying Women Livelihoods Through Ajarpura Dairy Cooperative Society
- Empowering Women Dairy Farmers in India
- Empowering Women Dairy Farmers Through The Sundarban Model Of Organic Dairy Cooperative
- The Milk Women of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow
- Achieving Gender Equality in Kenya's Dairy Sector
- Weezesha Initiative: Empowering Women and Youth Through Dairy Farming
- Unveiling Gender Gaps in Live Animals and Milk Value Chains Towards Women's Empowerment
- Breaking Barriers
- Advancing Opportunities for Women with the State of Women in Dairy Report and its Implementation







## BANGLADESH

# Female Dairy Entrepreneurs Defy Odds in Bangladesh

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## How the project supports SDG 5

The project directly addresses SDG 5 targets by creating income-generating opportunities for women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh through the Pushti Ambassador Partnership project. By providing training, support, and access to markets, the project helps women overcome barriers such as lack of market access, limited finance, and gender discrimination that hinder their economic empowerment.

The project provides women-led businesses with access to markets and corporate value chains. Additionally, by offering capacity development and skill-building programs, the project addresses the need for women entrepreneurs to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed in their businesses.

Furthermore, the project indirectly contributes to the SDG 5 target by focusing on enhancing the use of enabling technology to promote women's empowerment. Through the provision of digital training tools and the utilization of technology in the project's operations, women entrepreneurs are equipped with the necessary tools and resources to enhance their business skills and reach a wider customer base.

In summary, the project supports the achievement of SDG 5 by promoting women's economic empowerment, providing equal access to entrepreneurship opportunities, and fostering women's participation in decision-making roles.



## The big picture

Bangladesh has made significant progress in reducing poverty, increasing literacy rates, and narrowing the gender gap over the past decade. However, challenges remain, such as approximately 22 million people living below the poverty line and a slowdown in income opportunity creation. According to the National Statistics Bureau data, Bangladeshi women (approximately 43%) are less likely than men (approximately 81%) to participate in the labor force. Additionally, wage gap still remains an issue as men earn 35.8% more on average than women.

The project: "Pushti Ambassadors Partnership - Creating jobs for female entrepreneurs in Bangladesh" aimed to enhance access to income opportunities for female entrepreneurs through sale of Arla's affordable dairy nutrition, Dano Daily Pushti. Pushti means nutrition. The female

entrepreneurs are located in rural markets in South-West Bangladesh, and the project has therefore improved access to Arla's affordable dairy nutrition for families with low-income, addressing challenges such as poor infrastructure and low product awareness.

The project was managed in an innovative cross-sectorial partnership between Arla Foods and Bopinc, a Dutch NGO to achieve that goal.

## The premise

The "Pushti Ambassadors Partnership" aims to empower women economically and improve nutrition in rural Bangladesh by increasing sales of Arla's affordable dairy nutrition, boosting micro-entrepreneur incomes, focusing on rural marketing and distribution, and supporting recruitment and training.



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### Getting the wheel in motion

The project strategically identified locations with high demand but limited product availability adjacent to Arla's next-mile distribution leg to ensure sustainable distribution post-project completion. The distribution network and uninterrupted product supply were mapped out to ensure smooth operations. 200 Pushti Ambassadors were recruited based on specific criteria, including entrepreneurial mindset and capacity. Needs assessment exercises were conducted to tailor training content and plans for the entrepreneurs. The program provided digital training tools and sales management programs, along with sellable products as starting capital without the risk of misutilization. As a result, women entrepreneurs were able to generate income by selling Dano Daily Pushti (DDP) in their small shops, an affordable powder milk produced by Arla, in areas with limited opportunities. Now these dynamic entrepreneurs are part of Arla rural distribution network, and continues to improve the livelihood for themselves and their families.

### The history of success

The results of the project were highly encouraging and has created a positive effect in terms of both factual outcomes and socio-economic impact.

- 99% of 200 retailers actively sold DDP, with 100% of Pushti Ambassadors (PAs) purchasing products with their own funds.
- This has led to a 33% increase in the Pushti Ambassadors' income, indicating potential for further expansion.
- Arla Foods supplies 200 female retailers through their Sub-Distributor network
- Arla Foods continues to scale up its gender inclusive network.
- A women entrepreneurship awareness campaign identified over 4000+ women willing to run businesses, take jobs, or participate in economic activities.

There are a few intangible outcomes too. Women inspired by the name "Pushti Apa" (literal translation: Nutrition Sister) and have taken on a more active role in promoting nutrition in their community. Their increasing

respect within the community is also earning them visits from sales representatives of other companies.

### The value of the initiative

From a contextual point-of-view, the rural Bangladesh still sees its women as home managers rather than bread earners; unless any accidental circumstances are involved.

Sharmin Kabir's husband got paralyzed in a road accident in 2007 which prompted her to start her own business. Despite initial societal challenges, she now holds a place of respect within her community, and this is true for almost all the ambassadors. The respect derived from the utility and convenience these women were able to bring to their societies.

Interviews revealed that the women experienced positive business changes, including growth from new products, capital reinvestment, consistent product supply, and cost reductions. A significant improvement was the direct product delivery by Sales Representatives, saving the



“In the beginning, many people raised their eyebrows and taunted me. But now everyone respects me and everyone in the area calls me ‘Pusthi Apa’.”

Sharmin Kabir from Morrelganj.

retailers time and travel costs, and providing a wider range of products. This has proven that working with women-run micro-shops is a more efficient and viable way to support women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.

### New opportunities

The partners are assessing the sustainability of its Pushti Ambassadors in the coming six months, which will guide Arla Foods scale-up strategy, to include more women retail shops in their expanding rural network. Arla Foods will also strengthen its collaboration

with Sub-Distributors, ensuring an efficient and commercially viable sales channel to reach better the next mile of consumers living in more remote areas.

### More information

[The inspiring tale of Ronju Begum becoming an entrepreneur \(dhakatribune.com\)](http://dhakatribune.com)

[Triumph of resilience: Women entrepreneurs defy odds in Khulna | The Business Standard \(tbsnews.net\)](http://tbsnews.net)

[Creating social impact through a commercial approach | LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/arlafoods)



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## BRAZIL

# Justiceiras Project: Helping Women in Vulnerable Situations Who Have Suffered Any Kind of Violence Using Milk Cartons

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## How the project supports SDG 5

The project led by Lactalis Brazil contributes to achieving SDG 5.2 by establishing the first online multidisciplinary reporting channel dedicated to supporting, guiding, and assisting girls and women who are victims of violence. Operating 24/7, this platform offers round-the-clock reception and support services, making it a critical resource for those in need. Over time, it has evolved into a national and international network, providing comprehensive assistance to victims of all forms of violence. Through this initiative, we are actively working to eliminate violence against women and girls, in both public and private spheres.

## The big picture

Brazil faces a severe crisis in violence against women, ranking as the fifth highest in femicide rates globally, with a staggering frequency of physical violence occurring every seven seconds. The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated this issue, leading to increased incidents of domestic abuse and highlighting the urgent need for effective support systems. In response to this escalating crisis, the project called “Justiceiras” provides crucial channels of support and guidance for victims, aiming to bridge the gap between survivors and the resources they need. The project plays a vital role in raising awareness about domestic violence, offering practical help and legal support, and fostering a culture of zero tolerance for abuse. By addressing these needs, the “Justiceiras” Project not only

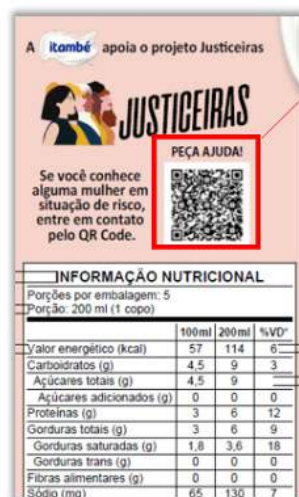
aids immediate victims but also contributes to long-term societal change and improved protection for women across Brazil.

## The premise

The “Justiceiras” Project aims to support women experiencing domestic violence by providing crucial assistance and resources. Operated entirely by volunteers, the initiative has expanded nationwide, leveraging Lactalis UHT milk cartons to publicize its support channel and reach vulnerable victims across Brazil effectively.

## Getting the wheel in motion

The “Justiceiras” Project, initiated during the pandemic due to the surge in violence against women, is an ongoing initiative designed to provide vital support to victims. In collaboration with Parmalat,



The QR code to access the exclusive Lactalis help request form will be available on all our UHT milk cartons:





“Brazil is one of the world leaders in violence against women, being the fifth country in the world with the highest femicide rate, and every 7 seconds a woman suffers physical violence”

**Guilherme Portella**

Elegê, Batavo, and Itambé, the project has introduced a unified reporting channel. Individuals can access a comprehensive support network by means of a QR Code printed on around 200 million UHT milk cartons of the brands Parmalat, Elegê, Batavo, and Itambé.

The project has a group of more than 13,000 volunteers throughout Brazil and in more than 27 countries around the world. This network includes experts in justice, health, psychology, social assistance, and reception, offering a multidisciplinary approach to aid survivors. This innovative strategy ensures that women in vulnerable situations receive immediate, coordinated help, enhancing their safety and support nationwide.

On the day of the launch, an online event was held across all factories, engaging over 700 employees. The event served not only to introduce the “Justiceiras” Project but also to emphasize its importance and relevance. It provided a valuable opportunity to educate and train employees on recognizing and understanding the different types of violence. By clarifying these crucial issues, the session empowered participants to better support the initiative and contribute to the project’s mission of combating violence against women.

### **The history of success**

The “Justiceiras” Project has achieved remarkable results since its launch, reaching every state in Brazil and even extending support to Brazilian women abroad. The initiative has received 279 reports of violence, with 111 cases classified as very serious. Notably, 102 of these complaints represent women who reported abuse for the first time, reflecting the project’s success in building trust and credibility. In the last report, it was also shown that the majority of the women affected by violence were between 41 and 50 years old and unemployed.

This nationwide effort underscores the project’s effectiveness in providing essential support and fostering a safe environment for survivors to seek help, demonstrating its significant impact on addressing and mitigating violence against women.

### **The value of the initiative**

The “Justiceiras” Project was developed with one objective: to facilitate access to the justice system and the protection network for all girls and women in situations of violence and vulnerability in Brazil or Brazilians abroad.

We learned that the project has great relevance when our UHT milk boxes,

a basic food item, can be a means of helping women in situations of violence and generating collective awareness of the problem.

### **New opportunities**

The future of the project and the opportunity is to increasingly facilitate access for all girls and women in situations of violence and vulnerability in Brazil or Brazilians abroad, as well as raising awareness of the issue more widely.

### **More information**

[Latest victims report 1 March 2023 – 2 May 2024](#)

# UN Committee on World Food Security endorses Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition

Article by Janice Giddens, U.S. Dairy Export Council

Women make major contributions to the strength and resilience of the global dairy sector with women leading 37 million dairy farms and 80 million women engaging in dairy farming [1]. Nearly half of the world's food supply is produced by women [2]. Despite this, large gaps remain in achieving gender equality in agrifood systems. Women worldwide lack sufficient access to land, livestock, inputs, technology, and financing to be able to significantly increase farm productivity and their livelihoods. Approximately fifty-three percent of all retail trade workers in agrifood systems are women, but women trade in less-profitable commodities than men. On average, women engaged in wage employment in agriculture earn eighty-two cents for every dollar earned by men, and women are more likely to experience food insecurity as compared to men. Closing these gaps, along with many others, would greatly improve food security, nutrition and increase economic growth [3].

Recognizing that women and girls continue to disproportionately face barriers to accessing and controlling productive resources, assets, education, and financial services, largely stemming from gender discrimination and inequalities that worsen food security and nutrition, the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) decided to undertake work to develop Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment (GEWGE) in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition.

These guidelines seek to:

- Support Member States, development partners and other stakeholders to advance gender equality, women's and girls' rights, empowerment and leadership, as part of their efforts to eradicate hunger, food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition;
- Provide concrete policy guidance based on good practices and lessons learnt on gender mainstreaming, gender-responsive public policies, programmes and innovative solutions;
- Foster greater policy coherence among GEWGE and food security and nutrition agendas and promote mutually reinforcing policy measures; and
- Contribute to accelerating action by all stakeholders at all levels, including farmers' and women's organizations, to achieve food security and improve nutrition outcomes for women and girls.

Janice Giddens, an active IDF Expert and VP of Sustainable Nutrition at the U.S. Dairy Export Council, participated in virtual and in-person negotiations to develop the Guidelines as a member of the CFS Private Sector Mechanism. She advocated for guidelines that seek to improve women's access to international markets,

tools and resources that support improved productivity gains, and livelihoods. As women make most of the food purchasing decisions for a household, improving their livelihoods and earnings can increase their purchasing power for nutritious foods, such as dairy, for themselves and their families. Commendable efforts that U.S. dairy companies are actively initiating and supporting to promote women's empowerment and gender equality were also shared with the Committee.



After years of difficult deliberations, during CFS 51 in October 2023, the Committee endorsed the Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition. Giddens was present for the endorsement and delivered the Private Sector Mechanism plenary speech, congratulating the committee on the passage of the Guidelines, and reinforcing the need to improve women's access to productive resources and nutrient-dense foods such as dairy. She also participated in a CFS 51 panel discussion in support of the guidelines which centered on improving food security for female farmers. This panel provided a platform for robust discussion on the needs of female farmers, and for IDF initiatives and activities on women's empowerment to be highlighted in an important global forum.

As we advance toward the International Year of the Woman Farmer in 2026, and endeavour to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 5, let us carefully consider how our programs, policies, and initiatives can advance gender equality for a more inclusive and sustainable food system. Dairying continues to be a catalyst for female empowerment, entrepreneurship, educational attainment and thriving rural communities.

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## CHILE

# Women in Action: Technology, collaboration... and friendship!

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## How the project supports SDG 5

By empowering themselves with knowledge, accessing resources equitably and using modern technologies, these farmers not only improve their productivity and economic stability, but also strengthen their position in decision-making and leadership within their communities. Today, they hold leadership positions in farmers' associations such as Aproval, Aroleche Osorno and Fundación GTT. Therefore, the initiative contributes to SDG 5.5 - *Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life, and SDG 5.A - Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.*

## The big picture

In Chile, it is estimated that between 15 and 20% of dairy farms are managed by women, who normally take over these enterprises later in life due to late generational replacement, work decisions and family duties.

In the case of this group, most of them are professional women, who recognised the need to overcome technological and business gaps, added to the interest in uniting under their common realities, which today has led them to leadership roles at the level of productive guilds, usually in charge of men.

“More than just a technical group, they are a family. Chilean women dairy farmers gather monthly to share technologies, offer advice and strengthen their bonds of friendship, all while focusing on continually improving their activities.”

The initiative of Chilean women dairy farmers, GTT Mujeres en Acción (translated as Technology Transfer Group Women in Action), addresses gaps in access to new technologies, leadership opportunities, and challenges that women in agriculture traditionally face. The initiative meets the need for inclusive support networks where women can collaborate, exchange ideas, and learn from each other, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose. Additionally, the initiative promotes sustainable farming practices and animal welfare, addressing broader environmental challenges while also improving the quality and efficiency of dairy production.

## The premise

The aim of the initiative is to create a platform where women can share technologies and engage in discussions on key topics such as dairy sustainability, animal welfare, soil care, and energy efficiency. The core objective is to establish a strong, enduring network of women with shared interests, fostering collaboration and continuous improvement in these critical areas.

## Getting the wheel in motion

Fifteen years ago, twenty women dairy farmers came together through the support and encouragement of the National agricultural and livestock research institute (INIA), brought together by Soledad Espíndola, a veterinarian from the COLUN cooperative.

The group meets monthly, following a structured technical agenda throughout the year. These meetings typically take place on a member's farm, where the focus is on reviewing farm management practices and sharing experiences. Each session starts with a personal catch-up, underscoring the importance of human connection and friendship within the group.

During each visit, the host explains the technical work conducted on their dairy farm, followed by a group tour of the facilities and any new developments. After the tour, the host receives valuable feedback from the other members, which is highly regarded and beneficial for improving their own practices.

Despite diverse agronomic and productive realities, the GTT Mujeres en Acción remains



focused on producing high-quality milk through sustainable practices and ensuring animal welfare.

### The history of success

The success stems from both the strength of their collective and the high level of technical discussion achieved. Each meeting not only serves as an opportunity to enjoy and appreciate the host's efforts in preparing technical visits but also reinforces their commitment to regular, organized activities.

The group has made significant strides in developing their family dairies, with all members now engaging in financial management and strategic planning based on production data. They have also advanced in obtaining official farm certifications and other sustainability and animal welfare credentials. Additionally, they are actively promoting recycling and waste management on their farms.

This group, driven by a continuous quest for technological solutions, has explored productive practices in various countries. Their international learning includes visits to dairy farms in Australia, New Zealand, France, Denmark, and the United States,

with a planned overseas trip every two years—a target they have consistently met.

Five years ago, the group became independent and began a new phase of growth by welcoming new members, further expanding their impact and expertise.

Today, this initiative stands as a prime example of collaborative effort and technological innovation in a vital sector of Chile's dairy industry.

### The value of the initiative

"Unity is strength", says Alejandra Klagges (member of the group), "this is a group where maintaining the discipline of the meetings, the dynamics and the periodicity, have allowed group growth and projection." The commitment of those who have continued in the group is notorious, they emphasize.

For the president, Karin Weber, "you learn how to do things, the mistakes of others, and in this sense, it is important to be transparent and clear".

"You go further in a group than alone. To get there fast, go alone, but to go far, go together, that's why Mujeres en Acción allows us to be associated, collaborating

with a clear purpose," says Paulina Carrasco (member of the group).

### New opportunities

The dairy workforce is both a constant challenge and an opportunity to train and contribute to their education. Currently, they are in a phase of expanding and integrating more members, including young women, utilizing social media to raise awareness about the group's activities and the dairy sector.

Ongoing training is essential, alongside maintaining enthusiasm and reinforcing group cohesion. They review new topics of need 1 to 2 times a year. The focus remains on strengthening the group, recognizing women's efforts, enhancing leadership, creating workshops, and preparing for emerging productive scenarios.

### More information

<https://codesser.cl/2022/11/15/gtt-mujeres-en-accion/>

GTT Mujeres en Acción. 2022 <https://agrocolum.cl/grupo-de-transferencia-tecnologica-mujeres-en-accion-1/>

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## CHINA

# Empowering women with functional nutrition stimulating dairy products with ‘Her Power’

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## How the project supports SDG 5

Mengniu has built an all-encompassing digital management system, integrating technology, product innovation, data operations, industry operations, and open innovation. This integration infuses new vitality into the company's development. Simultaneously, this model optimizes the consumer experience and improves operational efficiency. Moreover, it offers women more opportunities to showcase themselves and realize their self-worth, thereby advancing social inclusivity and progress. Therefore, this initiative supports SDG 5.B - *Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.*

## The big picture

Since its inception, Mengniu has established and perfected a Women's Committee, making the protection of legal rights and special interests of female employees a primary focus of its operations. The company continually explores new methods for addressing the needs of female employees in the evolving corporate landscape. Mengniu is dedicated to addressing the nutritional and health needs of Chinese women, empowering their inner health and outer beauty. The company has developed and launched nearly 20 female-specific functional nutrition products targeting areas such as gut microbiome regulation, bone health improvement, sleep enhancement and weight management. Some of the flagship products include “Chang Le Dao Probiotic Solid Beverage (for gut microbiome regulation), Deluxe Low-Fat High-Calcium Milk (for bone health improvement),



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FAFACAT GABA  $\gamma$ -Aminobutyric Acid Gummies (for sleep enhancement), Corn Silk Mulberry Leaf Tea (for diuretic and anti-swelling).” These products emphasize women's specific nutritional health and promote their comprehensive development and empowerment.

## The premise

Mengniu focuses on developing functional nutritional products for women, enhancing their health rights and addressing their health needs throughout all stages of life. By utilizing digital channels, the company swiftly reaches female consumers, aiming to raise awareness about women's health and improve their quality of life.

## Getting the wheel in motion

Concept: Mengniu is committed to making consumer health a top priority. The company aims to leverage AI-driven solutions to integrate health into family life. By addressing the challenges of low accessibility to nutritionists and the high cost of health services for families in China, Mengniu strives to enable more consumers

to benefit from high-quality nutritional and health services.

Development Process and Impact: Mengniu has partnered with multiple technology companies to jointly launch the world's first model in the field of nutrition and health-MENGNIU.GPT. With the support of AI, high-quality and personalized nutritional health services will provide each family with an enhanced health experience.

Usage: The “WOW Health+” platform represents a significant application MENGNIU.GPT, serving as an AI-driven integrated platform for nutritional health services. It offers consumers a range of services including health assessments, nutrition plan development, and personalized nutritional advice, significantly enhancing the convenience of consumer health management.

Correlation with Dairy: MENGNIU.GPT, as a new frontier for the intelligent transformation of the dairy industry, can meet the personalized and scientifically







informed nutritional health needs of female consumers, optimizing the consumption experience.

#### The history of success

Mengniu has developed and launched nearly 20 female-specific functional nutrition products targeting areas such as gut microbiome regulation, bone health improvement, sleep enhancement, and weight management.

At the intersection of technology and nutritional health, Ms. Li, the female Chief Data Officer (CDO) of Mengniu, has partnered with leading tech companies such as Tsinghua Zhipu AI to successfully develop the Mengniu nutritional health Q&A text generation algorithm (MENGNIU.GPT). This model was registered with the National Internet Information Office for deep synthesis service algorithms in June 2024 (sixth batch). It is the first to be approved in the nutritional and health sector as a consumer-facing application in China.

The application of digital platforms has advanced the empowerment of women's functional nutrition. These platforms provide precise nutritional consultations

**“Honoring every female worker with love, safeguarding her rights through actions, empowering women, and allowing her strength to shine with limitless brilliance!”**

for women while also facilitating Mengniu's development of more functional products that meet the needs of female consumers. This approach deeply satisfies women's demands for personalized and scientifically based nutritional health services.

#### The value of the initiative

Mengniu's women's empowerment initiatives enhance employee well-being and corporate competitiveness while promoting gender equality. By offering exclusive

benefits and career opportunities, Mengniu creates a supportive work environment. The company emphasizes female leadership development and uses innovative technologies to serve female consumers. Mengniu also supports women's football, showcasing its social responsibility.

#### New opportunities

Mengniu plans to expand women's empowerment through technological innovation, offering personalized nutritional solutions tailored to women's health needs. We will broaden female leadership development programs, providing career advancement opportunities to inspire female employees. By optimizing a female-friendly work environment and strengthening collaborations with social organizations, we aim to promote women's rights and gender equality. Mengniu will advocate for and implement a corporate culture of gender equality, creating more opportunities for women and fostering social inclusivity and progress.

#### More information

[https://www.mengniu.com.cn/news/group\\_news/detail/1752.html](https://www.mengniu.com.cn/news/group_news/detail/1752.html)

## EGYPT

# Alban Baladna: Empowering Women Dairy Farmers to Enhance Egyptian Food Security and Rural Livelihoods

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## How the project supports SDG 5

Women in Egypt play an essential role in agriculture, but their contributions often go unnoticed, limiting their potential and negatively impacting the sector. By empowering women dairy farmers, this project enhances agricultural performance and helps uplift rural communities. Notably, over 71% of women in rural Egypt work in informal, unprotected jobs [1].

Overall, the project nourishes the following targets of SDG 5:

- 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.
- 5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.
- 5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.
- 5. A Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.

The Alban Baladna initiative - a collaboration between Danone Egypt, Danone Ecosystem, and Care Egypt - is paving the way for a sustainable food system in Egypt. By establishing milk collection centers and empowering farmers, particularly women, this project has created jobs, uplifted 8,500 farmers, 95% of them being women, and positively impacted over 27,000 families.

## The big picture

Domestic milk production in Egypt meets only 65-72% of demand, with the rest covered by milk powder imports. Smallholder dairy farmers are crucial for food security, contributing about 85% of total milk production. Before Alban Baladna, farmers in southern Egypt produced milk mainly for subsistence or byproducts, selling through informal traders at poor quality and arbitrary prices, leaving them vulnerable and unable to secure stable incomes.

Egyptian smallholder farmers also face environmental challenges like water scarcity, inefficient irrigation, rising temperatures, soil salination, and erosion. While struggling with access to resources, including training, finance, and market infrastructure.

Socially, women in agriculture are often marginalized, affecting their empowerment and the sector's performance. Empowering

women through education and services is vital for improving livelihoods and fostering sustainable farming.

In response, CARE Egypt, Danone Ecosystem, and Danone Egypt co-created the Alban Baladna project to have on positive impact at social, economic and environmental levels.

## The premise

- 1) Empower small-scale milk producers and farmers - a significant proportion of whom are women - to enhance their decision-making abilities and improve their livelihoods, thereby fostering economic independence and growth.
- 2) Build a sustainable supply chain that not only meets the current demand but also mitigates the environmental impacts, contributing to the long-term development of the dairy industry.



## Getting the wheel in motion

Alban Baladna provides comprehensive support in:

- farmer training,
- vaccination campaigns,
- vet services,
- and infrastructure investment, transforming collection centers into service hubs.

The first phase of Alban Baladna introduced equipment to ensure high-quality milk, crucial for Egypt's dairy industry. Within the first ten months, local assembly centers increased production from 200 kilos to 5 tons per day, surpassing the initial goal of 3 tons. The second and third phases focused on further increasing production and improving milk quality[7].

Women empowerment is at the center of the project. They have been recruited and trained as community leaders to secure access to education and services. This training has helped farmers adopt best practices, increasing milk yield and quality, generating more revenue, and reducing environmental impact of catering activities [8]. Community Leaders are the liaison between the Milk Collection Centers (MCCs) and farmers. They have played a critical role in changing rural farmers' mindsets to begin formally selling milk (previously considered a taboo), outreach to new farmers, and coordinating the provision of farmer services (e.g., vaccination campaigns).

Phasing of the project:

## The history of success

### SOCIAL IMPACT:

24 women have become community leaders, sharing knowledge and recruiting new farmers

### DATA FOR 2022:

- The project allowed to empower 8,500 farmers through sustainable revenue streams, 95% of whom being women who are involved in the milk reception and delivery.
- The project created 190 jobs among which 36 of them are held by women.
- More than 27,000 family members benefited from an increased or secured revenues.

### DATA FROM 2024:

- ~€1.5M estimated annual incremental income (adjusted for 2022+ price inflation, €3.3M otherwise) to ~3,700 active Alban Baladna farmers.

## DEVELOPING THE EGYPT SMALLHOLDER DAIRY SECTOR BY WORKING ACROSS THE VALUE CHAIN [DATA FROM 2024]:

- 1) The initiative helped to make significant quality improvements over time (+8% protein, +6% fat, -74% rejections), outperforming alternative milk sources.
- 2) Vaccination & AI campaigns: 15,000 cows vaccinated, 5,555 artificially inseminated per year.
- 3) Linkage to vet services: 6,000+ cows serviced via vet clinic and portable vet service.
- 4) 25 Collectors employed by MCCs to increase accessibility to farmers.
- 5) Construction and renovation of 24 Milk Collection Points and 6 Milk Collection Centers

The initiative won the 2022 GEEIS-SGD [Gender equality & diversity for European and International standard - Sustainable Development Goals] award.



## The value of the initiative

Alban Baladna has driven grassroots change by recognizing women's crucial role in sustainable solutions. Empowering women fosters growth in families, communities, economies, and the environment.

"Before, my husband was the one working and providing money. I was only milking the cow and giving it to the trader. Now I'm running the milk sales, managing the finances – I went from being a housewife to a businesswoman." – Sabra, Farmer, Halabia MCC

The project provided training and technical support to local dairy farmers, focusing on women, unlocking their potential and contributing to economic growth and environmental sustainability.

The initiative's transformative impact on the community and its replicable model highlights the power of empowering women and investing in local resources. It demonstrates the importance of community-centric and gender-sensitive approaches for sustainable development.

The uniqueness of the approach also lies on its systemic approach, encompassing social, environmental and economic challenges.

## New opportunities

Looking ahead, Alban Baladna faces opportunities to deepen impact and ensure long-term sustainability:

### 1 – Expand services to farmers:

- Genetic improvement.
- Expansion of veterinary service coverage.
- Boost local feed production.
- Potential access to finance programs for farmer improvements.

### 2 – Continue improving MCCs

- MCCs require financing support for large infrastructure investments.
- Milk chillers to preserve quality.
- Milk analysis / quality testing equipment at Milk Collection Points: avoids cost of rejecting milk once received at the MCC.
- Larger storage tanks for increased capacity.
- Solar infrastructure for energy efficiency (subject to space constraints).

### 3 – Environment al impact

- Intensify efforts to drive reduction in carbon intensity (via productivity, herd management, portfolio management, etc.).

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## INDIA

# Diversifying Women Livelihoods through Ajarpura Dairy Cooperative Society

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## How the project supports SDG 5

The case study of Ajarpura Dairy Cooperative Society strongly supports the achievement of SDG 5 (Gender Equality) through its various initiatives aimed at empowering women in the dairy sector. By providing comprehensive training in dairy practices, value-added product creation, and mushroom farming, the program directly contributes to the economic empowerment of women. This approach aligns with SDG 5.5, which emphasizes ensuring women's full participation and leadership in all areas of decision-making.

The establishment of a women-led beekeeping self-help group and the provision of training in creating products like wafers, pickles, and masala powders address SDG 5.4, which advocates for the recognition and value of unpaid care and domestic work. The initiatives not only create additional income sources but also enhance women's skills and leadership roles.

Furthermore, the local retail outlet managed entirely by women fosters SDG 5.5 by promoting women's leadership and entrepreneurship within the community. This outlet provides women with a platform to showcase their products and gain economic independence, which supports SDG 5.1—ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls.

Through these targeted efforts, Ajarpura Dairy Cooperative Society not only improves women's socio-economic status but also advances gender equality by increasing their visibility, market access, and leadership opportunities, directly contributing to the broader goals of SDG 5.



© Ajarpura Dairy Cooperative Society

## The big picture

The Ajarpura Dairy Cooperative Society's initiative is a transformative model of rural development and gender empowerment. Located in a community where dairy farming is a primary livelihood, the Society has leveraged its extensive network and trust within the village to address multiple socio-economic challenges.

**Context and background:** The initiative began with the goal of improving the livelihoods of women dairy farmers by enhancing their skills and creating diverse income streams. Recognizing that women in rural areas often face barriers to economic opportunities and leadership roles, Ajarpura Dairy introduced various programs to address these challenges. These programs include training in dairy best practices, value-added product creation, and non-traditional farming activities such as mushroom cultivation and beekeeping.

**Overall importance:** By providing training and resources, the initiative has significantly enhanced the socio-economic status of women. Training in dairy farming and value-added products boosts productivity and income, while beekeeping and the production of items like wafers and pickles create additional revenue streams. The establishment of a women-managed retail outlet further empowers women by giving them direct control over the marketing and sale of their products.

## Interconnections and wider

**implications:** The interconnection of these elements like training, skill development, income diversification, and leadership opportunities creates a comprehensive approach to rural development. The initiative not only addresses immediate economic needs but also fosters long-term sustainability by enhancing women's roles in the community. By increasing their income





## “Empowering Women, Enriching Lives: Ajarpura Dairy’s Path to Gender Equality and Economic Growth.”

Laurette Batstone

and leadership roles, it challenges traditional gender norms and promotes gender equality. On a wider scale, these efforts contribute to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), demonstrating how localized initiatives can drive global development goals. The success of this model offers valuable lessons for other communities and organizations seeking to integrate gender equality and economic empowerment into their development strategies.

### The premise

The Ajarpura Dairy Cooperative Society aims to empower rural women by providing training in dairy farming, value-added products, and diverse activities like mushroom farming and beekeeping. This initiative enhances income, fosters leadership, and promotes gender equality, supported by a women-managed retail outlet that showcases their products.

### Getting the wheel in motion

The Ajarpura Dairy Cooperative Society's initiative began in 2020 and was implemented through a structured approach aimed at enhancing the livelihoods of rural women.

Actions Taken:

1. **Needs assessment and planning (initial phase):** The initiative began with a comprehensive assessment of the community's needs and the existing skills of women dairy farmers. This involved engaging with local stakeholders to identify gaps and opportunities for training and development.
2. **Training and skill development (ongoing):** The core of the initiative involved organizing training sessions in dairy farming best practices, including improving milch animal productivity. Additional training was provided in creating value-added products from dairy waste and non-traditional activities such as mushroom farming and beekeeping.
3. **Establishment of self-help groups and retail outlets (mid-phase):** A women's beekeeping self-help group was established, offering specialized training and support. Simultaneously, a retail outlet was set up within Ajarpura village, managed by local women, to market and sell products made by the women farmers.

#### 4. Product development and marketing

**(ongoing):** Women were trained in producing various items like wafers, pickles, and masala powder. The products were showcased at exhibitions nationwide to gain visibility and market reach.

#### 5. Monitoring and evaluation

**(continuous):** The initiative includes ongoing monitoring and evaluation to assess impact, address challenges, and ensure continuous improvement.

Overall, the initiative is a dynamic and evolving program designed to provide ongoing support and opportunities for women in rural areas, with actions and timelines tailored to meet their needs and promote long-term empowerment.

The initiative is still active and continues to evolve with new training programs and product development efforts.

### The history of success

The Ajarpura Dairy Cooperative Society initiative led to significant outcomes: approximately 25,000 women were trained in dairy best practices and value-added product creation. The establishment of a beekeeping self-help group and training in mushroom farming provided women with additional income sources. Women gained skills in making items like wafers, pickles, and masala powder, resulting in increased earnings. Products crafted by these women were showcased at exhibitions and sold at a local retail outlet managed by women, boosting their economic independence. These efforts have enhanced women's leadership, fostered community engagement, and contributed to broader socio-economic development.

### The value of the initiative

The value of the Ajarpura Dairy Cooperative Society initiative lies in its comprehensive approach to empowering rural women

by enhancing their livelihoods through skill development and diverse income-generating activities. Others can learn that integrating training in dairy farming, value-added products, and alternative livelihoods such as beekeeping and mushroom farming can significantly boost women's economic independence and leadership. The establishment of a women-managed retail outlet demonstrates the effectiveness of local enterprise in increasing income and fostering community engagement. This model illustrates how multifaceted support and market access can drive sustainable socio-economic development and gender equality in rural settings.

### New opportunities

Some of the next steps that we have planned are:

- 1. Expansion of training programs:** The initiative will further expand its training programs to include more advanced techniques in dairy farming, value-added product creation, and alternative livelihood activities. This includes introducing new courses in emerging areas like organic farming and digital tools for agriculture.
- 2. Strengthening market access:** Efforts will be made to enhance market access for products made by women farmers. This involves exploring new sales channels, including online platforms, and participating in more national and international exhibitions to increase visibility and reach.
- 3. Scaling up beekeeping and mushroom farming:** The initiative will scale up the beekeeping and mushroom farming components, aiming to increase production and expand these activities to more women in the community. This will involve additional training and support to ensure sustainability and profitability.
- 4. Community engagement and empowerment:** Plans are in place to further engage the community through workshops and awareness campaigns, promoting the benefits of women's empowerment and the role of the dairy cooperative society in driving economic development.



© Ajarpura Dairy Cooperative Society

Some of the opportunities in foreseeable future are:

- 1. Increased collaboration and partnerships:** There are opportunities for forming partnerships with other organizations and businesses to introduce new technologies and practices, enhance training programs, and secure additional funding.
- 2. Technology integration:** The adoption of advanced technologies such as digital platforms for product marketing, precision farming tools, and data analytics can further improve productivity and efficiency.

- 3. Expansion to new regions:** The successful model of Ajarpura Dairy Cooperative Society can be replicated in other rural areas, leading to broader impact and scaling up of the initiative's benefits.

- 4. Enhanced gender equality and leadership:** Continued focus on women's leadership and empowerment can drive systemic change, setting a precedent for gender equality in agriculture and rural development.

Overall, the initiative is poised for growth, with plans to enhance training, market access, and community engagement while exploring new opportunities for expansion and technology integration.

### More information

<https://youtube.com/@vanshgreencowdungproducts1476?si=v322Ft9nmVWZNuRj>

# Driving Gender Equality through International Standards

Article by Sergio Mujica, Secretary-General, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO)

## 1. How is ISO addressing gender equality through its standardization system and the International Standards it develops?

ISO's commitment to gender equality is an absolute cornerstone of our mission to develop standards that address global challenges, foster innovation and make lives easier, safer and better.

Along with many other prominent standards development organizations, ISO signed the Declaration on Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development at the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe in 2019. In doing so, we pledged our commitment to mainstream gender in the development of International Standards, create and implement a gender action plan and track our progress on these fronts. The objectives were twofold: to support a more gender-balanced and inclusive standards development process and to strengthen the gender-responsiveness of standards themselves.

Understanding the critical role that gender equality plays in driving sustainable development, ISO launched our ambitious Gender Action Plan shortly after this. This groundbreaking initiative exemplifies our dedication to nourishing inclusivity and advancing gender equality within standardization. It aligns seamlessly with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (SDG5).

The Plan is not just a strategy – it's a bold step toward a more equitable future. We are actively gathering and analysing data on gender representation, striving for gender balance in technical work, ensuring our standards are gender-responsive and championing diversity and inclusion within the ISO system. In addition, we are committed to building our members' capacity to integrate gender equality into their own work, driving transformative change across the board.

## 2. Why is the recent publication of ISO 53800 on gender equality such an important landmark for global industry?

ISO 53800 serves as an indispensable resource for organizations to advance gender equality and empower women. This International Standard provides key strategies for overcoming entrenched gender disparities and bias, particularly in the workplace. Its goal is to cultivate an environment of gender equality that benefits all, leading to sustainable development centred on people.

The standard comprises a transformative framework that empowers organizations to weave equality into the very fabric of their culture. It includes a blueprint for action – with a robust approach, an innovative methodology and hands-on tools designed to dismantle the barriers of gender-specific roles. Tailored for diverse entities of



COP28 - Sergio Mujica reaffirmed ISO's commitment to promoting #GreenDigitalAction through standards

all types, regardless of size, geography or sector, it is a universal call to embed inclusivity in the workplace.

Embracing gender equality through ISO 53800 is more than simply a moral imperative – it's good for business. In implementing the standard, organizations are not only promoting economic and social progress but also aligning with the core values of corporate social responsibility. Typically, employee retention is transformed, recruitment quality soars and the workforce becomes a powerhouse of resilience, productivity and innovation. At the helm, equitable leadership ensures decisions are well-rounded and beneficial for all.

## 3. Can you provide examples of how specific standards have successfully advanced gender equality?

At ISO, we recognize that International Standards are powerful instruments that tackle inequalities, foster sustainability and propel inclusive economic growth. Each standard we develop is a stepping stone to a fairer world and the achievement of the UN SDGs.

We're proud to champion women's entrepreneurship with IWA 34, which creates a common language for women-owned and women-led businesses worldwide. It provides clarity and consistency around this topic, paving the way for meaningful actions that will amplify women's economic empowerment and create ripples of change across industries and society.

ISO's commitment to SDG5 is manifested in many standards which are directly applicable to this goal. These include the trailblazing ISO 26000, which aims to champion social responsibility by eliminating bias and promoting parity throughout businesses and organizations.



The ISO/UNDP Guidelines for SDGs is a pioneering new guidance tool for organizations to harmonize their strategic vision with the SDGs, developed in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme. This is a global first and particularly significant for its comprehensive approach to all 17 goals, including achieving gender equality.

We envisage a future where every standard is infused with the insights and experiences of women, adding value, perspective and relevance. Gender equality in standards development leads to innovative and revolutionary solutions. It's about ensuring that the standards we create reflect the diversity of their users and resonate with everyone, everywhere.

#### **4. There is a powerful link between gender equality and climate action. Could you delve into how these two critical areas intersect and drive positive change?**

The intertwining of the topics of climate and gender has become starkly apparent. This reflects the harsh reality that women constitute the majority of the world's poor; their livelihoods, such as agriculture, often relying heavily on natural resources – resources that are now under constant threat from climate change.

Furthermore, the impact of climate disasters often disproportionately affects women and girls. In many cultures, they shoulder the burden of caregiving and securing essentials such as food, water and energy. When these lifelines are severed by environmental catastrophes, the foundations of their lives can crumble in an instant. Incredibly, UNDP data shows that women are 14 times more likely than men to die as a result of a climate-related disaster – a sobering reminder of the gendered aspect of the climate crisis.

Despite this, women's voices remain largely absent where it matters most: in the halls of power shaping environmental and climate policy.

Enter International Standards, which provide the bedrock on which to craft policy, support the implementation of international climate agreements and guide climate-funding initiatives. Standards touch many aspects of everyday life. By incorporating gender awareness and action, they can contribute to a global movement that changes mindsets and uplifts communities.

Ultimately, standards will help transform the perception of women and girls as passive victims of climate change to dynamic leaders and promoters of climate action. The quest for solutions to the climate crisis requires everyone to be on board. ISO's commitment to developing inclusive standards sets a course towards achieving this more equitable and resilient future.

#### **5. What is your vision for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the agricultural sector?**

There is a profound and urgent need to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in the agricultural sector. The agrifood industry employs a remarkable 36% of working women globally, with even higher figures in developing regions such as sub-Saharan Africa (66%) and southern Asia (71%). Despite this significant involvement, women face considerable barriers: they are less likely to be entrepreneurs or landowners, have limited decision-making power and on average earn just 82 cents for every dollar that men make.

We are addressing these disparities head-on by increasing the representation and influence of women in ISO's technical committees. By including more women, we can enhance the quality and relevance of our agricultural standards. We can also help counteract the gender biases inherent in agricultural systems and machinery.

At ISO, we are committed to aligning our efforts with the broader goals of sustainable development. Our collaboration with the International Dairy Federation (IDF), through our technical subcommittee on milk and milk products (ISO/TC34/SC5), demonstrates our dedication to improving nutrition, supporting healthy lives and advancing gender equality, all key to achieving SDGs 2, 3 and 5.

Improving the status of women in agriculture not only empowers women but also positively impacts their physical and mental health, access to resources and food security. It reduces gender-based violence and fosters a more equitable, profitable and sustainable agricultural sector. Through our Gender Action Plan and ongoing partnerships, ISO is making significant strides in closing the gender gap and enhancing the role of women in agriculture and beyond, contributing to a more just and prosperous society.



Sergio Mujica at the ISO Annual Meeting 2023 in Brisbane, Australia



ISO 53800

## INDIA

# Empowering Women Dairy Farmers in India

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## How the project supports SDG 5

This initiative contributes to SDG 5A - Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws. Project Ksheersagar has empowered women dairy farmers in India through helping them open individual bank accounts, paying them directly for their milk deliveries, providing financial literacy training, and opening small local banks near milk collection centers that provide access to financial instruments and cash.



© Abbott Nutrition

## The big picture

With over 300 million bovine animals, India has the largest global dairy animal population which contributed ~230 million tons of liquid milk in 2023, accounting for 24.6% of global milk production (USDA 2023). Additionally, India has over 67 million dairy farms (IFCN 2023), making dairy farming a key employment and household income mechanism for many small-holder families in India. For many of them, dairy-farming related work (milking, feeding, providing water, cleaning, and delivery of milk for sale) is done by women. The project's focus on women for capacity building efforts on Indian dairy farms not only embeds best practices with the primary operators of dairy farms, but also creates additional opportunities for female empowerment both on and off farms. With education on best farm management, veterinary care, and quality milk production practices, small-holder dairy farms can be made more profitable, healthier for milking animals, and capable of consistently producing highest quality milk.

## The premise

Abbott has initiated Project Ksheersagar, a dairy capacity building initiative with an aim to achieve high standards of milk quality; increase volume of high-quality milk available for purchase; and empower women through classroom education, on-farm training, access to capital, and recognizing their work through direct payment; and implementation of relevant best practices in animal care.

## Getting the wheel in motion

Launched as a shared value project between Abbott, its suppliers and Technoserve in 2022, Project Ksheersagar aims to educate 12,000 farmers through more than 70 dairy extension officers in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. The initiative focuses on improving the quality of the milk produced through education and financial incentives. Project Ksheersagar also empowers women farmers through targeted trainings and by paying women directly for milk deliveries. The project will run through 2025 transitioning from a proof of concept to a

standard procurement model for Abbott's dairy procurement and supply chain in India.

## The history of success

Project Ksheersagar has demonstrated positive outcomes for women: more than 4,000 women have opened their own bank account; over 6,000 women are paid directly for their daily milk delivery; and 42 small local banks are run by female staff providing both off-farm employment as well as community access to capital.

Additionally, more than 500 women self-reported that after implementing farm and animal management practices, labour has been reduced by an average of four hours per day.

## The value of the initiative

Project Ksheersagar demonstrates the impact of targeted education, training, incentives, and interventions delivered at the initial point in the dairy procurement supply chain journey. With a focus on animal husbandry and care, women empowerment,

and community development, we can improve the entire supply chain. Project Ksheersagar has helped enhance lives of women dairy farmers, animals, and communities. Implementation at scale was made possible with steady and planned progress—rather than all at once.

### New opportunities

Project Ksheersagar continues to adapt to become a key project for Abbott's dairy development efforts in India. Abbott is working with both its current and new suppliers implementing these principles including capacity building, training, and farm management practices. In addition to continuing to implement best practices in animal husbandry, dairy farm management, and milk procurement, we are also evaluating how we can further support the communities of farmers supplying high quality milk.

“Abbott and our supply partners are working to build dairy farmer capacity by empowering women farmers in approximately 12,000 dairy farms in India.”





## INDIA

# Empowering Women Dairy Farmers through the Sundarban Model of Organic Dairy Cooperative

## AUTHOR

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## How the project supports SDG 5

Sundarban Cooperative Milk & Livestock Producers' Union Limited is the first organic dairy cooperative owned and led by women dairy farmers in the riverine islands of the Sundarbans delta region in India. Despite the challenging conditions of the area, the cooperative has embraced these difficulties as an opportunity by initiating an organic movement to sustain the fragile ecology, provide meaningful employment to women and their families, and thereby develop a sustainable food system in the region.

By organizing marginalized women farmers, the cooperative empowers them and serves as a catalyst for addressing issues such as gender equality, poverty, hunger, health, education, affordable energy, inequality, responsible consumption, climate action, and life on land — all of which contribute to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

## The big picture

Sundarban Cooperative Milk & Livestock Producers' Union Limited is a pioneering all-women organic dairy cooperative in India's fragile Sundarbans, recognised as the world's largest mangrove forest and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Initiatives like the Sundarban Cooperative Milk & Livestock Producers' Union Limited are vital in India as they promote sustainable development and empower marginalized communities. By supporting women-led



organic dairy cooperatives, these initiatives address multiple challenges, including gender inequality, poverty, and food insecurity. They provide women farmers with economic opportunities, enhancing their livelihoods and decision-making power.

## The premise

Sundarban Organic Dairy Cooperative is the first organic women-owned and led multi-commodity producers' organisation operating in the challenging riverine deltaic Sundarban region in India. Its mission is to ensure prosperity and happiness among the women producer members, employees, supply chain actors and consumers while mainstreaming organic farming for sustainable development.

## Getting the wheel in motion

To support small and marginalised farm

families of the region, the state government with technical support from the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), India, initiated operations on 1 November 2015 to develop all-women dairy farmers' cooperative.

Key actions included restructuring the cooperative to focus on women-led governance and operations, promoting organic farming practices, and diversifying into multi-commodity production. Extensive capacity development including exposure visits was conducted to equip the key women farmer members with skills in organic farming, dairy management, and leadership. Infrastructure, including ICT-based systems and digital payments across value-chain was established to support milk procurement and distribution. Community engagement and awareness campaigns



© National Dairy Development Board

were launched to ensure active participation and commitment from women farmers, thereby creating a sustainable and inclusive cooperative model.

### The history of success

Over the past eight years, the cooperative has successfully organized women farmers from the various villages, along with its officers and staff, into a cohesive group committed to building a strong organic cooperative. Major achievements include:

- Establishing the first organic women-led multi-commodity producer cooperative in India, which procures indigenous cow milk, wild mangrove forest honey, rice, pulses, and more, supporting the livelihood of over 4,500 organic women farmers in the Sundarbans. The cooperative achieved a revenue of USD \$1.4 million in 2023-2024.
- Ensuring a fair and transparent procurement system for all commodities purchased from producer members and payments made digitally to individual bank accounts.
- Implementing a system for organic input and extension services, including supply of fodder and crop seeds, organic manures, azolla, mineral mixture, organic cattle feed, de-wormers and facilitating vaccination and artificial insemination services.
- Developing women Jaibo Monitors (Organic Monitors) to promote and monitor organic farming and ethno-veterinary medicine within the societies.
- Installing cow-dung-based biogas plants at over 150 households, with the slurry used as crop manure.
- Training more than 2,000 women farmers and employees.
- Certifying organic milk, cow ghee (clarified butter) and honey, which are delivered exclusively in glass bottles and marketed through “Sundarini Naturals” mobile application, with home delivery in Kolkata.
- Being the first dairy cooperative in India to market milk-based traditional sweetmeats or Bengali Mishti by opening speciality outlets in Kolkata.
- Receiving national awards from NDDDB, India and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry, as well as international recognition from IFOAM Asia for innovation and women empowerment.

“Women leading the organic dairy cooperative movement in Sundarbans: A new revolution driving a sustainable food system in India”



### The value of the initiative

Sundarban Dairy Cooperative has made significant strides in women's empowerment and leadership by providing the necessary tools, resources, and opportunities for women to thrive. Women hold key leadership positions within the cooperative, driving decision-making and strategic direction. Increased financial independence has enhanced their bargaining power and economic status.

Training and capacity-development programmes have equipped women with the skills to boost productivity and maintain sustainable practices. These programmes have also fostered a strong sense of community and solidarity among women, encouraging them to support and mentor each other.

### New opportunities

Building on the success of women-led organic cooperative dairying in 75 villages of the Sundarban region in India, the Dairy Cooperative plans to expand its reach to over 250 villages across the deltaic islands. This expansion aims to engage approximately 15,000 women farmers and promote organic farming to ensure prosperity of members and enhance environmental sustainability in the region. The cooperative is also focused on building economies of scale to ensure economic stability and financial viability.

The dairy cooperative has initiated the following activities:

- Promotion and harmonisation of biodynamic practices for dairying and crop farming.
- Intensification of farmer-to-farmer organic training through Micro-Training Centre.
- Expansion of its product portfolio to include long shelf-life canned organic sweets, such as GI-tagged Banglar Rasogolla.
- Production and marketing of organic manures in a newly established manufacturing unit.
- Provision of e-scooters for female Artificial Insemination Technicians to facilitate mobility and expand coverage of services to farmers.
- Establishment of mobile collection centres to enhance sustainability in the value chain.
- Initiation of organic fodder and indigenous crop seed production and processing activities under Government of India schemes.



### More information

<https://www.sundarini.organic>

<https://india.mongabay.com/2018/12/sundarbans-women-lead-the-way-in-making-dairy-farms-organic/>

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## ITALY

# The Milk Women of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

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## How the project supports SDG 5

Our project is dedicated to promoting gender equality and empowering all women and girls, aligning with the objectives of SDG 5. By recognizing and supporting the critical roles women play, particularly in managerial capacities within the dairy sector, we aim to elevate their contributions and visibility. The initiative highlights women's unique ability to balance tradition and innovation, while fostering nutrition, growth, and health. This approach not only affirms the importance of milk and dairy products in a healthy, sustainable diet but also underscores the vital role women play in achieving these outcomes, thereby advancing the broader goals of SDG 5.

## The big picture

In Italy, the connection between food and tradition is deeply rooted, with dairy playing a significant role in the country's cultural heritage. Women are essential in balancing tradition and innovation, acting as stewards of both the past and the future. Their unique ability to manage the complexities of the dairy sector—amidst evolving factors like production, economy, environment, and consumer demands—is invaluable. However, despite their critical role, the percentage of women employed in the dairy sector has remained unchanged at 28% from 2012 to 2017 (ISTAT data). This initiative aims to address this gap by promoting women's employment and enhancing their roles within the sector. By doing so, it not only fosters innovation but also ensures that the rich traditions and

knowledge of the dairy sector are preserved and passed down to future generations, maintaining the delicate balance that defines Italian culture.

## The premise

The initiative aims to enhance and celebrate the role of women in Italy's dairy sector by recognizing their different roles and impacts. It seeks to empower women and girls by producing an annual factsheet, affirming their contributions to the sector's success.

## Getting the wheel in motion

Initiated two years ago, this ongoing project annually produces a factsheet titled "The Milk Women of Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow" to honor women's invaluable contributions to Italy's dairy sector. The factsheet is launched on the International Women's Day (8 March). The factsheet, endorsed by Italian dairy associations like Assolatte, FIL-Italian Committee, and Aitel-Italian Association of Dairy Technicians, is distributed to dairy sector stakeholders through mailing lists, association websites, and social media. This science-based initiative draws on institutional and scientific sources, including ISTAT data, FAO reports, and the thesis entitled 'DONNE DEL LATTE' by Serena Di Nucci.

## The history of success

The initiative has received positive feedback, with the factsheet being prominently displayed in numerous livestock farms, cheese factories, and processing sites. This effort has also raised awareness of the significant contributions and skills of women in production, sales, marketing, and communication within the dairy sector.

“It is crucial to actively communicate and highlight the pivotal role that women play in the dairy sector: their contributions are instrumental in driving progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations. ”

The primary outcomes of this initiative include fostering a sense of belonging among women in the dairy sector and sensitizing all operators to the pivotal role of women.

## The value of the initiative

The strength of this initiative lies in its simplicity: a straightforward tool that effectively reaches all operators in the dairy sector. These factsheets serve as valuable resources for promoting accurate and relevant information across various fields. This project not only addresses industry-related topics but also highlights the “human values” tied to the role of women and their empowerment. It enables all sector participants to engage with these important issues, fostering a deeper understanding



of the contributions women make and the significance of their empowerment within the industry.

### New opportunities

Future initiatives could develop in two directions:

- 1) Integration with other factsheets: to highlight and disseminate specific projects, results managed and achieved by women, in order to confirm and promote the strategic role of women in the dairy sector.
- 2) Promotion of women's experience: through the organization of webinars that allow women to share and deepen their experiences.

### More information

<https://www.unioncamere.gov.it/imprenditoria-femminile/tesi-di-laurea/donne-del-latte-indagine-sui-ruoli-e-le-esperienze-delle-donne-operanti-nel-comparto-lattiero-caseario-nazionale-s-di-nuoci>

<https://www.istat.it/informazioni-sulla-rilevazione/indagine-annuale-e-mensile-sul-latte-e-sui-prodotti-lattiero-caseari-anno-2017/>

**AITeL** **Assolatte** **ITALIA**

Un omaggio di AITeL, Assolatte e del Comitato italiano FIL/IDF alle  
"Donne del Latte" di ieri, oggi e domani

Dalla bella contadina alla donna professionista e imprenditrice l'immagine delle donne del settore lattiero-caseario racconta da sempre un legame forte con il proprio lavoro, quasi una vocazione innata.

Oggi Le vogliamo chiamare con affetto e riconoscenza "Le donne del latte", per sottolineare il valore della figura femminile nel settore lattiero-caseario, il suo grande impegno e la sua capacità di raccontare la bellezza delle produzioni e dei prodotti attraverso il proprio operato.

Tutti sappiamo che la donna, per le sue innate caratteristiche, è preziosa nel gestire le attività di una filiera legata all'evolversi del tempo e delle nature, dove è particolarmente importante la salvaguardia di saperi e tradizioni, da promuovere, valorizzare e trasmettere alle generazioni future.

Una di loro ha detto: "Ho scoperto il contrasto del candore del latte con il rosso luminoso del rone della caldaia". È una frase che non ha bisogno di commenti, ricorda a tutti che l'amore per il proprio mestiere è una chiave di felicità e che l'entusiasmo e il coraggio sono i motori di giornate intense, molte volte difficili ma straordinarie se vissute nella loro ricchezza.

Oggi sono sicuramente ancora troppo poche le donne impegnate nel settore lattiero-caseario, un comparto di grande rilevanza per l'economia agroalimentare italiana in continua ristrutturazione, evoluzione.

AITeL, Assolatte e Comitato italiano FIL/IDF ringraziano le donne del settore lattiero-caseario con la certezza che il loro ruolo sarà sempre più valorizzato ed il loro contributo sarà sempre più percepito come garanzia di professionalità, serietà, precisione e competenza per promuovere il latte e dei suoi derivati quali prodotti fondamentali di una dieta salutare e sostenibile.

Libera mente tratta da "DONNE DEL LATTE". Indagine sui ruoli e le esperienze delle donne operanti nel comparto lattiero caseario nazionale, tesi di laurea della Dott.ssa Serena Di Nucci, Corso di Laurea in Promozione e Gestione del Patrimonio Gastronomico e Turistico, Università degli Studi di Scienze Gastronomiche.

Factsheet "The Milk Women of Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow" 2023

**AITeL** **Assolatte** **ITALIA**

A Sharon e a tutte le donne del latte

**8 MARZO 2024**  
UN OMAGGIO ALLE  
**DONNE DEL LATTE DI IERI, OGGI, DOMANI**

"Fotografai gli occhi e la memoria della mia infanzia... c'era il sapore buono del latte di nonna Zia...  
Oggi... incontro anche luoghi dove le donne resistono, inventano, innovano".

Questi versi ci parlano delle donne del latte: ci raccontano che oggi le donne del settore lattiero caseario si muovono in un mondo dove tutti vogliono ritrovare le nostre radici e dove, allo stesso tempo, cerchiamo risposte adeguate alle esigenze dei nostri giorni.

Donne che si muovono in un mondo in movimento, dove i cambiamenti passano anche attraverso la figura femminile, la sua capacità di fare scelte di vita e la sua emancipazione.

\* Da: Ulderico Da Pozzo, Femmine. Donne del latte "Ostè e luoghi, tra presente e memoria"

Raggiungere l'uguaglianza di genere ed emancipare tutte le donne e le ragazze è considerato dalle Nazioni Unite un obiettivo strategico per uno sviluppo sostenibile.

Donne, quindi, come colonne portanti per assicurare il legame tra tradizione e innovazione, tra nutrizione, crescita e salute e per confermare il ruolo del latte e i suoi derivati all'interno di una dieta salutare e sostenibile, come già riconosciuto dalla FAO.

AITeL, Assolatte e il Comitato Italiano FIL/IDF celebrano tutte le donne del mondo del latte, con la certezza che il loro impegno sarà sempre più valorizzato nella consapevolezza che il loro contributo è fondamentale per il raggiungimento dei goals delle Nazioni Unite e per un mondo migliore per tutti.

Factsheet "The Milk Women of Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow" 2024

## KENYA

# Achieving Gender Equity in Kenya's Informal Dairy Sector

## Overcoming Barriers and Unlocking Opportunities for Women Milk Vendors in Urban Markets

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### How the project supports SDG 5

The Vendor Business School (VBS) initiative directly contributes to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5.1, which aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women by addressing systemic gender barriers, such as restrictive norms that hinder women's meaningful participation in the milk vending business. Additionally, the VBS initiative contributes to SDG 5.A, which seeks to ensure women's equal rights to economic resources, including access to financial services. The VBS initiative advances this goal by equipping women vendors with entrepreneurial skills and linking them to financial institutions where they can access loans on favorable terms. Through coaching and mentorship, the VBS initiative empowers women milk vendors with the skills and mindset needed for effective participation in decision-making and leadership roles. This, in turn, contributes to SDG 5.5, which promotes women's full and effective participation in leadership and economic decision-making.

### The big picture

Milk vending is an appealing venture for women in Kenya due to the high demand for milk and related products, the relatively low startup capital and operating costs, and the flexibility it offers women to manage milk vending activities alongside household responsibilities, such as caregiving roles (Galiè et al., 2022). In the urban areas of the Kenya, men dominate the formal milk vending sector (and the transport segment of the informal sector) while women are



concentrated in the informal one, where they operate mostly as unlicensed milk vendors.

Women face numerous constraints that limit their ability to participate meaningfully in the formal sector or remain competitive in the milk vending business. Key barriers include restrictive gender norms that limit women's mobility, limited entrepreneurial attitude and business skills, along with lack of access to capital needed to formalize and expand their milk vending businesses (CGIAR Initiative on Resilient Cities, 2024; Galiè et al., 2022, Myers et al., 2021). These challenges limit the potential of their businesses. For example, restricted women's mobility makes it difficult for women to source milk directly from producers, forcing them to rely on middlemen. This reliance increases costs, reduces the reliability of milk supply, and limits their ability to control milk quality—all of which negatively affect the sustainability of women-led milk vending businesses. Additionally, women milk vendors often lack skills and bargaining power to negotiate better prices when sourcing milk or to seek compensation for spoiled milk delivered by middlemen, which typically results in low profit margins (Galiè et al., 2022).

The Vendor Business school is a transformative project of the CGIAR Resilient Cities Initiative that aims to enhance the business and food handling skills of street vendors. In Kenya, the project empowers women milk vendors operating in the Kenya's informal milk market channels such as street vendors, small and large food retailers selling fresh raw milk, and milk bars. The project is led by the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI).

### The premise

The Vendor Business School program aims to sustainably increase women's involvement in and benefits from urban milk vending activities. The women vendors are expected to use their increased profits to expand their businesses and improve their households' livelihoods. Additionally, the milk vendors are expected to contribute to ensuring that the milk sold in peri-urban and urban settings is clean and safe for consumption. By focusing on these dual goals, the project promotes healthier communities and a more profitable and sustainable business for the women milk vendors.





## “Empowering women and expanding economic opportunities through sustainable milk vending enterprises”

### Getting the wheel in motion

Given the lack of published literature on the gender-specific constraints faced by milk traders in the urban setup of Nairobi, Kenya, a small sample qualitative study was conducted to address the identified knowledge gap (Galiè et al., 2022). The findings were used to inform development of a gender-sensitive entrepreneurial and mentorship program for the VBS initiative.

In mid 2022, ILRI hired a business development consultant who, in collaboration with the ILRI research teams, developed a gender-sensitive group-training and individual-coaching program along with related materials. This program covers critical aspects of milk handling, hygiene, and safety to ensure that vendors provide high-quality milk to urban consumers. Additionally, the training includes business management and marketing skills, empowering vendors to increase their sales and enhance their market presence through effective social promotions. The trainers were also expected to engage women vendors and their spouses in discussions aimed at challenging existing social norms.

By mid 2023, women trainers were recruited and taken through the mentorship program and materials. From January to August 2024, the women milk vendors (mentees) were recruited, onboarded, trained, and mentored.

### The history of success

Close to 100 women milk vendors have been trained in proper milk handling to ensure that the milk delivered to consumers is safe and of high quality. Additionally, they have received training and coaching in business skills and mentored to help them negotiate better prices, access credit, and manage their businesses effectively.

### The value of the initiative

Conducting a gender analysis to inform project interventions is crucial, as it ensures that interventions address specific needs and align with project goals. By applying these insights, projects can better meet the needs of all participants and enhance overall effectiveness. This approach underscores the importance of integrating gender considerations into project design and implementation, which improves outcomes and creates more inclusive outcomes/impacts.

### New opportunities

The effect of the program on women's empowerment and other relevant outcomes is being measured through an impact evaluation. A group of women was recruited and offered to participate in the program, and another group was only monitored as a comparison group. At the end of the program, we aim to extend similar benefits to women vendors in the comparison group, by offering them the training materials and three coaching sessions.

Potential follow-up initiatives aim to collaborate with Kenya's dairy authorities and adapt the format to engage both women and men, promoting equitable opportunities in the dairy sector. This is especially important given the difficulties that milk traders face in sourcing fresh raw milk from producers and the challenges producers encounter in finding market outlets. Key potential areas of focus include creating linkages between women producers and women traders, intentionally addressing gender norms that affect equitable participation of women in milk vending ventures, and co-designing mechanisms to facilitate access to credit for women milk vendors.

The shared experiences from this program highlight the importance of integrating gender considerations into initiatives designed to empower women through livestock-related innovations. They demonstrate the benefits of adopting approaches that increase women's involvement in research and development innovations. These experiences emphasize the need to improve gender responsiveness in agricultural research for development.

### More information

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## KENYA

# Weezesha Initiative: Empowering Women and Youth through Dairy Farming

## AUTHOR

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In collaboration with: Lynda McDonald, TetraPak

## How the project supports SDG 5

The Weezesha Initiative supports SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by promoting equal opportunities for women and youth in dairy farming, which leads to financial empowerment and participation in decision-making. It also aligns with SDG target 5.5, which focuses on ensuring women's full and effective participation in leadership, and SDG target 8.6, which aims to reduce youth unemployment through entrepreneurship and skill development.

## The big picture

In many regions, dairy farming has traditionally been dominated by men, leaving women and youth marginalized in terms of ownership, decision-making, and financial benefits. The Weezesha Initiative was launched to address this imbalance by empowering women and young people in dairy farming. By educating them on modern farming techniques and encouraging them to participate actively, the initiative aims to break down longstanding barriers and create a more inclusive agricultural sector. The project emphasizes the importance of financial empowerment, enabling women to contribute meaningfully to household decisions and share domestic responsibilities. Meanwhile, youth are encouraged to view dairy farming as a viable path to financial stability, reducing their reliance on unstable employment opportunities. By fostering a more equitable and informed community, Weezesha is driving sustainable development in rural areas, promoting gender equality, and uplifting the next generation of farmers.

“Empowering women to empower communities, empowering youth to drive nations forward.”

## The premise

The Weezesha Initiative aims to empower women and youth through dairy farming by providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge. The project seeks to eliminate gender biases, improve financial independence, and ensure that women and youth have a voice in domestic and community decision-making processes.

## Getting the wheel in motion

The Weezesha Initiative began by engaging women's “merry-go-round” groups, requesting 20-minute sessions to discuss dairy farming. In Kenya, “merry go rounds” are informal savings and credit groups predominantly formed by women. These groups, also known as “chamas”, are rooted in the tradition of collective financial support and community cooperation. Members contribute a fixed amount of money regularly, typically on a weekly or monthly basis. The pooled funds are then given to one member at a time, allowing them to invest in personal or family needs, such as starting a small business, paying for school fees, or covering emergency expenses.

These groups are essential for economic empowerment, especially among women in rural and urban areas where access to formal banking services may be limited. The funds can also serve as a social safety net, providing financial security in times of need. Additionally, these gatherings foster a sense of community, trust, and mutual

support among women, strengthening social bonds. The “merry go rounds” often include additional activities such as rotating leadership roles, social gatherings, and even shared investments in larger ventures, such as purchasing land or property collectively. They are a vital part of Kenya's informal economy, enabling women to achieve financial independence and improve their living standards.

The first meeting drew 19 women, many of whom were already involved in farming but eager to enhance their skills. Weekly meetings were established, focusing on various dairy farming topics, starting with calf rearing. Following the women's engagement, the initiative expanded to include youth, forming a WhatsApp group to facilitate ongoing learning and support. The group grew from 9 to 17 members and focused on best practices in hygiene, record-keeping, and internet use for continuous learning. The project is ongoing, with regular training sessions.

## The history of success

The Weezesha Initiative has led to significant improvements in dairy farming practices among women and youth. There has been a noticeable increase in milk production, reduced cases of mastitis due to improved hygiene, and better financial outcomes from lower production costs. Enhanced record-keeping has enabled farmers to track important milestones like cow heat



cycles and calving, leading to more efficient herd management. As a result, both women and youth have achieved greater financial stability and are more informed and empowered within their communities. The initiative has also contributed to meeting key performance indicators in dairy management and record-keeping.

### The value of the initiative

The Weezesha Initiative demonstrates the transformative power of inclusive agricultural practices. By empowering women and youth, the project has not only improved dairy farming productivity but has also fostered financial independence and social equity. The initiative shows that with the right training and support, marginalized groups can play a critical role in agriculture, leading to more sustainable and prosperous communities. Other regions can learn from this experience by recognizing the importance of gender and youth inclusion in farming and replicating the approach to drive similar positive outcomes in their areas.

### New opportunities

Moving forward, the Weezesha Initiative plans to expand its reach, incorporating more women and youth into the program. Future steps include gathering data to track the initiative's progress.

By continuing to empower women and youth, Weezesha aims to create a new generation of skilled, independent farmers who can contribute to the local economy and inspire broader societal change.



## KENYA

# Unveiling Gender Gaps in Live Animals and Milk Value Chains towards Women's Empowerment, in Kenya

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## How the project supports SDG 5

The result of this study closely aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. This is because the results can inform the design of targeted transformative interventions to address gendered challenges in live animals and milk value chains, which especially hinder women from engaging in and benefiting from them. Transformative interventions aim to address the challenges and barriers faced by women, which limit their engagement and benefits from these value chains. The potential transformative interventions are likely to reduce gender inequalities in ownership, access to, and control over important resources and benefits. Women's decision making, agency, and leadership ability can also be enhanced in line with target 5.A (Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws) and 5.5 (Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life) of SDG 5.

## The big picture

The live animal value chain is a critical component of the agricultural sector, particularly in rural areas of developing economies and in the study communities. This value chain involves the production, processing, distribution, and consumption of animal products, which include not only live animals but also products like milk. Despite the importance of the live animals and milk value chains, diverse challenges are encountered, by both women and men value chain players. There are factors that hinder women's full engagement and potential to benefit compared to their male counterparts. For instance, women face restricted access to resources, safety concerns, and exclusion from key economic activities like livestock trading. Recognizing the gendered nature of live animals and milk value chains is crucial for designing targeted transformative interventions that can address existing gender disparities and inequalities. Targeted interventions are likely to empower women and enhance livestock productivity, contributing to sustainable development.

## The premise

This study aimed to uncover the gender-specific challenges in the live animals and milk value chains among Kenyan pastoralists. It explored the constraints, risks, and the impact of negative gender norms on women's participation in these value chains, with the intention of informing the design of transformative interventions. The local concepts of empowerment were also explored.

## Getting the wheel in motion

The study employed an exploratory design, characterized by its flexibility and unstructured nature, allowing researchers to adapt and refine their approach based on emerging insights. This design was crucial for capturing the complex and dynamic nature of gender issues in pastoral livelihoods. Three qualitative data collection methods were used: focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIs), and individual interviews (IIs). FGDs and IIs focused on both women and men livestock farmers, ensuring diverse perspectives, while KIs targeted community and religious leaders, veterinary officers, traders, and agrovets dealers, providing a comprehensive understanding of the gendered dimensions of pastoral livelihoods. All the data was gathered in March 2024.

## The history of success

The study revealed that livestock is a vital economic and cultural asset in Wajir and Garissa counties, shaping the livelihoods and social structures. While men dominate in livestock trading, women contribute significantly through milk production and trading, with a few starting to venture into poultry production. However, women face severe challenges and restrictive gender norms that hinder them from fully participating and benefiting. For instance, men—the household heads—are the authoritative figures in charge of most decisions in the households. As such, men are expected to sell or slaughter animals while women are mandated to perform



## “Women in pastoral communities in Kenya face significant barriers which limit their engagement in, and benefits from live animals and milk value chains.”

domestic chores. Risks such as rape and practices like FGM were also uncovered. The results highlight the need for targeted gender-responsive interventions to enhance women's participation.

### The value of the initiative

This work emphasizes livestock's central role in the economic, social, and cultural life of women and men in Wajir and Garissa counties, in Kenya. It identifies gender-specific barriers and challenges such as restricted access to capital and increased vulnerability to theft and violence for women. The value of this study lies in its nuanced understanding of gender-specific challenges impacting women's involvement in live animal and milk value chains. The study provides actionable recommendations that can inform the design of targeted interventions such as enhancing security, gender training, formation of collectives, and enhancing market access for women. This can enhance women's economic opportunities and market participation. The study's findings can also foster the establishment of favourable and enabling environment for both women and men to engage in and benefit from live animals and milk value chains.

### New opportunities

The study highlights several new opportunities for empowering women in live animal and milk value chains, within the pastoral communities. For instance, women's market participation can be enhanced through logistical support and the creation of women-focused trading groups, enabling them to negotiate better prices and reduce reliance on intermediaries. The development of microfinance products tailored to the needs of women can provide them with the necessary capital to expand their operations and invest in sustainable practices. Targeted training including gender trainings and sensitization can present opportunities to enhance women's skills, making them more resilient to economic and environmental challenges. Gender trainings targeting both women and men can lead to critical reflection and conscientization, prompting the confrontation of gender restrictions faced by women. Technology integration can offer women new opportunities for empowerment. Policy and advocacy efforts can also leverage this work to design targeted policies and advocacy strategies.

### More information

Our results are not yet published, so we are not able to provide a link as requested.







## NEW ZEALAND

# Breaking Barriers

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## How the project supports SDG 5

The Fonterra Research & Development Centre (FRDC) significantly contributes to SDG 5, which focuses on Gender Equality, through its efforts to promote gender diversity and empower women in STEM disciplines, particularly within the dairy sector. The FRDC's leadership team is a testament to its commitment, with 64% female representation. This commitment to gender balance not only serves as an inspiring model but also actively advances the cause of gender equality in the workplace and the broader industry.

Specifically, it aligns with SDG targets 5.5 (Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life) and 5.B (Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women).

“How women in STEM from around the world are shaping the dairy sector starting in New Zealand.”

## The big picture

Despite a significant gender disparity in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) careers in New Zealand, where women make up only 28% of the STEM workforce, the Fonterra Research and Development Centre (FRDC) has achieved a balanced 50:50 gender ratio among its staff, who hail from over 46 different nationalities.

Fonterra's initiative is a vital step towards addressing the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields, specifically within the dairy sector in New Zealand. With women comprising 50% of their R&D workforce and a commitment to diversity, Fonterra is actively promoting female leadership and participation in STEM. This initiative not only strives for gender equality but also recognises the value of diverse perspectives. By encouraging women and girls to pursue STEM careers, Fonterra is opening new opportunities and pathways in the dairy industry. This not only empowers women but also leads to enhanced innovation and problem-solving capabilities. Diverse teams are known for their ability to tackle complex challenges, which is crucial in an ever-evolving dairy market. This initiative goes beyond just numbers; it is about improving livelihoods. By breaking

down gender barriers in STEM, Fonterra creates a more inclusive and equitable dairy sector. It provides women and girls with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in STEM roles, ensuring a stronger and more prosperous future for all involved in the dairy industry. We monitor and voluntarily report our male-female pay gap; we have approx. 1.5% difference between males and females (in favour of females).

## The premise

The FRDC initiated efforts to combat gender disparities in STEM, specifically within the dairy industry. This involved addressing challenges such as the underrepresentation of women, combating stereotypes and biases, and creating pathways for women in STEM careers.

## Getting the wheel in motion

To empower women in STEM, Fonterra initiated a programme for mentorship, professional development, and leadership training. Creating the Fonterra Graduate Technical Programme (FGTP) over 50 years ago, this supportive environment offers equal opportunities for women. Actions like these pave the way for women to excel in STEM roles, fostering an atmosphere of inclusion and innovation. The Fonterra Research & Development Centre has over 350 staff, from over 46 nationalities, and 50% are female. The initiative is ongoing and continuously evolving to address new challenges and opportunities.

## The history of success

FRDC's commitment resulted in a significant increase in the representation of women in STEM roles. Two of the women on the FRDC Leadership Team, which is 64% female, have worked their way up to General Managers after starting out with the FGTP. This programme offers the opportunity

to gain a Master of Dairy Science and Technology and has been successfully developing industry leaders for over 50 years. Women now hold key positions in research, development, and innovation. This inclusivity has brought fresh perspectives, fuelling innovation and addressing complex challenges more effectively.

### The value of the initiative

Fonterra's initiative demonstrates the tangible value of gender diversity in STEM. It serves as a model for other organisations, showcasing the benefits of diverse teams in driving innovation, meeting customer needs, and staying competitive in the dairy industry. It underlines the importance of equal opportunities and promotes a more inclusive, forward-thinking, and impactful cooperative.

### New opportunities

Fonterra is committed to sustaining and expanding its efforts to empower women in STEM. Fonterra and its Research & Development Centre will continue to support women's growth in STEM, further diversify recruitment pathways, and explore new collaborations and partnerships. Future opportunities include expanding mentoring programs and participating in global initiatives to advance gender diversity in STEM.

### More information

[Fonterra's Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives](#)

[More about the FGTP programme](#)



**Sophie Mellsop, Senior  
Research Engineer at FRDC**

#### Background and Career Journey:

*"One of my biggest challenges has been deciding which career directions to take at each decision point. There was a fair amount of decision paralysis, but accepting that there is no 'wrong' decision, just different decisions, has helped me with this. Also accepting my priorities will change through my life, I'll never be able to please everyone, and deciding to do what's right for me."*

#### Experience at FRDC:

*"What I think is fantastic about FRDC is its recognition of where there is good gender diversity and where there isn't, and taking active steps to celebrate where there is good, and active steps to improve where more work is needed. I have also seen plenty of evidence of managers trying to do their utmost to prevent any unconscious bias when hiring new employees."*



**Ankita Jena, Computational  
Biologist at FRDC**

#### Background and Career Journey:

*"From a young age, I was immersed in an environment that cherished science and medicine. Growing up in a family where academic excellence was the norm, with doctors and engineers, I was naturally drawn to the field of science. Dinner table conversations often revolved around health and physiology, courtesy of my parents' medical backgrounds."*

#### Experience at FRDC:

*"Working at the Fonterra Research and Development Centre (FRDC) has been an incredible experience. Being surrounded by some of the industry's brightest minds has been inspiring and motivating. The transition to FRDC has allowed me to work on cutting-edge research projects in nutrition and health, utilising advanced computational tools to generate meaningful insights."*



**Background and Career Journey:**

*"During intermediate school, we had to do a scientific investigation for the science fair, and I found it fascinating. This sparked my interest in science and inspired me to pursue a career in STEM. I did an internship at FRDC the summer before my final year of undergraduate study and was lucky enough to have a master's project funded by Fonterra."*

**Experience at FRDC:**

*"I've learned so much since I've started! I've had the opportunity to work across several projects with different focus areas, which has helped to develop my research skills. I've also had the opportunity to collaborate with a variety of people with different backgrounds and experience levels."*



**Rachel Taylor, Associate Research Technologist at FRDC**

**Background and Career Journey:**

*"I am a microbiologist by training, with a university degree (TU Dresden, Germany) in Biology, and a PhD (Hannover Medical School, Germany) in infection biology. My expertise is in genomics and metagenomics, which means looking at genome sequences of bacteria and microbial communities."*

**Experience at FRDC:**

*"It gives me the opportunity to apply both my theoretical knowledge about microbes and how they 'behave' in community, as well as all the practical lab (high throughput DNA sequencing) and metagenomics/bioinformatics skills I have acquired until now, in the context of probiotics & dairy research and food safety."*



**Halina Tegetmeyer, Senior Research Scientist at FRDC**

## UNITED STATES

# Advancing Opportunities for Women with the State of Women in Dairy Report and its Implementation

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## How the project supports SDG 5

In 2023, the International Dairy Foods Association's (IDFA) Women in Dairy network revised its focus to align with the UN's Sustainable Development Goal #5 on gender equality. While significant progress has been made in advancing gender equality within the dairy industry, IDFA recognized that more work was needed. Additional data was necessary to identify areas for improvement and effectively address existing inequalities. The State of Women in Dairy Report, released in January 2024, was the logical next step to bridge this knowledge gap, aiming to identify inequalities for women in the dairy industry and provide recommendations to dairy businesses to create more opportunity for women. By highlighting data-based areas where women may face unequal treatment or lack of opportunity due to their gender, the report ensures that leadership and human resources teams across the U.S. dairy industry are aware of the various gaps women face and can begin to work more effectively to address them.

Ultimately, by targeting these areas of inequity, the industry can eliminate any remaining discrimination against women in the workplace (5.1) and work towards successfully ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making (5.5).



Dairy Forum

## The big picture

Women in the U.S. dairy industry are now better represented and have more opportunities than ever. They are moving into more management positions, earning higher salaries, and gaining greater recognition for their contributions. However, despite this progress, our industry must do more as women still face roadblocks.

For the first time, IDFA collected data and research that allow companies to see what is changing—and what is not—across the U.S. dairy industry. The report captured key metrics on the attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and policies affecting women throughout dairy and makes recommendations for addressing them. IDFA subsequently followed those recommendations to implement key programs aimed at addressing inequalities identified by the report, including women-focused leadership

development through IDFA's inaugural Women's Summit, increased mentorship opportunities, and by updating IDFA's own family leave policies, among others.

IDFA will continue to advance gender equality and opportunity for women in the U.S. dairy industry through programming, networking and reporting.

## The premise

The aim of the 2024 State of Women in Dairy Report was to develop data-based metrics and insights on the attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and policies that limit opportunities for women. Ultimately, the data identified whether inequalities still exist for women in dairy and if those inequalities are being experienced consistently. The data informed a set of recommendations that industry leadership can implement to reduce gender inequality.

### Getting the wheel in motion

The data for the report was collected through an online survey from October – November 2023. Participants represented a sample of 548 professionals from the dairy industry—396 women and 152 men representing various ages, job functions, and experience levels. The sample included individuals from processors, farmer cooperatives, farms, retailers, and suppliers.

Demographic data such as age groups, experience length, and job functions were collected to accurately represent different segments of the dairy workforce. The report's findings and recommendations were presented at IDFA's Dairy Forum conference in January 2024. At the conference, a panel of industry experts discussed the new data and shared their insights on steps the industry can take to enhance gender equality. The initiative is ongoing as IDFA continues to present the 2024 findings (e.g. with IDF, the Women's Meat Network, and individual companies), and as IDFA

has already begun work towards the next survey, to be conducted in Fall 2024. (See below links for tables/figures.)

### The history of success

In the 2024 State of Women in Dairy Report, IDFA used the data to create six recommendations for the dairy industry to address perceived inequalities that were illustrated in the survey:

- 1) Develop culture of respect and inclusion;
- 2) Develop structured leadership development programs;
- 3) Conduct annual compensation audits and address disparities;
- 4) Ensure adequate and meaningful human resources support;
- 5) Review and expansion of family leave policies; and
- 6) Continue surveys and benchmarking data.

The report and recommendations generated significant outcomes for women in dairy,

including:

- Increased conversations across the dairy industry leadership about these findings and gender inequality;
- Exponential growth in mentorship programs for women (e.g. IDFA's mentoring circles program has tripled in size);
- First ever all-female leadership development summit in U.S. dairy, which sold out, had a waiting list, and of which participants said it "changed their lives";
- Multiple dairy companies reporting increased family leave policies and additional internal discussions on support for women; and
- Significant discussion on improvements to and expansion of future reporting.

### The value of the initiative

IDFA is aware of at least 500 people who have experienced a positive impact or benefited from the 2024 State of Women in Dairy report and its implementation.



© International Dairy Foods Association

IDFA's inaugural Women's Summit from March 2024





IDFA's inaugural Women's Summit from March 2024

Because the report effectively provided a data-based benchmark on the current challenges facing the sector, it fostered a neutral, transparent, objective conversation around inequalities facing women. Being able to discuss challenges facing women in that manner created new ways for the sector's leadership to consider these sensitive issues with less apprehension.

Furthermore, the report and its data also serve as a guide to future programming, strategy, initiative, and policy development on gender equality in the dairy industry, which IDFA hopes to continue facilitating through these same neutral, data-based methods.

### **New opportunities**

IDFA will continue to build on the insights from the first State of Women in Dairy report by improving and expanding the original survey and publishing the second annual State of Women

in Dairy Report in early 2025. That follow-up report will aim to include expanded survey sample sizes as well as respondents

**"IDFA's 2024 State of Women in Dairy Report initiated the industry's efforts to address gender equality in the dairy sector – we are hoping to demonstrate progress in next year's report."**

representing all roles within the dairy sector. IDFA is planning for the next report to demonstrate the dairy industry's progress on the areas identified for improvement in 2024. IDFA also aims to continue increasing its leadership development, mentorship offerings, and other support for women as identified in the reporting as we recognize the recommendations identified in 2024 are likely to require ongoing support to result in significantly measurable change.

### **More information**

More information about the 2024 State of Women in Dairy report can be found here: <https://www.idfa.org/news/2024-state-of-women-in-dairy-report>

The stat graphics for the 2024 State of Women in Dairy Report can be downloaded here: <https://www.idfa.org/news/idfa-celebrates-womens-history-month-with-resources-and-programming-to-advance-gender-equality>

## Helping nourish the world with safe and sustainable dairy

The IDF is the leading source of scientific and technical expertise for all stakeholders of the dairy chain. Since 1903, IDF has provided a mechanism for the dairy sector to reach global consensus on how to help feed the world with safe and sustainable dairy products.

A recognized international authority in the development of science-based standards for the dairy sector, IDF has an important role to play in ensuring the right policies, standards, practices and regulations are in place to ensure the world's dairy products are safe and sustainable.



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## Celebrating 120 years of dairy expertise: proud to be dairy

IDF was founded in September 1903, during the first World Dairy Congress in Brussels. The original aims of the federation are much as they are today: to represent the dairy sector as a whole at international level by providing a global source of scientific expertise and knowledge in support of the development and promotion of quality milk and milk products so as to deliver consumers with nutrition, health and well-being.

For the last 120 years, IDF has contributed to the development of standards for the dairy sector and has closely collaborated with key stakeholders to share its expertise for milk and dairy products, with safe, sustainable and fair-trade practices at heart.

The creation of IDF was an act of innovation. It was so innovative that 60 years after that, the FAO and the WHO created Codex based on the standardization work that IDF had done with milk and dairy products.

120 years later, IDF is still developing dairy science, knowledge and innovation, and sharing them with the world through its publications, its awards and recognitions, and its events, like the IDF World Dairy Summit.

IDF has become a synonym of Dairy. That is why we not only say that we know Dairy. **We are Dairy.**

