



Investing in rural people

A group of six women and one young boy are standing outdoors in a rural, arid landscape. The women are dressed in traditional, colorful floral and patterned clothing and headscarves. One woman on the right is holding a blue folder and gesturing with her hand as if speaking to the group. The background shows a dry, rocky hillside under a clear sky.

IFAD in Tajikistan

The virtues of village organizations

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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

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.





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

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

Firuz 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.”

Firuz 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.





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