

# EXPORT TO CANADA NEWS

## Bridging Gaps, Breaking Barriers: The Women in Trade Project Results.

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# Message from Executive Director

## Five Years of the Women in Trade for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth Project

This edition of the “Exporting to Canada” newsletter is focused on what has been TFO Canada’s flagship initiative over the past 5 years. With most of the funding coming from Global Affairs Canada, the “Women in Trade for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth” project has been a highly impactful collaboration that involved a variety of stakeholders across 23 developing countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Women entrepreneurs in developing countries face significant challenges in expanding their businesses to foreign markets. Obstacles such as limited access to finance, restrictive trade policies, cultural barriers, and lack of market knowledge often hinder their ability to export. However, supporting these women in global trade is not just an economic necessity—it is a powerful tool for sustainable development and global economic growth. These have been the primary motivators behind TFO Canada’s work over the past several years.

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are widely viewed as the engines of economic growth as they have a proportionately higher impact on job creation. It is also known that women-owned businesses contribute significantly to local economies. When these businesses access international markets, they create jobs, improve income levels, and foster economic stability within their communities. In fact, studies show that women reinvest up to 90% of their income into their families and communities, which lead to longer-term socio-economic benefits through inclusive economic development.

E-commerce and digital trading platforms present great opportunities for women entrepreneurs. By leveraging online marketplaces, social media, and digital payment systems, women can overcome geographical and logistical limitations. Providing

digital payment systems, women can overcome geographical and logistical limitations. Providing digital literacy training and ensuring access to reliable internet infrastructure can empower women entrepreneurs to expand their businesses beyond local markets.

Supporting women entrepreneurs from developing countries in exporting to foreign markets is important for the global economy. By addressing financial, regulatory, and digital barriers, we can unlock the full potential of women in trade, fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Over the past several years, TFO Canada’s work has focused on many of the opportunities and challenges that are outlined in this article. It has been a privilege working with so many dedicated partners and stakeholders that have contributed towards inclusive and sustainable economic growth for many women-led businesses across the globe.



Steve Tipman  
Executive Director  
TFO Canada



"Women-owned businesses should leverage trade associations and programs that are tailored for female entrepreneurs. Use digital marketing to reach international markets and consider partnerships with local distributors. Stay informed about trade regulations and cultural nuances to ensure smooth transactions and build lasting relationships"

# The Relevance of Women's Participation in Trade: Overcoming Challenges for Economic Empowerment.

By Janin Mendoza, Project Manager at TFO Canada, and Haydee Martinez de Osorio, TFO Canada Associate

While women's economic empowerment is essential to achieving women's rights and gender equality, increasing economic diversification and income is equally important to foster sustainable economic growth and shared prosperity.

According to the [World Bank](#), "closing gender gaps in areas such as employment and entrepreneurship could increase global gross domestic product by 20%." This is a compelling reason for governments, businesses, and individuals to focus on increasing opportunities for women in the economic sphere. The [World Economic Forum](#) further emphasizes that women-led businesses have the power to reduce poverty, stimulate job creation, spark innovation, and contribute to safer, greener, and more vibrant communities. These women-led enterprises are transformative and serve as regenerative forces, providing stability and growth to local economies. Many [studies](#) show that women are more likely than men to invest a significant portion of their income into their children's education, helping break the cycle of poverty and creating long-term benefits for entire communities.

## Why Women's Participation in Business and Trade Matters

Increasing women's participation in business, particularly in trade, is not just an ethical or social issue; it's an economic necessity. Women bring unique perspectives, skills, and innovative solutions contributing to market expansion and sustainable business practices. Research shows that if women participated "[identically to men](#)" in entrepreneurship and trade, the global economy could see a boost of up to \$28 trillion by 2025. This level of economic growth would benefit everyone, as women's involvement helps reduce income disparities, diversify industries, and promote more inclusive growth models.

Furthermore, businesses with higher gender diversity tend [to performance better](#), as they are able to innovate and adapt more effectively to changing market conditions. Women's participation leads to more balanced decision-making, greater collaboration, and the identification of new opportunities, all of which contribute to overall economic development and prosperity in their communities.

## Challenges to Overcoming Women's Barriers to Economic Participation

### 01 Access to Finance

Despite these clear benefits, many women face substantial barriers in their journey toward economic empowerment. These obstacles hinder their ability to contribute fully and benefit from global commerce, limiting their potential and the broader economic growth of their regions and countries

### 02 Cultural and Societal Norms

Some of the most significant challenges women face include: i) access to finance, ii) cultural and societal norms, iii) legal barriers, iv) lack of mentorship and networks, and v) lack of digital skills to effectively use online platforms and services, and the cost of using digital technologies.

### 03 Legal Barriers

While the challenges are significant, many ways exist to address these barriers and create an environment where women can thrive in business and trade. Some key steps include:

### 04 Lack of mentorship and Networks

1. **Expand Access to Finance:** Women face challenges in accessing credit, loans, and investment opportunities, hindering business growth and full participation in global trade. Financial institutions should tailor services to meet the needs of women exporters.

### 05 Digital technology

2. **Promote Gender-Sensitive Policies:** In many societies, traditional gender roles can limit women's decision-making opportunities and restrict their ability to participate in economic activities, especially those

that require engagement across borders. These cultural barriers remain a significant obstacle to women's full participation in trade, and the enjoyment of human rights. Governments and international bodies should remove

legal and cultural barriers to women's trade participation. Gender equality should be included in economic strategies, workplace policies, and trade agreements. Trade Support Institutions should also implement gender-sensitive policies and services tailored to SMEs

**3. Building and Strengthening Capacities:** Women in trade often lack access to essential knowledge, mentorship, networks, and business opportunities critical for success. Without guidance, resources, or connections, women face more difficulties scaling their businesses and accessing new trade opportunities. Offering training programs focused on trade skills, digital technology, business management, and leadership development is essential to empowering women. Training programs on trade skills, business management, leadership, and supportive mentorship networks are key to empowering women in global trade.

**4. Encourage Inclusive Regulations and Trade Agreements:** In some regions, laws and regulations disproportionately impact women, creating legal obstacles that restrict their entrepreneurial freedom and limit their access to trade. These legal and policy challenges must be addressed to allow women to compete equally with their male counterparts. Trade agreements and international trade policies should include gender considerations and actively promote policies that enhance women's economic participation. By focusing on inclusivity, trade agreements can foster environments that encourage women's entrepreneurship and leadership.

#### **TFO Canada's Role in Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment in Trade**

TFO Canada is dedicated to breaking down the barriers women face in trade, having supported over 3,300 women-led businesses and creating pathways for them to enter the global marketplace. However, TFO Canada acknowledges that much remains to be done. Addressing affordable childcare, sector-specific training, financial inclusion, and stable employment is essential for women's full participation in business and trade. TFO Canada is committed to advancing these causes, aiming to create a more inclusive global economy where individuals, regardless of gender, can thrive, ensuring a more equitable future.



## Access Canada: A Guide to Exporting to Canada

By Beverley Rodrigues, TFO Canada Associate



TFO Canada is pleased to announce the publication of *Access Canada: A Guide to Exporting to Canada*, a comprehensive resource designed to help SMEs navigate the Canadian market. This latest edition includes updated data up, with additional insights on Canada's population and economy based on available statistics.

The manual features 15 chapters, all of which have been updated to reflect key developments, including economic trends, evolving consumer behaviors, customs regulations, food standards, and the growing opportunities in Canada's expanding ethnic markets. Notably, this edition introduces three new chapters:

- Corporate Social Responsibility & Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) Reporting – providing insights into buyer expectations and the measures SMEs should adopt to stay competitive.
- Digital Technology – highlighting the increasing digitization of the Canadian market and shifting consumer behaviours toward online shopping.
- Climate Change – addressing food security, supply chain disruptions and offering practical strategies to reduce risk.

This manual is packed with references, links, and resources to deepen your understanding of market access to Canada. It can be used as a standalone tool or alongside [TFO Canada's Market Information Papers](#), [Webinars](#), and other educational materials available on our [Learn platform](#). We encourage you to take full advantage of this valuable resource to enhance your export success in Canada.

[Register](#) with TFO Canada to gain full access to our range of services for suppliers, buyers, exporters and support agencies involved in the Canadian market.

*This guide will be available online in English, French, and Spanish on the TFO Canada website beginning on April 1.*

[Access the full document](#) through your account.

# Thank you to all our Trade Support Institution Partners in the Implementation of the WIT Project



# Program Updates

Welcome to this special edition of our newsletter, dedicated to the *Women in Trade for an Inclusive and Sustainable Growth Project*. In this issue, we explore the thoughtful impact that the project has had on Trade Support Institutions (TSIs), and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from developing countries toward achieving their export goals. Through the joint efforts, we highlight how the project played a role in closing gender gaps in trade, empowering women entrepreneurs, and fostering inclusive economic growth in international markets. Join us as we share inspiring stories and insights that showcase the positive changes being made!.

Happy reading!

## The Women in Trade for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth (WIT) Project

The WIT project was committed to fostering inclusive and sustainable growth by empowering women from developing countries to engage more actively in international trade. The focus was on increasing the participation of women exporters and boosting the export share from women-led small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by building capacities and providing opportunities to participate in market access activities. By driving growth in exports from these businesses, the project contributed to economic development and poverty reduction—creating jobs and generating positive ripple effects throughout value chains.

Working in partnership with TSIs in 23 developing and least developed countries (LDCs) in Africa, Asia, Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean, the project **addressed the main constraints faced by women exporters such as their lack of market knowledge, skills, resources, and networks to access global trade as well as their low involvement as members and leaders of TSIs.**

Three innovative mechanisms specifically for women exporters in Sub-Saharan Africa enable them to connect with buyers and grow their networks:



## WIT Project in Numbers



5 1/2 years



\$14.6 MM project.

Global Affairs Canada: \$11.7 MM - 50% allocated to Sub-Saharan Africa.  
TFO Canada and partners: \$2.9 MM



23 countries



Agri-food (fresh produce and processed foods), Home Décor and Artisan, Apparel and Textile, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT)



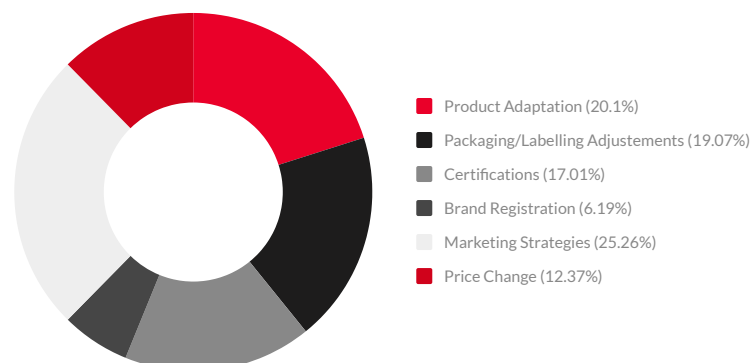
**553 SMEs (364 women-led)** had successfully generated CAD **\$19.94 MM (\$5.5 MM by women-led)** - **78** of them (**49 women-led**) were **first time exporters**.



**2689** jobs created - **1989** held by women

SMEs reported investing in the growth and sustainability of their businesses through measures like adopting new technologies to increase productivity.

## Actions taken by SMEs to Improve Competitiveness



## Story of Change

### Jute Land: Empowering Women and Driving Sustainable Growth.

Jute Land, a women-led SME based in Dhaka, has experienced significant growth over 15 years in the home décor industry, thanks to training and support received during their participation in the WIT project that boosted export revenue. By reinvesting in their workforce through improved salaries and creating 300 new jobs (100% filled by women), they've also prioritized sustainability, forming the 'Sustainable Bangladesh' alliance to cater to large buyers like Walmart and Target. The company has improved labor practices, including fair wages and maternity leave, and transformed its branding to better align with Western tastes. Through these efforts, Jute Land has gained confidence in market research and client acquisition, generating an additional \$500,000 in export revenue and strengthening their position in the global market.

[Read more](#) about how Jute Land is transforming its business and empowering women through sustainable practices and global expansion.

## Capacity Building & Skills Development

TFO Canada's mission is to empower SMEs and TSIs in developing countries, equipping them with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in international trade. With a focus on promoting gender equality and social inclusion, as well as tackling the challenges presented by climate change and environmental considerations.

**2,645** SMEs were trained in export readiness.

**1,726** were women-led SMEs.

From them, **1,092** SMEs were trained in technical areas (Climate Change, Corporate Social Responsibility, e-commerce, and digital marketing).

**749** were women-led

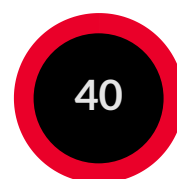
**990** SMEs reported having improve their export-readiness.

**732** SMEs reported to have developed new or improved existing export plans to include environmental strategies.



**264** TSIs representatives (**150** women) and **160** Embassy Trade representatives (**81** women) completed the Export training program

**Lead Buyer Program** in Sub-Saharan Africa: **16** WLSMEs partnered with **8** Canadian buyers who act as coaches to help the SMEs improve and adapt their products based on the requirements of the Canadian market.



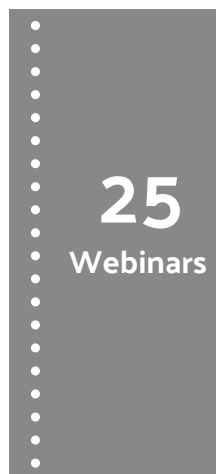
**Lead Exporter Program** in Nigeria and Kenya: **40** WLSMEs partnered with **4** businesswomen mentors to coach and guide on trade and export, business operation, pricing, market research, and market penetration.

### Through **Women Exporters Matching Fund (WEF)** SMEs in Sub-Saharan Africa



### Additional Trade Support Services include:

- 5** sessions of Canadian market access,
- 2** sessions on regulation compliance,
- 1** 'Introducing TFO Canada's and Connect Americas's online services',
- 2** on digital tools,
- 3** on supply chain and logistics,
- 4** on gender,
- 1** on preparation to participate in trade shows, and
- 7** sessions on Introducing TFO Canada and its Online Information Services in English, French and Spanish



Success stories that showcased the key elements of the success of SMEs in entering the Canadian and other international markets as a mechanism for knowledge transfer and capacity building.

20  
Success Stories

70  
Publications

- 46 Info bulletins for Canadian Importers in English and French
- 20 Export to Canada Newsletters in English, French and Spanish.
- 4 Impact Reports

potential through leveraging its expertise in industry research, entry strategies, trade promotion events, and networking opportunities.



553  
SMEs

Participated in



28

Trade Mission\*



364  
WLSMEs

## Story of Change

### Busaino Fruits & Herbs: Empowering Women and Expanding to Global Market.

Busaino Fruits & Herbs, a women-led company in Jinja, Uganda, has made significant strides in exporting fresh produce after participating in the WIT project. Known for their agroecology approach to addressing land degradation and providing affordable, nutrient-rich food, they were eager to expand internationally but hadn't yet exported. Through their participation in training through the project, they developed a compelling business story, improved their marketing and packaging, and honed their business skills, particularly in contracts and negotiations. They also transitioned to digital marketing, helping to expand their reach. As a result, they've secured a repeat order contract for 20,000kg of Jackfruit exported monthly to the Netherlands, generating CAD\$90,000 in revenue. This success has led to the creation of 45 new jobs, 30 of which are filled by women.

[Read more](#) about Busaino Fruits & Herbs' growth and impact in global markets.

## Market Access Activities and Trade Promotion

TFO Canada provides comprehensive support to SMEs in developing countries seeking to enter new markets. TFO Canada support SMEs navigating the complexities of international trade and help them maximize their growth

\*SIAL Paris 2022, Maputo International Trade Fair (FACIM 2022), NY Now 2022, SIAL Montreal 2022; Africa Big 7 2023, ANUGA 2023, Cosmoprof 2023, Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA) 2023, Ghana Agrofood 2023, Global Produce and Floral Show (GPFS) 2023, Montreal International Game Show (MIGS) 2023, International Exhibition of Agriculture and Animal Resources (SARA) 2023, SIAL Canada Toronto 2023, NY Now 2023; International Food and Drinks Event (IFE) 2024, SIAL Montreal 2024, Colombia - Canada Virtual Trade Mission in the IT Services Sector 2023, Jordan - Canada Virtual Trade Mission in the Processed Food sector, Jordan - exporter mission to Canada in the Dead-Sea Cosmetic sector 2024, Colombia - exporter mission to Canada in the agrifood sector 2024, and Buyer Missions to East Africa, Madagascar, Indonesia, Morocco, Vietnam, Peru, Honduras, and Zambia.

Through Women Exporters Matching Fund (WEF), 30 WLSMEs from Sub-Saharan Africa participated in an additional independent export promotion event.

From the SMEs that participated in market access activities



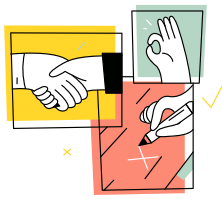
49% made contact with new buyers



30-40% contacts leading to active negotiations







with them **16-20%** received an initial order



**10%** received at least one repeat order

Project activities promotion was carried out through social media, where the TFO Canada account gained the following number of followers:



2690

1420



4283

809



## Story of Change

### APASEM Foods: Empowering Women and Expanding to Global Markets.

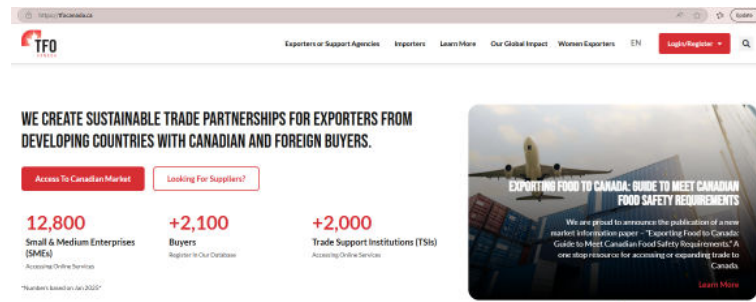
APASEM Foods, a women-led producers association specializing in ginger, turmeric, and oranges, had not exported its products before joining the project. With training in export readiness, marketing strategies, and negotiation, the group of 30 members (20 women) developed an Export Plan that refined their packaging, labeling, and buyer selection. They also created a professional website highlighting their commitment to sustainability and social responsibility, positioning themselves strongly for international markets. As a result, APASEM Foods began exporting to the Netherlands, UK, and USA, generating USD\$200,000 in revenue to date.

[Read more](#) about how APASEM Foods is growing its export business and empowering women entrepreneurs.

## Research and Market Intelligence

TFO Canada offers insights into market trends, consumer preferences, product innovation and emerging opportunities, allowing SMEs to make informed decisions and adapt to changing market dynamics.

One re-developed and tailored [website](#), more accessible and user-friendly, designed to share relevant information that supports both capacity building and networking between international buyers and small to medium-sized exporters from developing countries.



In total:



**12,815** Exporters  
**3,381** Women Exporters



**3,381** Importers

and **2,127** Trade Support Institutions benefiting from TFO Canada's online services.

**61%** of Canadian Importers,  
**43%** of Trade Support Institutions, and  
**68%** of SMEs indicated usefulness of these services.

In 2019 -2024

**3,946**

New SMEs registered on TFO Canada's online platform



**1,260** Women Led



**644** Men Led



**2,042** Mixed Ownership

**13** Market Information Papers (MIPs): develop in the project identified sectors; and

**5** Guides: Environment Management for Exporters: Environmental Management Guide for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Exporting to Canada, Corporate Social Responsibility the New Standards of Business, Guide for Women Exporters to Access the Canadian and International Markets, Guide to meet Canadian food safety requirements, and Access Canada: a guide on exporting to Canada 2025.

**33** Local Market Research Studies on country-specific sectors.

**39** MBA market entry studies completed for 35 women-led businesses, and 4 mixed-led businesses, with the support of Concordia University, University of Ottawa, HEC University Montreal, and Wilfrid Laurier University.

# Gender Equality

The WIT project's approach is based on the idea that for Trade Support Institutions (TSIs) to offer gender-responsive support to women-led SMEs and drive equitable export development, they must first integrate gender equality into their own organizational culture. Through training provided by the project:

23

TSIs developed a stronger understanding, and positive attitudes towards women's leadership and the importance of equitable participation in trade.

399

TSI representatives (261 women) were trained on understanding the gender gap in trade and how to address the under-representation of women in trade.

17

Gender Action Plans were developed formalizing the TSIs' commitment to promoting gender equality and delivering gender-sensitive trade facilitation services.

**The 17 TSI partners** implemented at least one measure from gender action plans.

By the end of the project, women's leadership positions on boards of directors and senior management of participating TSIs had increased by 14% to 48% of leadership positions. An even more significant change is observed in the representation of women's leadership among SMEs that make up the membership of participating TSIs (initial 28% of representation versus a 57% at the end of the project).

By the end of the project, the representation of women in leadership roles within participating Trade Support Institutions (TSIs) saw a remarkable increase, with women holding 48% of board and senior management positions—up from 14%. Even more impressive was the shift in women-led SMEs' memberships within these TSIs. Initially,

women-led just 28% of these businesses, but by the project's close, that number had nearly doubled to 57%, highlighting a significant stride toward gender equity in leadership.

## Story of Change

### Jordan Exporters Association: Advancing Gender Equality in Export Development.

The Jordan Exporters Association (JEA), serving 100 members, has long focused on helping companies expand into new markets through practical training and trade missions. Historically, their services mainly catered to male-led companies, but after engaging with the project, JEA has taken significant steps to become more gender-responsive and inclusive. They've updated their gender policy to align with best practices, prioritizing women-led businesses both in policy and activities. CEO Halim Abu Rahmeh shared, "Through the help of TFO Canada, JEA was able to touch on a sector that was marginalized or fairly marginalized..."

The project also brought about leadership changes within JEA, including the election of Nadia Shahin, General Manager at Kawar Group, to the board: "having Nadia as a member of the JEA board... adds a dimension in recognizing gender equality. Her presence on the board set standards to other women ... Nadia's presence ... consolidates the role of JEA in supporting women owned/managed enterprises throughout Jordan." Halim said.

[Read more](#) about how JEA is championing gender equality and empowering women in business across Jordan.

## EtouNature: Natural Products Company Spurs Growth with Exportings

Mariétou Diouf was ahead of the game back in 2013 when she started her natural products business, EtouNature, in Senegal in 2013. "There are many natural products here that are good for health and cosmetics, but no one was doing anything to monetize that," she explains. Today, her ISO 9000:2015 certified company not only has a store, two offices and a manufacturing plant in Dakar, but it also exports to Europe, Canada and other parts of Africa.

EtouNature offers natural food and cosmetic products such as baobab, bissap, moringa, and shea, as well as training in natural cosmetic and food formulation. It promotes African natural products and values local resources while integrating the principles of sustainability, equity, and inclusion. This is done through employing primarily women, including 500 women from villages around Senegal and West Africa in the production chain, and sporting packaging that promotes its natural ingredients and the fact that it works with women.

She began exporting in 2015, initially to France because it is French-speaking just like Senegal and geographically attractive. After attending trade shows and selling at a street market in Canada, Mariétou has focused on exporting power bars to Montreal, once again due to its dominant French language. In order to sell in the Canadian market, she had to adapt her labels to include both French and English as well as the nutritional values. She is planning to create a website for Canada and has hired a logistics company to store inventory and ship product in the country. Although the Canadian market is competitive, she differentiates EtouNature by emphasizing its natural ingredients and gender inclusive work practices.

There is no question that the superior quality of its certified natural products and its reputation based on sustainable practices are among the success factors for entering the Canadian market.



Mariétou Diouf, *Founder and CEO of EtouNature*



[READ THE FULL STORY](#)

## Shanantina: Core values and Sustainability- the Cornerstones of this Growing Peruvian Business.

Always interested in organic farming and spotting a niche to promote products from the biodiversity of the Amazon, **Carolina Sanchez** started Shanantina, based in Peru, back in 2007 to work with producers of sacha inchi. "I had heard about the properties of sacha inchi and decided to learn more and work with it," she explains. This plant produces fruits with large, edible seeds that are usually roasted or pressed to obtain a liquid part, which is the oil rich in omega 3 and 6, and a solid part, which is extruded to obtain a protein-rich flour. Shanantina uses it to make snacks in various flavours, supplemented with ingredients like salt from the Amazon mine and organic sugar. It has also branched out into processing turmeric, cocoa and yuca.

Employing 15, nine of whom are women, in its factory and working with producers, 60% of whom are women, Shanantina was founded on the principle of being a sustainable business. This means integrating environmentally-friendly practices with a strong commitment to supporting local communities. "We prioritize preserving the biodiversity while ensuring fair trade and economic empowerment for our producers, many of whom are from rural and indigenous communities," says Carolina. "Sustainability is not just a practice but a core value that guides our production, from sourcing raw materials to delivering high-quality products."

Empowering female producers is integral to Shanantina's mission to support the vital role that the women play in preserving ancestral knowledge and promoting sustainable practices within their communities. Shanantina incorporates ancestral practices into its processes, particularly in the cultivation and harvesting of ingredients like sacha inchi and cacao. Traditional methods are used for soil enrichment, seed selection, and crop rotation, which respect the environment and enhance the nutritional quality products. These practices are combined with modern techniques to maintain quality and safety standards.



Carolina Sanchez, *Founder and CEO of Shanantina.*



[READ THE FULL STORY](#)



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TFO Canada improves lives through the creation of sustainable trade partnerships for exporters from developing countries with Canadian and foreign buyers. We facilitate access to the Canadian marketplace and share Canadian trade expertise for the benefit of smaller male and female owned/managed exporters from developing countries and for the men and women they employ.

Founded in 1980, TFO Canada is a non-governmental, non profit organization. This newsletter is produced with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through Global Affairs Canada.