



Spotlighting Women in Sustainable Rural Innovation

Policy Brief Italy

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"Spotlighting women contributing to sustainable innovation in rural areas favor knowledge exchange, help to strengthens networks and inspire other women to engage in innovation."

Executive Summary

Women play key roles in leading sustainable innovation in farming and in rural areas in general. However, their contribution is often not visible and goes unrecognized. The creation of a national online inventory of women leading farming and rural innovative projects will enhance their visibility and may inspire other women to be engaged in sustainable innovation in rural areas.

Following the successful approach of the FLIARA project, which entailed the creation of such inventory at the national level and the subsequent selection of 20 women innovators (10 farmers and 10 rural entrepreneurs) to document their innovation journey and impacts. Fact sheets about these women and their projects were created and published on the FLIARA project website to enhance their visibility and strengthen their networks.

Policymakers should develop a similar initiative or expand the existing one to spotlight rural women engaged in sustainable innovation across Italy. At the same time, they could support local events (e.g. through the LAGs) where women innovators could showcase their products and services to a wide audience as well as meet and network with other women innovators. Such national as well as localized engagement strategies would contribute to empower female innovators, spotlighting their projects, facilitating peer learning and accessibility of information, and inspiring other women.

By selecting key female innovators, documenting their experiences, and fostering a supportive community, this approach promotes knowledge exchange and leadership. Lessons from the FLIARA project demonstrate that regional and national initiatives can be equally effective, with informal networking preferred. Policymakers should support tailored programs that empower



female innovators, facilitate peer learning, and ensure accessibility through localized engagement strategies.

The Challenge

- 🏠 Women bringing forward innovative projects in farming and in rural areas are often not seen or not known beyond small groups of insiders or beyond their networks.
- 🏠 Women's contribution to rural sustainability often goes unrecognized.
- 🏠 There is a lack of platforms where female role-models in farming and rural areas can present their projects and inspire other women.

Policy Solutions

Identify women that bring forward innovative and sustainable projects in farming and rural areas.

- 🏠 Consider multiple dimensions of sustainability (economic, environmental, social, cultural).
- 🏠 Use an assessment framework (see [Initial Case Study Assessment and Selection Framework](#) for an example).
- 🏠 Identify women that bring forward innovative and sustainable projects in farming and rural areas in each region of Italy.
- 🏠 Build a national inventory of women-led innovative projects.

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Produce fact sheets about each project

- 🏠 Contact the women included in the inventory to ask if they would like their project/innovation to be included in a national online and open access platform
- 🏠 Obtain an informed consent form from each woman to present their project in a factsheet
- 🏠 Use a standard layout that includes text and visuals
- 🏠 Fill in a factsheet for each woman-led project collecting standardized information to present their project, their innovation journey, the products and services they offer, their impact on different sustainability dimensions, and add relevant related websites and contacts. For a practical example see the factsheets created in the context of the FLIARA project: [Innovators - FLIARA Project](#)

Create a public open access website to upload the factsheets and advertise it

- 🏠 Upload the factsheets produced on a website created specifically to spotlight rural women
- 🏠 Include an interactive map to show where the different projects are located
- 🏠 Add a "contact" section, so that women innovators interested in being added can contact the website managers
- 🏠 Make sure the website is regularly updated
- 🏠 Advertise the website at the local level (e.g. through events organized by the LAGs, markets, public spaces), as well as at regional and national events (e.g. on the website of the national strategic plan of the CAP)



Organize Community of Practice

- 🏠 Community of Practice (CoP) bring people with a common interest together to share knowledge, innovate, offer support and advance an agenda. Organizing CoP at regional level or/and at local level (for example by LAGs) would be useful to increase awareness about women's needs.
- 🏠 Organize workshops/events involving women, policymakers and other stakeholders which are part of the CoP to discuss innovations, problems and solutions and learning experiences

Support the organization of events spotlighting women innovators specifically

- 🏠 Allocate funds to support local events and initiatives (e.g. organized by the LAGs) to showcase and appreciate particularly women-led projects
- 🏠 Allocate funds to support the organization of at least one regional fair about women-led innovation in farming and in rural areas in general
- 🏠 Share outcomes through media channels

Supporting Evidence & Best Practices

A similar approach to the one suggested here was successfully implemented in the **HORIZON EUROPE** project **FLIARA** (Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas). The initiative engaged 200 women from 10 EU Member States, and included among other tasks, the production of 200 factsheets on women-led projects on farming and rural innovation and the creation of a Community of Practice.

The women who participated in this initiative expressed great enthusiasm about being involved in the project activities. Their projects got visibility in their own country as well as across Europe, demonstrating the importance of supporting and creating new ways to spotlight women-led innovative projects and their impact on rural sustainability. In addition, the women involved created a WhatsApp group that enabled networking among themselves.

Conclusion & Call to Action

Spotlighting women innovators in farming and rural areas, and their roles in promoting sustainable innovation can empower women, strengthen their networks, facilitate peer learning, and provide inspiration for other women.

The success of the FLIARA project highlights the effectiveness of spotlighting female innovators, also to point out the challenges they face, the support they need and to highlight the impacts they have. Regional and national initiatives can replicate this model, ensuring accessibility and relevance.

Call to Action:

- 🏠 A national online, open access platform showcasing female-led innovative projects in farming and in rural entrepreneurship, and their contribution to rural sustainability, should be funded through public support (e.g. through the CAP National Strategic Plan).
- 🏠 Regional and local events and the creation of Communities of Practice should also be encouraged, and financial support (through public funds) should be provided to create spaces where women can present their projects, gain visibility and meet other women to network with.



By investing in these strategies, it is possible to amplify women's contributions and drive meaningful, sustainable change in rural communities, while promoting gender equality.

Further Reading

www.fliara.eu

[Innovators - FLIARA Project](#)

[Ambassadors - FLIARA Project](#)

Initial Guidelines for Case Study Assessment and Selection <https://zenodo.org/records/14045179>

Strategic Action Plan <https://zenodo.org/records/14045414>

About FLIARA

The project is on a mission to create a more sustainable future by highlighting the role of women in agriculture and rural areas. FLIARA will boost understanding of the needs and challenges facing women leading innovative environmental and rural development practices in EU farming and rural areas.

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Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas

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