



Uplifting rural communities through wheat assistance in Afghanistan

Sanam, Abdul Manan and Farhad are three farmers from Nangarhar province in the east of Afghanistan. Like most Afghans, their livelihood depends solely on agriculture and livestock. Their families belong to the half of the country's population that is facing hunger every day.

Sanam, a 42-year-old farmer from Shega Charikar village of Nangarhar's Khewa district, is the only breadwinner of a family of 12 members. His family's income relies entirely on subsistence agriculture. Drought severely affected his harvest last year, adding yet another shock to his family's already weakened financial condition due to the economic impact of the pandemic and the lack of alternative employment opportunities.

Sanam's family couldn't afford certified seed as its prices soared due to the restrictions on export and import throughout the pandemic. To make matters worse, he had pending debts but couldn't borrow more money from other farmers as the country was facing a severe cash crunch following the political transition. That was his situation by September last year. He was helpless when FAO reached to him thanks to the generous funding of the United States.

As every farmer assisted by FAO, Sanam received 50 kg of locally adapted drought-resistant variety certified wheat seeds, as well as specific technical training on wheat cultivation. "If we hadn't received

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this certified seed, poverty and lack of employment would have obliged us to cultivate the local seed,” Sanam said. “We would have been happy to plant the local seed, but we wouldn’t have been very confident about the outcome,” the farmer from Khewa district added while working in his wheat field close to his house.

The certified wheat seed provided by FAO in Nangrahar and across the eastern region is already showing good results through the heading and flowering stages as the wheat turns yellowy. Farmers like Sanam, Abdul Manan and Farhad hope for a plentiful harvest this upcoming wheat season.

Comprehensive support to agriculture

Each household assisted with wheat cultivation support was also provided with 50 kg of urea fertilizer to be applied at a critical time in this cropping season. This wheat assistance package (seeds, fertilizer and training) to vulnerable farmers like Sanam, Abdul Manan and Farhad costs only USD 157, while the cost of the minimum food basket for the same family for that period would amount to USD 1 080, making it a cost-effective, strategic and long-lasting humanitarian intervention.

FAO has also provided livestock protection support to vulnerable farmers and herders in Nangrahar and across the country, as well as other emergency support packages, including summer crops, home-gardening, backyard poultry, cash for work and unconditional cash to safeguard rural livelihoods, prevent further food insecurity and avoid displacement.

Technical training

Farhad is from Lal Pur district in Nangrahar province. He has been farming all his life and head a family of a seven in Sarband village. His family fully depends on agriculture with no other source of income except for their land. Having limited technical knowledge, Farhad used to perform traditional cultivation methods, producing low yields. This would add to the already increasing financial instability of the family, which was affecting their food security. Only effective cultivation would help him and his family produce enough crops from the land. Farhad received the same support as Sanam. He particularly appreciates the training. “The first thing I learned was how to prepare the land for cultivation,” he mentioned. “I also learned how to control weeds and diseases in the wheat plants that may reduce yields,” added the farmer from Sarband village.

Hopes for increased harvest

Abdul Manan is a farmer from Shega Charikar village, Khewa district. He is the breadwinner of a family of 13 members. In addition to farming, he raises livestock. His family has no wealth or alternative income. “We are poor and don’t have any salary or wealth, but I do have 2.5 jeribs of land,” the farmer from Nangrahar province said.

The family has pinned high hopes to this year’s winter wheat harvest. Abdul Manan said that without FAO’s assistance he will have sold his livestock, and their living conditions would have gotten worse.

He is expecting a much better yield this season. The certified seed he received from FAO will help him produce enough staple food for his family for year, and trade the surplus for sale to earn money. “We are satisfied with this seed because it is resistant to diseases. We are happy with the seed so far,” Abdul Manan said.

“I have cultivated 50 kg of certified wheat seed in two jeribs (0.4 hectares) of land and I am expecting to harvest 700 to 840 kg yield per jerib,” the farmer said with a smile on his face. “The results are looking good and I will be able to keep some extra wheat seed for the next season. I will share the surplus with other farmers to increase the certified seed variety.”

Abdul Manan is also selling some dairy products in the local bazaar of Shaga bazaar, located along Jalalabad-Kunar highway, famous for its cheese. These sales together with the surplus of wheat will help him cover his children’s education and healthcare, as well as to feed his livestock.

A total of 1.3 million people are benefitting from the timely assistance to winter wheat cultivation, provided in 30 out Afghanistan’s 34 provinces, which is expected to grow enough staple food for a year for 1.7 million vulnerable Afghans.



Farmers threshing wheat.

New Zealand to support vulnerable rural Afghan with emergency agricultural inputs and cash assistance

New Zealand is funding with USD 2 million a new project of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to provide humanitarian assistance in the form of agricultural inputs and cash assistance to 94 500 vulnerable rural people from farming communities in the provinces of Kunduz, Nangrahar, Parwan and Wardak.

“We welcome New Zealand’s first ever contribution to FAO emergency and resilience programme at this critical point in time for Afghanistan. Farmers need quality seed in hand to plant in early spring, and secure their harvest this year. New Zealand’s support will help make this happen,” said Richard Trenchard, FAO Representative in Afghanistan.

“Following on from our recent humanitarian contributions in Afghanistan, New Zealand is pleased to support FAO’s initiatives to help rural Afghan people to grow food, feed themselves and remain self-reliant. FAO is one of the few organizations with the technical expertise and capacity to deliver inside Afghanistan at present,” a New Zealand government spokesperson said.

Spring and summer crops cultivation

Thanks to this new funding, FAO will assist 49 000 people from marginal and vulnerable farming households in northeastern Afghanistan with a spring and summer cultivation package. This assistance provides farmers with a chance to plant wheat in low-lying parts of the country, or maize and high-protein legumes, like mung bean and chickpea.

A wheat cultivation assistance package worth USD 157 can grow enough staple food to meet the consumption needs of a family of seven for a full year. It consists of certified wheat seeds, fertilizers and training.

“USD 157 is less than one-quarter of the cost of purchasing the same amount of grain in the local market, which vulnerable farmers without income cannot afford. It is a very efficient intervention,” added Trenchard.

Cash assistance

45 500 people will benefit either through cash for work or unconditional transfers or cash assistance. Each family will receive the equivalent to USD 100 in the local currency, Afghanis, to cover the most immediate food and basic needs.

Many food insecure families are currently forced selling their livelihood assets in despair just to buy food. Cash assistance is essential for these families to avoid resorting these extreme coping mechanisms.

42 000 people will benefit from FAO’s intervention funded by

New Zealand through cash for work activities designed to build or rehabilitate vital small-scale community irrigation infrastructures. This is a key intervention to improve access to water, a scarce resource across these four provinces, while providing short term employment opportunities and injecting cash in the local economy. Each worker will be engaged for 20 days.

FAO will also channel New Zealand's funding through unconditional cash transfers aimed at benefitting 3 500 people directly. This specific assistance will assist the most vulnerable groups that cannot engage in cash for work activities such as households headed by disabled people, pregnant women, widow or elderly.

FAO saves water and improves irrigation thanks to Japan funding

A rehabilitated 50-meter protection wall in Uruzgan's capital will prevent water waste and improve irrigation in the area

The recent drought in Afghanistan affected agricultural production and aggravated water scarcity in several provinces. Among them, Uruzgan province, in southern Afghanistan, has been notably affected by the drought and the subsequent decrease in harvest.

Talani village, located five kilometres west of the provincial center in Uruzgan, is home to over 8 400 people. The majority of families rely on agriculture and livestock as their only livelihood options. An area equivalent to 85 football pitches (approx. 60 hectares) of agricultural land near the village is irrigated from the main river in Tarinkot, the provincial center of Uruzgan. The water flows to this village through a 5.5 km long canal named the Talani Loy Canal.

In order to prevent any water leakages along the canal, a protection wall had been constructed on one side of it several years ago. However, the wall was gradually damaged due to seasonal floods and the open breakage points were causing substantial water losses. Hence, the Talani Loy Canal was no longer providing adequate levels of water for irrigation purposes.

The inadequate infrastructure resulted in a decline in harvest of vegetables, fruits and other plants, as well as a drop of the water table. Also, the threat of the protection wall and canal being further damaged was creating a potential risk of flooding. This could potentially cause severe damage to agricultural lands and livelihoods, even loss of life also needed to be urgently addressed.

"Prior to the FAO project, water was being wasted due to breakages in the river wall and it couldn't reach the Talani areas," Sayed Nabi, a community elder from the village, said. "The lack of water reduced agricultural production; and some people stopped cultivating their lands due to the scarcity of water," the community elder added.



Rehabilitation of 50 meter water canal for irrigation.

Following the request from the local communities, FAO helped villagers build a 50-meter protection wall by September 2021. A total of 26 community members from the village were employed under the Cash for Work (CfW) assistance modality, while another 23 people were employed in other related projects. In addition, they received working tools, such as shovels and pick axes.

"After the rehabilitation of the protection wall, much of that water that used to be wasted flows now down to the field, where we need it. People are now getting more water for irrigation and other purposes, such as drinking water," Sayed Nabil explained. "With increased production and higher income, the people's standard of living will improve," he emphasized.

Thanks to the people of Japan's funding, this project helped to ensure that at least 90 percent of the canal water-flow benefits the agriculture land while also creating employment opportunities for the local community members. Last but not least, this intervention has contributed to increasing income and improving the food security and nutrition situation for many in Talani Loy through creating employment opportunities for the local community members.

Beekeeping to diversify livelihoods

FAO supports beekeeping farming in Afghanistan's Herat province to enhance rural livelihoods thanks to Japan's funding

Farmers at the Kushk district (also referred to as Rabat-e-Sangi), north of Herat province in western Afghanistan, generally depend on rainfed farming and livestock farming. Beekeeping farming is not widely practiced in the district. This is mostly due to the combination of the lack of knowledge and the fact that few rural inhabitants can afford the tools and resources required for this practice.

FAO identified some of the most vulnerable farming households in the district to support them with livelihood diversification employment opportunities through beekeeping farming.

"Beekeeping is an excellent option for rural livelihood diversification. It can help alleviate poverty in rural households, protect biodiversity and support food security," said Kaustubh Devale, Emergency and Resilience Officer for FAO in Afghanistan. A total of 38 farmers across 23 villages in Kushk district were selected to receive beekeeping support. Japan funded this project, aiming to improve and diversify rural livelihoods in the region.

The farmers attended a four-day training on beekeeping best practices to attain the necessary skills to dive into beekeeping, honey processing and its marketing. Each farmer received a complete beekeeping startup kit. The package included two beehives (each containing 18 000 to 20 000 honeybees), two blank hives, three honey extractors, two feeders, two buckets, one smoker, one brush, one fork, one veil, 50 kg of sugar, 1 kg of wax, medicine and one beekeeping suit at the end of the training.

Saleh's new honey

Saleh Mohammad was supported by FAO through this initiative. He is satisfied with the quantity of honey he has produced. Despite the drought and reduced rainfall throughout the district, Saleh Mohammad collected 54 kg honey during the spring season. He could sell the total honey for around USD 550. This additional income can help Saleh expand his beekeeping business and support his family for at least three months.

Most of the people in the region are unaware that beekeeping and processing hive products can be just as profitable. Saleh used some of his earnings from beekeeping to purchase fodder crop seeds like alfalfa and clover. Clover species offer desirable resources to honeybees. He also employed another person from the village to help him with running the business.



Training on best practices in beekeeping in Herat Province.

Saleh wishes to expand his honey business further to promote beekeeping in the region and increase his income. “Beekeeping is good business and helps improve the farmers’ economic situation,” he said.

FAO brings life to degraded rangeland thanks to GEF funding

The establishment of woodlots and tree plantations improve sustainable land management in central Afghanistan

Rangeland degradation is an issue of growing global concern, including for Afghanistan. Bamyan province, in central Afghanistan, has become one of the country’s epicentres for rangeland degradation due to high levels of grazing and the increasing encroachment of invasive shrubs and woody species. A multi-year FAO project funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has shown that degradation can be reversed.

Bamyan has been historically known for its rangelands and highlands. However, large-scale rangeland degradation has become an increasing problem for both herders and other community members. The province’s mountainous topography make the rangelands a valuable resource, particularly for people grazing livestock but also for crop production and agroforestry. The rangelands are, therefore, vital for livelihoods and food security, which is why FAO has worked with local communities and other stakeholders to identify ways of protecting rangelands and reversing degradation where possible.

Rehabilitating degraded rangeland

To address the growing problem of rangeland degradation in Bamyan province, FAO began working with a range of stakeholders to rehabilitate 6 710.5 ha of degraded rangeland (more than 67 square kilometers) in July 2019 thanks to funding provided by the GEF. By July 2021, the project had achieved significant milestones.

The project focusses on two main sets of activities: restoring rangeland health, in particular through increased fodder production and the introduction of locally-adapted tree varieties to reduce erosion, and increase household incomes. Over half a million plant cuttings (willow, poplar and bamboo species) have been cultivated on 140.5 ha of land across Yakawlang and Punjab districts of Bamyan, 1 600 kg of alfalfa seeds ideally suited to rainfed areas have been cultivated on 190 ha of degraded rangeland and 5 000 red chief apple saplings were planted on 20 ha of land to improve agroforestry.

“Rangeland is the best source of fodder for livestock and needs to be managed sustainably. Sustainable fodder production in

rangeland areas helps fix soil, reducing potential flood damage and erosion, thereby, ensuring that communities and their animals can benefit for years to come. Similarly, conserving locally-adapted plants and shrubs in the rangeland helps absorb water for groundwater reserves,” said Richard Trenchard, FAO Representative in Afghanistan. “Women play a vital role in the livestock sector in Afghanistan, often unremunerated” Trenchard added. “We are pleased that this work will provide direct benefits to women, as well as communities in general.”

Afghanistan is one of the world’s lowest carbon emitters but is also one of the countries most at risk of climate change. Sustainable land management and tree plantation help mitigate climate change impacts (and provides a pathway for long-term adaptation). Sustainable land management, tree plantation and awareness raising are key mitigation measures for countries such as Afghanistan, which is why the technical support of FAO, funded through the GEF is so important, as it seeks to protect vital natural resources and contribute to global efforts to combat climate change.

The benefits of sustainable tree production are clear to communities. “Cuttings and tree plantation are good alternative options for fuelwood for our houses and cooking food. Rangeland degradation can be reduced while natural bushes and plants are not excessively used. If alternative options are available, people will stop over-using rangeland plants and bushes,” says Khalil, a community member in Yakawlang district.

Community-based natural resources management

The project also supported the establishment of seven Rangeland Management Associations (RMAs) in two districts of Bamyan in collaboration with a range of key stakeholders. The project invested heavily in capacity development training for members of these RMAs and community members in general to help them develop community-based natural resources management (CBNRM) plans. The plans will enable communities to manage their natural resources sustainably.

The people in Baghalak village, north of Yakawlang district, initially thought that community rangelands weren’t suitable for tree plantation and woodlot establishment, but the project helped them appreciate the range of benefits associated with sustainable rangeland management. “We didn’t know the value of trees and woodlots until we received the training from FAO. We now understand how to sustainably manage the natural resources and how to develop feasible plans” explained Joma Khan, a CBNRM training participant.

In addition, the project has also led to 1 800 ha of rangeland being kept free from grazing in order to accelerate restoration whilst another 4 560 ha of land has been prepared for rotational grazing.



Abdul Mubariz, a community member in Yakawlang district, looks after planted tree cuttings.

FAO's cash for work revitalizes rural livelihoods



Saeedullah and his sister inside their single-room house.

Saeedullah, 25-year-old head of a seven-member family in Wama district of eastern Nuristan province, lives with his family under the old ceiling of a small dark room in Mandok village. The shelter, provided to him by the community members, is barely good to accommodate the family. Saeedullah's family is lacking proper access to daily food and hygiene. The small piece of land he owns doesn't suffice for his family's needs, thus, they receive charity from other villagers on some occasions.

He was supported by FAO through cash for work intervention, funded by Sweden. Cash for work assistance by FAO boosts short-term income for rural families while improving infrastructure through rehabilitation of local irrigation and soil-water conservation structures, livestock watering points, flood protection walls and karez (underground canal system). Members of the local communities are temporarily employed as daily labourers in return for some cash. The introduction of cash flows through this intervention revitalized the local economy whilst the involvement of local communities ensured sustainability of the results.

Saeedullah's family depend mainly on livestock for their livelihood. He is the only male breadwinner of the family. In August last year, FAO selected him as a beneficiary of cash for work assistance in rehabilitation of water infrastructure project. "I was informed through the Community Development Council in my village that FAO will provide emergency assistance packages to vulnerable families," the 25-year-old head of the family said. He was hopeful that he could receive several packages as his family's condition was very poor, but FAO could support each family with only one package. "I chose the cash assistance which was extremely important for my family's survival."

After Saeedullah was selected to receive cash for work assistance from FAO, he was faced with a life changing tragedy. He lost his two legs in a car accident on his way from Nuristan to the neighboring Kunar province for labour, and his father died in the same incident.

The project team would have been forced to drop his name from the list of beneficiaries as he was no longer able to work with the project if his mother hadn't come forward to the family's rescue. Saeedullah's mother, 43-years-old Aziza, decided to work on behalf of her now disabled son under the cash for work intervention to earn some money and support her despairing family. Therefore, he is supported by the project through his mother's work.

The family received 3 850 Afghanis (close to USD 50) for ten days of work from Saeedullah's mother. "We are going to use the money to provide food for the family and cover basic healthcare of the children," Saeedullah said. "I will spend some money on the livestock to protect them from diseases," the villager from Nuristan added.

FAO assistance to Saeedullah helped improve the situation of his family but the money will be enough to cover his expenses for only a few months. Substantial humanitarian assistance and development work are required to help vulnerable families like Saeedullah's to pass through these challenging times. "I request you to raise my voice to other aid agencies as well so they can support my family," Saeedullah asked the project team.

Afghanistan: Humanitarian assistance averted a food security catastrophe in the harsh winter months, but hunger persists at unprecedented levels

People require humanitarian assistance, livelihood support, jobs, and long-term investment to help solve the crisis

Kabul – Some 19.7 million people, almost half of Afghanistan's population, are facing acute hunger according to the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis conducted in January and February 2022 by Food Security and Agriculture Cluster partners, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and many NGOs.

The report predicts that the outlook for June-November 2022 sees a slight improvement in the food security situation, with a reduction in the number of people facing acute food insecurity to 18.9 million people. This is due in part to the coming wheat harvest from May to August, and this year's well-coordinated scale-up of humanitarian food assistance - alongside increased agricultural livelihood support.

However, gains will be limited – the report warns. Lingering drought and the deep economic crisis mean that unprecedented hunger will continue to threaten the lives and livelihoods of millions of people across Afghanistan.

Of particular concern - and for the first time since the introduction of the IPC in Afghanistan in 2011 - a small pocket of "catastrophic" levels of food insecurity - or IPC Phase 5 - has been detected in the country. More than 20,000 people in the north-eastern province of Ghor are facing catastrophic levels of hunger because of a long period of harsh winter and disastrous agricultural conditions.

"Unprecedented levels of humanitarian assistance focused on bolstering food security have made a difference. But the food security situation is dire. Humanitarian assistance remains desperately important, as do the needs to rebuild shattered agricultural livelihoods and re-connect farmers and rural communities to struggling rural and urban markets across the country. Unless these happen, there will be no way out of this crisis," said Richard Trenchard, FAO Representative in Afghanistan.

"Food assistance and emergency livelihood support are the lifeline for the people of Afghanistan. We mounted the world's largest humanitarian food operation in a matter of months, reaching more than 16 million people since August 2021," said Mary-Ellen McGroarty, WFP's Country Director and Representative in Afghanistan.

"We are working with farmers, millers, and bakeries, training women and creating jobs to support the local economy. Because the people of Afghanistan would much prefer jobs; women want



A herder holds a lamb in Kandahar.

to be able to work; and all girls deserve to go to school. Allowing the economy to function normally is the surest way out of the crisis, otherwise suffering will grow where crops cannot,” she added.

The upcoming harvest will bring some relief to millions of families struggling with income losses and food shortages. However, for many, the harvest will only offer short-term relief and very little opportunity for recovery. The war in Ukraine continues to put pressure on Afghanistan’s wheat supply, food commodities, agricultural inputs, and fuel prices. Access to seeds, fertilizer and water for irrigation is limited, labour opportunities are scarce and enormous debts have been incurred to buy food over the last few months.

Both FAO and WFP continue to scale up their programmes across the country. WFP has reached more than 16 million people so far in 2022 with emergency food assistance, and is supporting local markets, working with retailers and local suppliers. WFP continues to invest in people’s livelihoods through skills training and climate adaption projects so that families can cultivate their land and grow their own food.

FAO continues to scale up its assistance to farmers and herders in rural areas and will assist more than 9 million people in 2022 through a range of interventions supporting crop, livestock and vegetable production, cash transfers and the rehabilitation of vital irrigation infrastructure and systems.

Supporting agriculture is a cost-effective and strategic intervention that delivers great short-term impact as lifesaving support, while it paves the way for longer-term recovery and sustainable development.

Afghanistan: FAO and the World Bank step up their response to the worsening food security

USD 195 million emergency project aims to provide critical life-saving and livelihood assistance to smallholder farmers

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) welcomed an unprecedented USD 150 million contribution from the World Bank to provide critical livelihood and life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable rural populations in Afghanistan, while boosting local food production and smallholder resilience.

Some 19.7 million people, almost half of Afghanistan’s population, are facing acute hunger meaning they are unable to feed themselves on a daily basis, according to the latest Integrated Food Security

Phase Classification (IPC) analysis released in May 2022 by Food Security and Agriculture Cluster partners, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and many non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

High levels of acute food insecurity persist across Afghanistan due to a combination of a collapsing economy and continuing drought. The ripple effects from the war in Ukraine are exacerbating the food security situation, pushing food prices to new highs, increasing the costs of vital agricultural inputs, especially fertilizer, and placing pressure on countries in the region supplying wheat to Afghanistan to restrict food exports, giving priority to their respective domestic consumption.

The new Afghanistan Emergency Food Security Project will boost the production of food crops for smallholder Afghan farmers and prevent the further deterioration of food security.

This is the first tranche of a total amount of USD 195 million, another USD 45 million will be released within the next 24 months.

“We are grateful to the World Bank and its Members for the generous and timely contribution”, said FAO Director-General QU Dongyu. “It is a historic moment for poor farmers in Afghanistan, and it represents an important milestone in our collective efforts to deliver results at scale, avert a looming catastrophe and make real transformative differences in the lives of vulnerable people”.

FAO will be the sole implementing partner for the funding, and this work will be centred around two main components.

First, it will focus on wheat production, supporting about 2.1 million people, that will be reached each year through the November 2022 and March-November 2023 planting seasons.

The project will also provide focussed support on the nutritional needs of children, people with disabilities or chronic illness, and households headed by women by providing seeds and basic tools for backyard kitchen gardening and technical training on improved nutrition and climate-smart production practices. Almost 1 million people will benefit from this support and these inputs, particularly targeting rural women.

About 150 000 women will receive training on improved cultivation techniques and nutrition. The project will enhance linkages for both farmers and women involved in gardening with local markets to facilitate the sale of marketable surpluses of wheat, vegetables and legumes.

Second, the project will also increase access to irrigation water, improve soil and water conservation, and bolster climate resilience by supporting the rehabilitation and improvement of selected irrigation and watershed management systems of over 137 000 hectares of land. Under this component, more than 1.9 million people will benefit from cash for work activities for the restoration of irrigation infrastructure and watershed management.



A farmer shows his wheat field planted with certified seeds distributed by FAO, Nawi Doh village, Daman district, Kandahar, Afghanistan.

The FAO food security project is one of the three projects totalling USD 793 million approved by the World Bank to provide urgent and essential livelihood and health services, in addition to food assistance, to the people of Afghanistan.

The World Bank support reinforces other ongoing FAO programmes in Afghanistan, funded by the Asian Development Bank and other donors, which combine to provide both immediate life-saving and livelihood-protecting assistance with activities that lay down pathways for longer-term recovery and resilience-building.

FAO Creates Resilient Livelihood for Youth in Small Scale Food Production

FAO launched the Dairy Industry Development Project in Afghanistan in 2014 to target some of the poorest families in order to reduce their vulnerability to climate change. The country's four dairy unions, supported by FAO, currently have 3771 registered members (1690 of them youth). Approximately 48.74 percent (1640) of the unions' members are women with a total of 390 young women. The FAO dairy project supports farmers (both men and women), helping them to collect 16 859 155 liters of quality milk in the years 2014-2022, generating revenues of AFN 500 582 280 (around USD 5 656 296) for farmers.

The Dairy Industry Development model consists of a dairy value chain – managed by the union as an enterprise – that encompasses milk production, collection, processing and marketing of pasteurized milk and dairy products. Inputs and services are organized around these activities.

This initiative supports women in becoming economically active in ways that will benefit their households and in developing economic opportunities that will improve livestock production and agricultural lands through the adoption of climate-resilient inputs, technologies and processes.

In Afghanistan, the first phase of the dairy value chain – milk production – is almost exclusively handled by young and adult women, while men play various roles along the value chain. The unions are exclusively run by men. Prior to the project, young and adult women were sometimes engaged in the marketing of milk, but results were limited as many of them faced hurdles in selling their products due to gender-based norms. In this respect, significant progress has been achieved by the project through support to young and adult women in establishing milk collection centers near their homes to sell their products.

Another major success of the project has been the establishment of 40 self-help groups (SHGs), with more than 657 members in Kabul, Parwan and Logar provinces. Between them, the groups accumulated total savings of AFN 1 183 990 (USD 15 580) between 2015 and 2022. These groups encourage young and adult women from different dairy cooperatives to come together to exchange experiences and receive training in finding linkages with local markets. Members of these small groups, which follow the norms of democratic self-governance, meet at regular intervals (weekly, bi-weekly or monthly) and contribute a small sum of money per

person (for example AFN 20, 50 or 100 [USD 0.20, 0.50 or 1]) to a communal fund that will help to provide financial support to members in need. An SHG's money can be loaned out to members of the group under agreed conditions, to help them launch or develop small enterprises. Through these groups, members have diversified their income beyond the dairy sector and between 2015 and 2022, they sold additional products to dairy for a total revenue AFN 5 810 000 (USD 63 245). Furthermore, they increased their market sales, gained financial independence and learned new skills.

As well as helping members to increase their incomes, SHGs also enable participants to build up a socio-financial safety network on which they can rely when experiencing social or economic difficulties. The central idea behind the self-help group approach is to tackle poverty, enable social and economic empowerment and support the advancement of gender equality. Many positive social impacts are already visible during the first years of SHG implementation, such as the development of group solidarity and social as well as economic networks that can support members' families.

The technical support provided by the Dairy Industry Development initiative has helped to reduce milk losses, by introducing refrigeration systems along the dairy value chain. The approach adopted has made a strong contribution to empowering the young women taking part, by offering them an opportunity to sell products safely at village level and to receive a reliable weekly cash income from sales.



A woman in Char Asiab district of Kabul, assisted by FAO, is preparing her cow's milk for sending to the milk collection center.

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