# The Power of the Land, Guided by Women: A Story of Development Through Solidarity in Yeniköy

Menderes Yeniköy Kadın Girişimi ve İşletme Kooperatifi, Türkiye
İzmir Metropolitan Municipality
Local Destinations (including villages, cities, municipalities, islands)
People & Community

**Summary of Good Practice Story**
In Yeniköy, a rural village in İzmir Province, Turkey, traditional sericulture (silkworm breeding) and salep cultivation — activities where women played a central role — steadily declined as rural migration and weak economic returns pushed younger generations toward other livelihoods, risking the loss of both income and cultural knowledge. In 2023, eleven women founded the Menderes Yeniköy Women's Entrepreneurship and Business Cooperative, collectively producing and marketing salep, silkworm cocoons, okra products, tarhana and pomegranate molasses under their own brand, supported by the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality's donation of 40 kg of salep seedlings, agricultural engineer guidance, and training programmes, while the "Silk Hands" project (backed by the Ministry of National Education) introduces schoolchildren to silkworm breeding. Cooperative products now sell nationally through Migros and Macrocenter stores, and the group is now planning a Salep House and Silkworm Festival to turn these production traditions into visitor experiences. The lesson: sustainable rural development depends as much on preserving knowledge, culture and local identity as on economic investment, and a small group of determined people — in this case eleven women — can create outsized change when local knowledge and women's leadership are placed at the centre of the process.

**Setting the Scene: Destination & context**

Yeniköy, a rural village in the Menderes district of İzmir, is shaped by its olive groves, mandarin orchards, and long-standing agricultural traditions. In this community, production is not merely an economic activity but a way of life passed down through generations.

For many years, sericulture (silkworm breeding) and salep cultivation were important parts of rural life in Yeniköy. Women played an active role in every stage of production, preserving traditional knowledge through daily practice. However, increasing rural migration, declining economic returns from traditional activities, and younger generations turning to alternative livelihoods gradually led to the loss of these traditions.

Today, a group of women is working to keep this heritage alive. Established in 2023, the Menderes Yeniköy Women's Entrepreneurship and Business Cooperative is more than a producer organization; it is a collective movement that safeguards the village's production heritage, makes women's labor visible, and supports local development.

**The Turning Point: Why change was needed**

Over the years, traditional activities such as salep cultivation and sericulture steadily declined. Important elements of the village's cultural and productive heritage faced the risk of disappearing. Although women played a significant role in production, they were often underrepresented in economic life, and local products rarely received the value they deserved. This was not only an economic challenge. It also meant the gradual disappearance of the knowledge, skills, and traditions that shaped the identity of the village.

Recognizing this loss, eleven women decided to take the future of their village into their own hands. For them, the goal was not simply to generate income but to preserve the living memory of Yeniköy.

**The Vision: What you set out to do**

The women united around a common vision: to revive local production, strengthen women's economic independence, and pass traditional knowledge and production practices on to future generations.

The cooperative's vision was to create a sustainable rural development model led by women, increase the added value of local products, and position Yeniköy as a rural destination recognized for its unique production culture.

At the same time, the cooperative aimed to make region-specific activities such as salep cultivation and sericulture visible once again and eventually transform them into components of authentic visitor experiences.

**The Journey: How change happened**

The cooperative was established in 2023 when eleven women joined forces. They brought together their individual production activities under a collective structure and began producing, processing, and marketing local products collaboratively.

Today, the cooperative produces salep, silkworm cocoons, okra, okra soup, dried okra, tarhana, dried eggplant, pomegranate molasses, and pomegranate vinegar. These products not only generate economic value but also preserve and celebrate the cultural heritage of the village.
The cooperative's success extended beyond production. Women transformed local agricultural products into processed, value-added goods, increasing both product diversity and economic returns while preserving traditional knowledge.
A particular focus has been placed on expanding salep cultivation. The cooperative distributed salep seedlings to women producers, creating new income opportunities while reducing pressure on wild populations and contributing to biodiversity conservation.
Public-sector support played an important role in this process. The İzmir Metropolitan Municipality provided 40 kilograms of salep seedlings to support the expansion of this high-value crop. Agricultural engineers from the municipality offered technical guidance, assisted with the preparation of cultivation beds, and provided expertise throughout the production process. In addition, participants of the municipality's Medicinal and Aromatic Plant Cultivation training programs gained practical knowledge and skills in salep cultivation, enabling them to join the production process.
The revival of sericulture helped bring renewed attention to a tradition that had nearly disappeared. Women not only produced goods but also revived knowledge and practices rooted in the village's history.
The cooperative views sericulture not only as an economic activity but also as an important element of cultural heritage. Through the "Silk Hands" Project, supported by the Ministry of National Education, students are introduced to silkworm breeding and encouraged to become productive, responsible, and engaged members of society. In this way, traditional knowledge is not only preserved but also passed on to future generations.
Beyond production, the cooperative developed a strong value chain to ensure market access for local products. The goal was not only to produce goods but also to process, brand, and successfully market them. To achieve this, institutional sales channels were established and products began to be sold under the cooperative's own brand.
Today, cooperative products are available through Migros and Macrocenter stores, giving locally produced goods made by women national visibility. These partnerships increase producers' incomes while strengthening recognition of Yeniköy's unique local products.
Throughout this journey, solidarity remained the cooperative's greatest strength. The cooperative became a social hub where women make decisions together, share experiences, and support one another.

**The Breakthrough: What you achieved**

In a short period of time, the cooperative has become an important force in strengthening women's participation in the economic and social life of Yeniköy.
Today, all eleven women members actively participate in production processes, and the economic value generated by local products directly benefits producers. Traditional activities

such as salep cultivation and sericulture have become visible once again, creating a strong foundation for preserving local knowledge and skills.
One of the cooperative's most significant achievements has been the creation of a complete value chain from production to marketing. By processing, branding, and distributing products through institutional sales channels, women have become active participants in every stage of the production process.
The presence of cooperative products in national retail chains such as Migros and Macrocenter has significantly expanded market access for women producers. At the same time, seedling support programs and training initiatives have encouraged the emergence of new salep growers in the region. Educational activities related to sericulture have also created a strong model for transferring traditional knowledge to younger generations.
Women have gained more than income. They have gained confidence, taken on more active roles in decision-making processes, and become more visible within village life. Through the cooperative, women's labor has become a central driver of local development in Yeniköy.

**Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn**
This journey has shown us that sustainable development is not achieved solely through economic investment but also through the preservation of knowledge, culture, and local identity. The most important lesson we learned is that a small group of determined people can create significant change. What began with only eleven women has become a source of hope for the future of the village.
Our advice to other destinations embarking on a similar journey is to place local knowledge—and especially women's experience and leadership—at the center of development processes.

**The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact**
The cooperative's impact extends far beyond the products it produces. Women's economic empowerment has strengthened community solidarity, renewed interest in local production, and increased awareness of the village's cultural heritage.
Through salep cultivation training programs, technical advisory services, and seedling support, new producers have been encouraged to enter the sector. Through the "Silk Hands" Project, children and young people have been introduced to traditional production practices. As a result, the cooperative's work has generated benefits that go beyond economics, contributing to cultural heritage preservation, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and the long-term sustainability of rural development.
The cooperative's activities also create value for rural tourism. Salep cultivation, sericulture, and the production of traditional local products provide visitors with opportunities to experience Yeniköy's production culture firsthand. Planned initiatives such as the Salep House and the Silkworm Festival aim to further connect these experiences with tourism.
The next chapter is already being planned. The cooperative intends to establish the Salep House and organize the Silkworm Festival, offering visitors immersive experiences centered on the region's productio

**Awards or Certifications**
Founded in 2023 by 11 women, the cooperative has revitalized traditional salep cultivation and sericulture, helping preserve production traditions that were at risk of disappearing.
Today, the cooperative's products are sold through Migros and Macrocenter stores, enabling locally produced goods made by women in Yeniköy to reach national markets.

**Web Articles**
https://www.izmir.bel.tr/tr/Haberler/menderes-te-salep-umudu/57634/156

**Other Relevant Links**
https://www.instagram.com/menderesyenikoykoop/

**Quotes or Testimonials**
"When we established the cooperative, our goal was not simply to sell products. We wanted our children and grandchildren to learn about salep, silkworms, and our village's production culture. Today, every product we make is part of a heritage that we carry from the past into the future."
— Member of the Menderes Yeniköy Women's Entrepreneurship and Business Cooperative