

IFAD in Tajikistan The virtues of village organizations

IFAD and the Government of Tajikistan have been investing in building the capacities of village organizations and pasture users unions to participate in and influence processes that are important for the livelihoods of their members. The results have been very positive, as the stories contained here show. Local communities have been empowered in managing local natural resources on which they depend. The community-driven development approach is a very effective way to identify priorities (such as roads, irrigation, drinking water, electricity supply, and low-cost storage and marketing facilities) in rural communities, and has been able to provide the needed investments to improve rural livelihoods. Activities also targeted the needs of female beneficiaries, not only producing significant economic benefits but also strengthening the position of women in communities.

The participation of beneficiaries in all phases of the projects was a key ingredient in ensuring that there would be ownership, commitment and long-term impact. Members of village organizations were involved in setting priorities and decision-making from the outset. Linking community development to training and strengthening local project partners helped to ensure sustainability, so that these communities will continue to thrive in the future.





Key to village prosperity: competent management

Gharabdara village is located in the mountainous area of Muminobod district. Its 1,200 inhabitants face many of the same challenges related to agriculture, livestock and unemployment as other villages in the mountains of southern Tajikistan. The Khatlon Livelihoods Support Project aims to reduce poverty across the Muminobod and Shuroobod districts by increasing the profitability of small farms.

Ghaffor Sharifov left Gharabdara to study, but came back to work as a teacher at the local school, eventually being appointed as its director. He could see the many problems of the village and was frustrated at being unable to solve them. This inspired him to seek election as chairman of the village's development committee union.

Under Sharifov's guidance, cooperation with a number of investment projects was set in motion. Drinking water supply lines were constructed, repairs were carried out on the school and equipment was provided for additional classrooms. With these problems solved, Sharifov turned the village's attention to the need to invest in infrastructure and rural development.

Sharifov describes how events have unfolded: "We explained to the villagers, and especially to the women, the importance of their active participation in workshops, consultations and meetings conducted by the project. Initially, the women's interest was low, but after joining the meetings they began to participate regularly in all of the project's activities. We were then able to demonstrate to the government representatives what active and well-organized women we have in our village, and that with their support we would be able to implement our subprojects in a satisfactory manner."

The members of the village organization decided they would use the funds provided by the project to buy a tractor and other machinery. As well as helping to improve crop production, the tractor has contributed to resolving many other problems in the village. It has been used in the construction of a bridge, a medical centre and other facilities. Key to the success of the tractor has been the good management of the village organization, which has ensured that the equipment supplied by the project is properly used and well-maintained.

"Now the villagers are looking forward to the rehabilitation of other facilities in the village and are actively involved in the process. Our problems related to the cultivation of lands, harvesting, transportation and other works are solved. We are also leasing out our tractor to neighbouring villages and receiving a good income. The Gharabdara village organization plans to build on this success and purchase more agricultural machinery," explains Sharifov.

There were lots of problems, but we were not afraid and we solved them together.

Ghaffor Sharifov
Chairman of Gharabdara Village Organization

KHATLON LIVELIHOODS SUPPORT PROJECT

Sharing the benefits from agricultural machinery

The 129 households in Odinaboi village in Shuroobod, southern Tajikistan farm about 270 hectares of non-irrigated land, but they have always struggled with a shortage of agricultural machinery. With the support of the Khatlon Livelihoods Support Project, the people of Odinaboi have been able to purchase two tractors and additional equipment.



Gavharbi Ahmadova is a busy woman. As well as caring for her eight children, she is the accountant of the Odinaboi village organization. She describes how the project has changed life in the village. "Previously, it was impossible to cultivate our lands and harvest our crops on time. Now villagers are satisfied that the machinery obtained with the assistance of the project has simplified our work. This year we were able to cultivate all our lands on time, and our harvest of cereals and vegetables has been much greater."

In the past, villagers had to rent machinery that was old, expensive and often not available at the right time. Now it is available when they need it, and at a reasonable fee. The villagers use the new equipment for threshing grain, as well as ploughing, planting and harvesting, with significant time and fuel savings.

The fees set by the village organization for the use of the tractors cover operating costs and drivers' salaries, and ensure a profit that can be used for other priorities in the village. Ahmadova keeps detailed records of all requests to use the machinery, plans the work timetable and manages the income and expenses. She makes sure everyone pays and gets paid on time, the tractor is used efficiently and the community enterprise runs smoothly. The machinery is also leased to neighbouring farms and communities to maximize the benefits.

The village organization has used some of its profits to improve orchards, as well as to provide poor families in the community with vegetable and cereal seeds. Ahmadova adds, "They had a good harvest this year, some of which they kept to use at home and the remaining products were sold in the market. These families are working independently now, and can provide their own seeds for next year."

The project has also had a notable impact on the participation of women in community life. "Before the project started," she says, "the women of the village worked mainly in the home. I spoke with them and invited them to participate in the realization of the project. Nowadays the women are actively participating at workshops and meetings, and are making interesting suggestions about how project activities could be improved."

The villagers' experience with the project has inspired them to make big plans for the future. "We are planning to develop our cooperation with other investment projects as there are still many problems in the village and the jamoat [rural municipality]. I will regularly consult the village's women, keep them interested in working together to develop new programmes, teach them about accounting and how to be active in cooperating with projects. We already know our priorities – improving the village's roads, rehabilitating our orchards and restoring our non-irrigated lands – and we have the income of the village organization to help finance them," explains Ahmadova.

Now we know our priorities, and we have the income to reduce poverty in our village.

Gavharbi Ahmadova Accountant of Odinaboi Village Organization



Small businesses and improved livelihoods

Fifteen women's groups dedicated to wool processing have been established under the IFAD-supported Livestock and Pasture Development Project, providing poor rural women with jobs and support, and helping them to gain market access for their products. Today, 110 poor rural women are running their own wool processing enterprises, making and selling marketable wool products. They can now count on stable earnings, with average income per household expected to be about US\$110 a month.

Gulsunbi Najmuddinova was keen to find work to help pay for her children's education and other household essentials. Her family is one of the most vulnerable in the village of Tebalai – one of the places where the project is creating favourable conditions for women's development and increasing employment in mountainous areas. Najmuddinova is the head of the Tebalai Pasture Users Union and a member of the Women's Income Generation Group. Her marked sense of responsibility, willingness to work and sincere belief in success shows what such groups can achieve.

"As my children grew older, first of all I started to think of how to pay for their education, provide them with necessary materials and books. I wanted to find an activity that would be profitable not only for my own family, but also for other women in my village. Fortunately, I found out about the Livestock and Pasture Development Project and how it provides support to rural women," says Najmuddinova.

The project provided wool processing equipment to the women's group that Najmuddinova and the other women have used to produce slippers that were then sold in Dushanbe. Earlier this year, Najmuddinova took part in a national fair of handmade products, showcasing wool items made by the group, which were rated highly for their quality and design. Through careful planning, Najmuddinova uses her income from the business to cover family expenses.

Based on her success with the group, Najmuddinova aspires to expand her business.

"I have plans to expand my activity even more. I want to launch another entrepreneurship activity using the profits from my current business, give my children a full education and improve my household conditions. First of all, we have decided to teach our practices to other women so they can also improve their livelihoods," says Najmuddinova. I wanted to find an activity that would be profitable not only for my own family, but also for other women in my village.

Gulsunbi Najmuddinova
Head of the Tebalai Pasture Users Union

KHATLON LIVELIHOODS SUPPORT PROJECT

Water brings new life

Dashtijum village is located in a valley in the high mountainous area of Shuroobod district. Although it suffers from a serious shortage of irrigation water, its good soil conditions are perfect for growing crops and vegetables, and it produces some of the best quality fruits in the district. Through funding from the IFAD-assisted Khatlon Livelihoods Support Project, the people of Dashtijum village have been able to address the problem of irrigation.



The KLSP assisted in the establishment of a village organization in the Dashtijum village. Through it, the villagers were able to organize themselves and prepare detailed plans for how they wanted to use the funds made available by the project, prioritizing irrigation and drinking water supply schemes.

"There are 60 households in this village with 20 hectares of land for fruit and vegetable production. Before the project, this land was not irrigated. It was not being fully used by the villagers who had no funds for an irrigation system. Villagers, mainly women and children, had to carry water for crops and trees from the nearest source which was a 5-kilometre round trip. This was hard work and they could never bring enough water," explained Tolib Yormahmadov.

The KLSP has helped to construct an irrigation and drinking water supply system for the village. The villagers played an active role in its construction and have since benefited from increased agricultural production and well-being.

"We completed the construction within 3 months, laying water supply lines from a mountain spring 2.5 kilometres from the village. The most important thing is that there is enough water for both drinking and irrigation. The water is pure and the children of the village will now be healthy and protected from waterborne diseases. We have been trying several times to construct this water line, but it was impossible because of shortage of funds," said Yormahmadov.

The villagers are committed to ensuring the sustainability of the new water supply system. They have established a water users' association through which they contribute towards paying for the costs of operating and maintaining the system.

The project has not only developed infrastructure, but has provided major benefits to the community in terms of training and capacity-building. It has encouraged community members to become more proactive to address their own development priorities.

"One of the project priorities is to involve people in training and workshops. By participating, the rural population – particularly women – have improved their skills and qualifications, and learned how to cooperate with development projects. For example, by working as the secretary of the village organization, Bobokhon Saidov improved his skills and qualifications that led to his selection as chairman of the Kuhistoni Dashtijum community organization. As a result of the project, the community now has more members who are actively involved in its social development," explained Yormahmadov.

For me, the provision of drinking and irrigation water for Dashtijum village is an important event and a noble cause.

Tolib Yormahmadov Chairman of Dashtijum Village Organization



New livelihoods from poultry change the lives of women and their families

Firuza Niyozova is a member of the women's group set up by the village pasture users union (PUU) in Sebdarai Kalon. Previously, a lack of qualifications and limited job opportunities meant that her life was focused on working in the home and caring for her two young children, and she was unable to earn any extra income for her family.

But when the Livestock and Pasture Development Project began supporting the PUU in Niyozova's village, she and the other villagers – particularly the unemployed women – eagerly seized on the new opportunities available to them.

"For me and my family it was very important to join the PUU, and through the PUU to improve our livelihood. The project provided me with training in raising poultry and gave my family 20 chickens, 18 female and 2 male, and a year's supply of feed," says Niyozova.

"Every day I get 15 or 16 eggs, which are enough to use for my children and to sell to my neighbours. I use the income from selling eggs to cover other expenses. I want to increase the number of poultry I keep, using the experience from the project. As my business grows, it will be possible to sell chicken for meat as well."

Niyozova's entrepreneurial spirit extends not only to expanding her business, but to helping others in her community and also branching out into new activities. "When I started this activity, my neighbours also became interested and wanted to learn from my experience. I'm also planning to improve my kitchen garden with the extra money I have," adds Niyozova.

The project also supports local veterinary specialists to ensure that animal health services are available to Niyozova and the other households in her village.

I want to increase the number of poultry I keep, using the experience from the project.

Firuza Niyozova Member of Sebdarai Kalon Pasture Users Union KHATLON LIVELIHOODS SUPPORT PROJECT

Better machinery, better harvests

The availability of good quality farm machinery can be a decisive factor in whether a farmer can increase production and be commercially viable. In Tajikistan, tractors for example, can often be very outdated. This means they frequently break down because they are old and spare parts are increasingly difficult to find.



Faizov Kamarali is a farmer from the village of Tuto in eastern Khatlon in Tajikistan. For many years, he provided food for his family of nine from his kitchen garden. The garden was also one of the main sources of income for his family, but it simply wasn't enough. Thanks to IFAD-supported projects, things began to change.

IFAD has supported many village organizations and pasture users unions in the region, and provided much-needed tractors. To date, more than 100 tractors have been delivered to the village organizations and pasture users unions. In the communities that have received tractors, agricultural production has increased by 20 per cent and post-harvest losses were reduced by 30 per cent.

The pasture lands had been in a deplorable state. As Kamarali said, "without the support of the IFAD-funded projects there was a threat of total pasture loss." He calls the tractors "a simple but vital instrument to alleviate rural poverty, feed families and ensure livelihoods for the long term."

Tractors are a simple but vital instrument to alleviate rural poverty.

Faizov Kamarali Head of Tuto Pasture Users Union



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