

## Increased Women Engagement and Participation in Faryab

### INTRODUCTION:

In Faryab province, NCA Afghanistan has supported the socio-economic and political empowerment and participation of women in 47 communities from four districts —i.e. Pashtoon Koot, Belcheragh, Qurghan and Qaramqul.

### PROBLEM ANALYSIS:

In a province where the poverty rate is estimated to be between 21-30%, the exclusion of women from community life is a key barrier for development and has a direct impact on the lives of women and their families.

Carpet weaving is one of the most ancient crafts at household level in Faryab, and for centuries, women have played a pivotal role in this activity. It is arguably the only culturally-accepted income-earning occupation for women from the province. Women and girls who weave the carpets are, however, too often treated as unpaid slaves by their male relatives, with most of them spending up to 18 hours a day working in poor conditions, many becoming ill or taking drugs to relieve pain work. Also, since women are not accepted at the market they have to operate via middle men who take much of their profit.

Cultural stereotypes, socialization practices and illiteracy hinder women's participation in economic activities. The relatively few existing women's enterprises in Faryab tend to be relatively small, have informal structures and depend on local raw materials. Commonly, these enterprises are not registered, maintain no business records and do not have access to credit from formal credit institutions. These enterprises are also characterized by their dependence on family labor and limited technical and managerial skills.

In terms of women's participation in community affairs Community Development Councils (CDCs) are often cited as the best mechanism for women engagement in community development decisions. However, women's participation is stalled by men's attitudes towards women, cultural sensitivities and traditions, and women's education.



Gul Chehra (third from left) joined the women cooperative established under the programme in Qurghan district . Here with her family, presenting their products

**Photo: Norwegian Church Aid, Afghanistan**



## RESULTS:

Participating in the programme has contributed to enhance women's self-confidence and increased literacy, as well as reducing women's economic dependency on family members. Four women's cooperatives consisting of 750 women were established and registered with the Department of Women Affairs and the Department of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock. 3,750 women received training on poultry raising and new designs of carpet weaving. The board members actively engaged on management and business capacity development activities and exposure visits to see markets. The members of the women cooperatives as assessed through monitoring have better understanding of business management and can do simple calculation, reading and writing.



Photo: Norwegian Church Aid, Afghanistan

Activities such as carpet weaving, cooperative establishment, loan disbursement, poultry farming, and business management skills, have had positive impacts on the lives of the women in the four districts. The loans enabled the women to purchase raw material for the weaving themselves and through gained knowledge on market feasibility, the women were able to sell their products without going through middle men and to generate more income.

Women participating in the programme mentioned that a sense of empowerment and ownership has been developed as a result of benefiting from the various components of the programme. Registering two women led poultry farms and two outlets where they can sell carpets and generate income has influenced many women and made them feel more empowered and independent.

Participation of women in the development activities represents an important transformation, particularly in places like Faryab where women are largely absent from public forums. 333 religious scholars, community elders and district authorities participated in 50 dialogue sessions about women's role in economic affairs, family and community decisions according to Islam. Another programme engaging religious leaders in conflict mitigation and peace building activities is also including the role of women and will contribute further to expand the space for women's participation in the public sphere. 846 male heads of families participated in dialogues about women's roles and rights. 990 female members of CDCs have received training on women's rights, peace building and advocacy.

## LESSONS LEARNED:

The establishment of women cooperatives—a men's domain for ages—is fairly new and creates a new dynamic. The engagement with religious leaders and elders is very important as it contributes to increased acceptance of women's participation outside their homes. A trusted relationship with these actors is instrumental in diminishing risks and handling incidents when they occur.

## PROJECT/PROGRAMME SCOPE:

The project was funded with a Norad grant of NOK 6,868,000

## PARTNERS:

Four national partner organizations have been involved in the implementation of the programme; Afghan Development Association (ADA), Afghan Women Skills Development Centre (AWSDC), Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (CHA) and Sanayee Development Organization (SDO).

## SOURCES:

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