

Exchange on good practices for public policy consultations

Tajikistan



Investing in rural people

Country-level policy engagement aims to support the development and implementation of national policies that shape the economic opportunities for poor rural people. These case studies illustrate that by utilizing innovative mechanisms for policy engagement, large impacts are achievable with limited resources.

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Issues

Tajikistan is the poorest of the former Soviet republics, and 77 per cent of its population lives in rural areas. Rural livelihoods typically depend on subsistence farming, livestock and remittances, with livestock ownership being a key component in income generation and diversification. In poor and remote agroecological regions the production of angora (which is processed into mohair) and cashgora goats often represents the only source of livelihood, particularly for poorer households. However, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the sector has been constrained by the absence of goat breeding programmes, the limited harvesting and processing skills of small producers, and the lack of access to high-value markets. These factors have had direct impacts on the incomes of poor rural households, and particularly women, in Tajikistan.

Through its grants programme, IFAD has a long-standing involvement in the quality fibres sector. Two grant projects with the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) have supported rural women in producing, adding value to and exporting mohair; and a third grant, with the Aga Khan Foundation, aims to develop the women-led small business model and cashgora production. An additional US\$16 million Livestock and Pasture Development Project was approved in 2011. An international NGO, the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), has been an important partner in these projects, and ACTED and IFAD have drawn on this experience to identify the following problems in the sector: an underdeveloped civil society; limited awareness among rural people, especially women, of relevant legislation and their own legal rights; lack of confidence to address major issues; and lack of connections and access to government and policymakers.

The initiative – which was essentially a policy-focused micro-project to be implemented by ACTED – aimed to respond to these issues, and in doing so, enable rural people to influence the policy environment and contribute to the sustainable development of the livestock sector in Tajikistan. The initiative was also expected to shape the IFAD country programme by helping to ensure sustainability of the results already achieved and starting dialogue with the government on building an enabling environment for small business creation, which could feed into the ongoing Livestock and Pasture Development Project and the design for the project's proposed scaling-up. Through these activities, the project aimed to provide a platform for continued and ongoing policy dialogue in this key sector for rural poverty eradication.

Summary

IMI funding: US\$75,000

Implementing partner: the NGO ACTED

Key objectives: To strengthen the policy environment for sustainable development of the livestock sector in Tajikistan. To achieve this, the initiative aimed to empower civil society in the target communities to lobby and advocate for supportive legislation and the mainstreaming of livestock sector development into district development plans.

Lessons and successes:

The initiative has been successful in achieving its objectives. Results have shown that working to enhance local actors' knowledge and coordination can strengthen civil society and increase its capacities to represent local interests at higher levels of consultation. The case demonstrates that opening spaces for policy dialogue and building the institutional capacity of community-based organizations is an effective way of engaging in local-level policy and influencing the legislative and operating environments of the livestock sector.

Actions

At the micro level, ACTED started by identifying and training community mobilizers to assist communities in designing village development plans (VDPs) and to help strengthen communities' capacities to lobby and advocate for their interests at the commune (*jamoat*) and district (*khukumat*) levels. In each of the 20 targeted communities, activities included: (i) distribution of information materials regarding the potential role of community organizations in rural development, local legislation and supporting the rights and responsibilities of livestock owners; (ii) meetings to spread awareness about the initiative and communities' role in it; (iii) participatory rural appraisals to improve understanding of communities' priorities and needs and to verify the appropriateness of the proposed activities; (iv) training of community-based organizations in local development, lobbying and advocacy, social partnership and conflict management; and (v) preparation of VDPs.

At the meso level, ACTED developed channels of communication between the grass-roots level (farmers, women's groups) and local authorities at the commune and district levels. Groups from each of the target villages were connected to local authorities through commune and district management boards. These boards serve as vehicles for discussing and resolving the problems faced by livestock breeders; establishing a more amenable local business environment for livestock sector development; and lobbying and advocating for the inclusion of VDPs in commune and district development plans and budgets. Designed to continue beyond the closure of the intervention, the boards will provide a regular platform for dialogue between civil society organizations and local authorities and for comprehensive development planning.

At the macro level, ACTED used print and broadcast media to increase public awareness and to bring the government's attention to the problems faced by communities involved in goat/mohair production. The aim was to encourage policymakers to focus on the challenges facing the livestock sector and create a more enabling business environment for livestock sector development. Four media representatives, selected for their willingness to engage with local community members on the drafting of members' stories, were guided around the target communities to observe and report on challenges for the livestock sector and livestock owners. Seven publications and one TV piece were developed and published/aired at the national level. This media focus has pushed local governments to address some of the challenges highlighted.

Lessons learned

As a result of the initiative's achievements, more than 80 per cent of group members were trained and improved their understanding of legislation, advocacy/lobbying and

self-governance; at least 50 per cent of the members of targeted groups and 70 per cent of those trained were women; half of the more than 60 self-financed projects developed through the VDP exercise focused on livestock; and all the target villages were connected to local authorities through the management boards, leading to a 30 per cent increase in the number of commune and district development plans to include the livestock sector. The approaches developed are currently being scaled up through other projects in Tajikistan, including capacity-building for pasture users' associations under the IFAD country programme.

The initiative offers two important lessons from a policy perspective. First, ACTED recognized the challenge of bringing together community-level livestock actors (breeders, farmers, women's groups, etc.) and government institutions, and facilitating interactions between them in a context of community members' general mistrust of government and its capacity and willingness to help address their concerns and challenges in building their businesses. Through the establishment of collaborative platforms, the initiative aimed to build trust between governing bodies and the communities they serve, encourage information-sharing, and promote collaboration among groups in addressing important issues such as district budgeting and the design of public programmes. Second, the engagement of national media proved successful in raising awareness among not only the general public, but also government officials at the regional and national levels. By shining the spotlight on these issues through a series of articles published in regional and national newspapers, the initiative has encouraged district and regional officials to discuss the issues facing the livestock sector, which is likely to help accelerate the process of finding sustainable solutions or ways of expanding the profitability of the sector.

Overall, the case has shown that opening spaces for policy dialogue and building the institutional capacity of community-based groups, complemented by support to government institutions, can be an effective way of supporting local-level policy processes. However, developing capacity on both sides and building trust between them is a slow process, given the region's Soviet past. Prolonged commitment to the project could produce even more substantial and long-term improvements and better linkages to national-level policy processes.




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