

October 2024

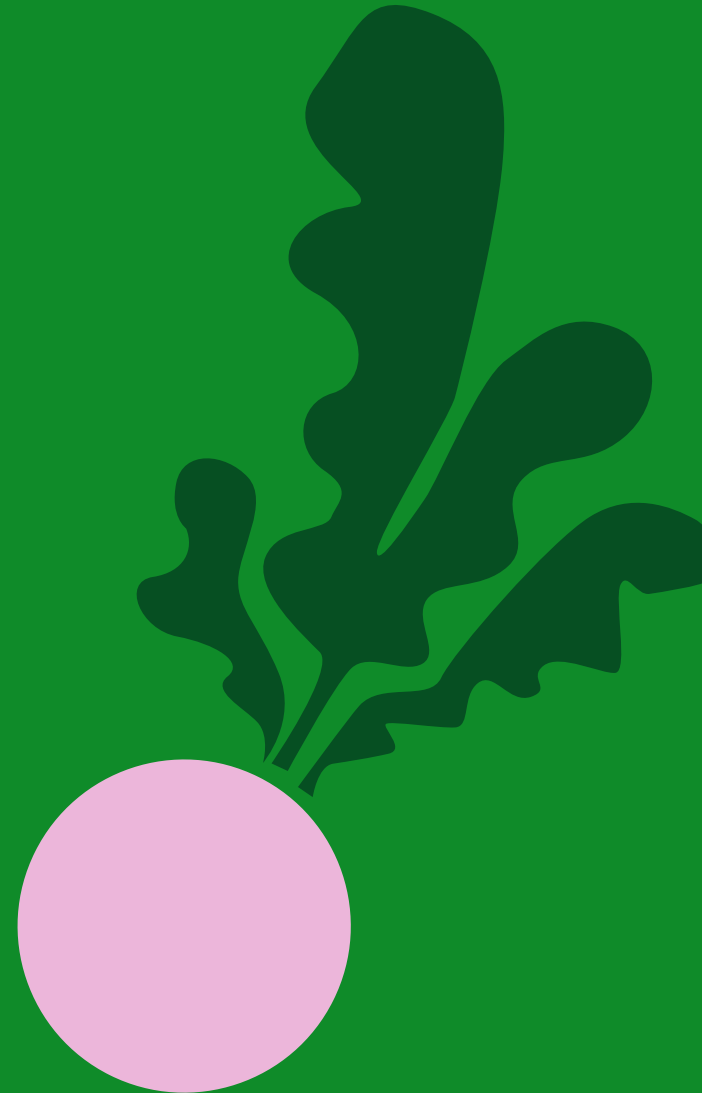
# Pathways to Growth

Gender-smart business  
actions that work



## Pathway 2

Agriculture



**Gender Equality**

**Pathway 6**  
**Workplace Safety**



Establish robust systems for addressing sexual harassment

- + Employee satisfaction / retention
- + Attract more diverse talent
- Legal risks

- + Equity in the workplace
- Harmful norms

**Pathway 1**  
**Product Delivery**




Deliver high-impact products and services to women customers

- + Sales to existing and new customers
- + Customer satisfaction

- + Economic empowerment
- Time poverty

**Pathway 2**  
**Agriculture**

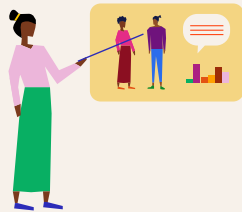


Connect women smallholder farmers to formal supply chains

- + Supply volume and quality
- + Retention of suppliers

- + Income for women farmers
- + Agency for women

**Pathway 5**  
**Work Culture**



Foster an inclusive work culture in which women can thrive

- + Employee retention and productivity
- Absenteeism

- + Opportunities for working caregivers
- Sexual harassment of women
- Stress and burnout

**Pathway 4**  
**Last-mile Sales**



Equip women sales agents with the tools to excel

- + Sales through new customers
- Agent turnover

- + Income opportunities for women
- + Access to products in rural areas

**Pathway 3**  
**Recruitment**



Hire more women by creating quality jobs and inclusive hiring practices

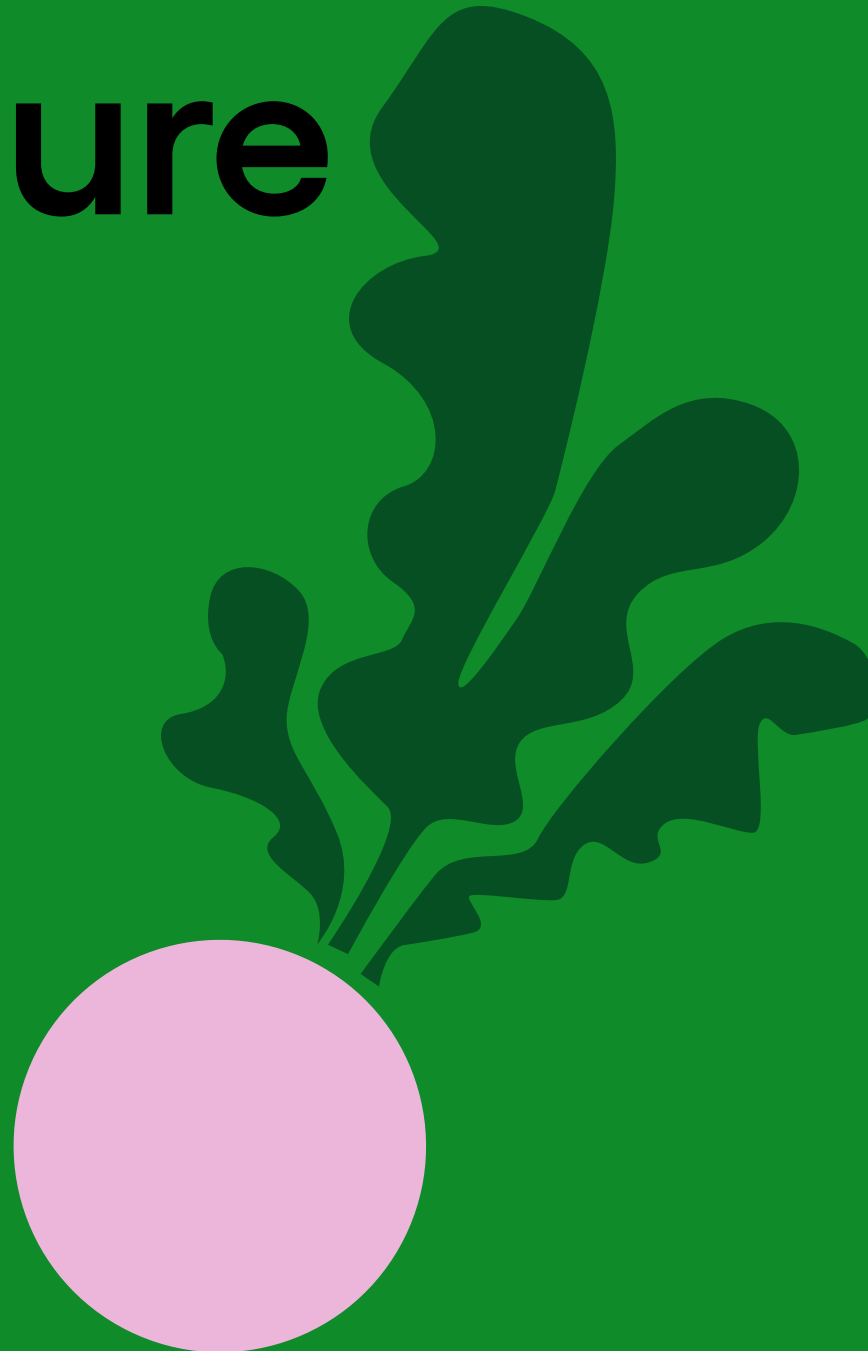
- + Market size and profitability
- Employee turnover

- + Women entering key fields
- + Employee satisfaction
- Gender pay gap

## Pathway 2

# Agriculture

**Increase volumes by connecting women smallholder farmers to formal supply chains**



In the agricultural sector, women farmers typically have worse access to productive resources than men. Agribusinesses have an opportunity to chip away at some of these inequalities and help bring women into formal supply chains, drive social impact, and expand their sourcing volumes and sales. Increasing sourcing from women necessitates first understanding the barriers that women farmers face. Companies can then take actions such as facilitating women farmers' access to agricultural inputs, loans, or training.

**Which enterprises this pathway works for:**

Agribusiness (e.g., aggregators, processors, input distributors, and any enterprise interfacing with farmers), especially those that seek to drive improved outcomes for women farmers.

**The challenge:** In many emerging markets, women make up almost half of the agricultural labor force.<sup>37</sup> Yet women farmers participate less in formal agricultural supply networks than men farmers because of the unequal conditions they face. These include unique restrictions in mobility, land access, financing, access to markets, and information. These ultimately contribute to women farmers having reduced yield quantity and quality and revenue.<sup>38</sup> Because women have less access to needed resources, when women farmers do participate, they often sell smaller volumes and benefit less.

**What businesses can do:** Agribusinesses can improve outcomes for women smallholder farmers by understanding their unique needs and challenges and implementing actions to address them. Often, the first step is to identify the specific constraints and preferences of women smallholder farmers in a given context, which companies can learn through interviews, focus groups, or surveys with women farmers. Then, actions may include:

- **Addressing mobility and accessibility challenges** by bringing services closer to women farmers.
- **Decreasing requirements** for formally supplying to the company, i.e., land ownership requirements for cooperative membership.
- **Facilitating access to agricultural inputs, equipment, and machinery**, and ensuring these are affordable and responsive to women's cash flows.
- **Providing access to information and training to improve product yields and quality** — and making sure the trainings are delivered in settings that work for women.

**Business outcomes:** Increased agribusiness sales and profitability achieved through:<sup>39</sup>

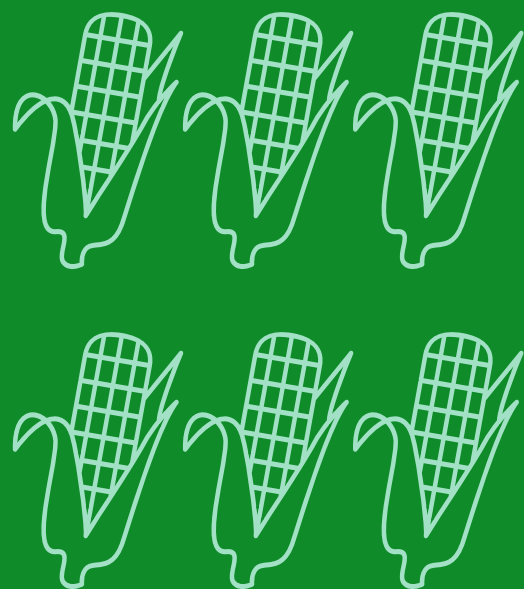
- **Increased supply volume.**
- **Improved supply quality.**
- **Expanded supply networks and potentially better retention of suppliers.**
- **Broadened access to new markets.**
- **Access to sectors seeking ethically-sourced or women-produced goods.**

**Social outcomes:**

- **Increased income for women farmers.** Globally, if women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase farm yields by 20% to 30%.<sup>40</sup>
- **Improved farm management**, increased women's leadership and negotiation abilities, and women's increased decision-making authority over household finances.<sup>41,42</sup>
- **Contribution to shifting traditional norms** that restrict women's mobility or designate certain tasks as unsuitable for women.<sup>43</sup>
- **Increased women's economic opportunity** (i.e., through employment in enterprises and increased production and income), promotion and protection of women's rights (whether land tenure for producers or employee health and safety for agro-processors), and improvements in land sustainability.

## Case study

## Warc



## Company profile

Warc Africa is an agricultural social enterprise operating in West Africa since 2011 with agricultural production, service, and consulting operations. Warc sells agricultural inputs, offers know-how, and provides access to market for farmers to move beyond subsistence and use their soils to spearhead climate change mitigation and adaptation. Warc's agribusiness serves over 20,000 farmers.

## Background

As a social enterprise committed to local economic empowerment, Warc has always actively supported farmers to improve financially by diversifying their production, enhancing yields, and accessing new markets. Empowering women in agriculture has been a key piece of this.

Through 2021, Warc's model consisted of establishing lead farmers in sourcing communities. These lead farmers then connected the company with farmers and provided farmers with technical assistance.

However, this wasn't the ideal setup to connect to farmers. There was high turnover among lead farmers, which limited how solid Warc's connection was to farmers and meant that supply of agricultural products wasn't stable.

## Business priority and entry point for the gender work

In 2021, Warc launched an ambitious growth plan to significantly expand the crop supply coming from farmers, with aspirations to do so equitably such that increased crops would come from all farmers, both men and women.

To achieve this, the agribusiness envisioned shifting from its lead farmer model to establishing a network of rural Trading Hubs. Through these Hubs, Warc would ensure an accessible, established space for farmers to sell their product at any time and in any quantity, as well as for farmers to buy regenerative farming input packages and get access to training and mechanized services. Warc thought about how to structure these Hubs to ensure the increased crops would come from all farmers, both men and women.

*Without gender inclusion in mind...there is a risk that farmers with smaller yields and transactions, who are usually women, are consistently left out of the market.*

— CEO, Warc

During this period, Warc received a TA grant from Acumen that funded advisory support from Value for Women. Following a comprehensive diagnostic, Warc and Value for Women decided jointly that focusing on applying a gender lens to this Hub model



presented a high-impact opportunity. With support from Value for Women, Warc conducted research with women farmers to better understand the barriers they were facing in accessing Warc's services. The research identified the following barriers:

- **Access:** Limited access to land, agricultural inputs, finance, and technical assistance was restricting women's ability to produce and sell at the same levels as men.
- **Traditional household responsibilities:** Household responsibilities were creating time poverty for women and limiting their mobility, generally undermining their sales and commercial activities and creating travel challenges to reach sales points.

Warc also recognized that the lead farmers and its agricultural technicians were predominantly men, which may have discouraged women from joining the supply network and selling to Warc and from seeking technical support.

# Actions

**Equipped with these insights and support from Value from Women, Warc took action.**

Warc saw that its new Trading Hub model could address some of these challenges. In particular, locating these Hubs in the communities from which Warc sourced would bring farmers closer to product trading and to inputs, services, and training. This would especially help farmers who struggled with time limitations and for whom transportation costs were burdensome, which were frequently women farmers. With the Hubs, women farmers would no longer have to travel outside their communities in order to sell produce to Warc.

Warc decided to take additional action, including to exclusively hire women as Hub managers and to increase the proportion of women administrators and extension services officers. This was intended to challenge traditional gender norms, expand employment opportunities for women, and enable Warc to better connect with women farmers. As a result, women farmers could receive farming information from other women and build stronger trust with Warc as a company.

*By hiring women to run our trading Hubs, Warc has significantly increased trust and market access for farmers. Our close proximity to the farmers is key to building strong relationships, which directly reflect in Warc's revenue growth and the creation of a profitable business model. This approach allows us to scale effectively while fostering a sustainable agricultural ecosystem.*

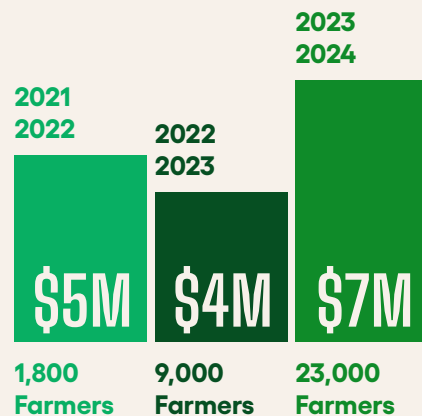
— Managing Director, Warc Consultants

# Results

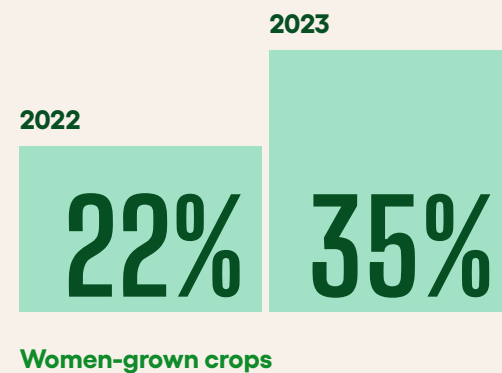
In light of Warc’s actions, farmers shifted from selling once or twice to Warc to selling smaller volumes more frequently. As a result, farmers sold more in total, increasing by 14x the total supply of agricultural products for Warc over two years.

Value of produce purchases from farmers

- **Season 2021/2022:** \$5M, 1,800 farmers
- **Season 2022/2023:** \$4M, 9,000 farmers
- **Season 2023/2024:** \$7M, 23,000 farmers



Women, in particular, were selling more in total. In the first season with the Hubs (the 2022/2023 season), women-grown crops increased from 22% of Warc purchases to 35% of Warc purchases.



Moreover, the Trading Hub model contributed to improving the quality of life of farmers, especially women. In a study conducted by 60 Decibels, 61% of women farmers and 40% of men farmers reported that their quality of life “very much improved.”<sup>44</sup> Looking at both farmers and Hub managers, 96% reported increased earnings after working with Warc.



The Trading Hubs also improved the quality of life of the Hub managers. 72% of Hub managers (mostly women) reported significant improvements in their quality of life, including increased ability to afford household expenses and greater financial independence. Nearly all Hub managers also reported enhanced influence in household and financial decisions. Today, Warc has scaled to 77 Hubs, which employ a total of 150 women managers from the communities, and Warc plans to open additional Hubs.

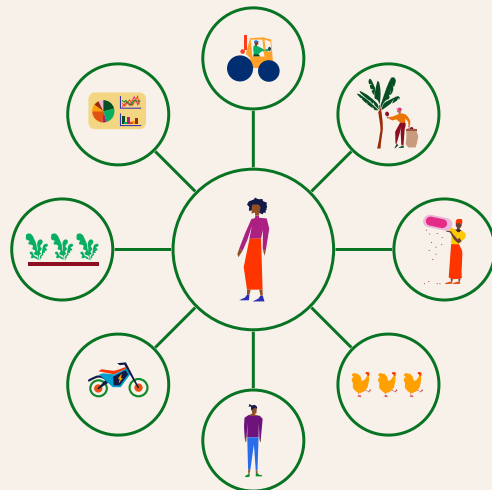




# What contributed to Warc's success?

## Leadership commitment

Warc's leadership, from the CEO down, was firmly committed to aligning business priorities with expanding opportunities for women.



## Clear business goals

Warc zeroed in on the actions that would increase volumes for Warc while driving its social impact objectives.



## Centering of women's voices

Warc prioritized directly hearing from women in the communities in which it operates. These insights became the foundation for Warc to take action, ensuring the actions responded to women farmers' realities. Then, through regular analysis of sex-disaggregated data, Warc confirmed that women benefited from the Hubs, selling smaller quantities more frequently to more quickly convert their harvest to cash.



## Mini case study

# Asili Agriculture



**Case Study: Asili Agriculture increased by 33% women farmers receiving input loans**



**Sector: Agriculture**



**Country: Uganda**

Asili is a large-scale producer and aggregator of maize, soybean, sunflower, and beans in Uganda, working with a network of over 15,000 farmers and providing them producer services (e.g., good agricultural practices training, input loans, crop monitoring).

## Challenge

Asili struggled to attract women farmers as suppliers, which limited its volume of grains. Asili also faced difficulty in recruiting women talent.

## Actions

Asili and Value for Women conducted focus groups with local women farmers and, with those findings in hand, improved and developed tailored producer services to meet women farmers' specific needs. They also developed a gender-forward recruitment process within Asili.

## Results

- In one year, Asili increased the number of women farmers receiving input loans by 33% (from 24% to 30% of total loan portfolio). This is expected to increase these farmers' productivity and incomes while simultaneously serving Asili's need for more and higher quality grains.
- Asili increased the number of women in permanent positions, including in roles traditionally held by men.

## Mini case study

# Kentaste



**Case Study: Kentaste increased by 2.7x the number of women farmers in its supply chain**



**Sector: Agriculture**



**Country: Kenya**

**Kentaste is a Kenyan company that buys coconuts from smallholder farmers, creates value-added products like coconut oil, and sells these globally.**

## Challenge

Kentaste aimed to increase the amount of coconut it was sourcing. A gender assessment and market research, carried out by Value for Women and Kentaste with the support of its investor AlphaMundi Foundation, revealed that many women farmers were involved in the farming but were not registered as formal suppliers. Therefore, these women farmers could not take advantage of Kentaste's services including training on quality production.

## Actions


Kentaste launched a campaign sending its team to local sourcing regions, identifying and contacting women farmers, helping them register as suppliers, and offering targeted training.

## Results


Over a single month, these actions increased by 2.7x the number of women farmers recruited by Kentaste. In the three years since, implementing these actions has led to women's share of revenue to Kentaste increasing from 13% to 21% of total income. Kentaste has faced headwinds in the last few years, and the increased sourcing from women farmers has helped the business to weather challenges, which Kentaste ascribes to women's higher reliability.



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This pathway contains references from the our report, Pathways to Growth: Gender-smart business actions that work. Please refer to the full report for complete context and to access the referenced footnotes and additional details.