

Supporting productive and stable livelihoods through collective organization in Afghanistan

What is decent rural employment?

[Decent rural employment](#) refers to any activity, occupation, work, business or service performed by women and men, adults and youth, in rural areas that: (i) respects the core labour standards as defined in ILO Conventions; (ii) provides an adequate living income; (iii) entails an adequate degree of employment security and stability; (iv) adopts minimum occupational safety and health (OSH) measures adapted to address sector-specific risks and hazards; (v) avoids excessive working hours and allows sufficient time for rest; and (vi) promotes access to adapted technical and vocational training.

THE SITUATION

Afghanistan is a predominantly rural country, with over 75 percent of the country's inhabitants living in rural areas. A staggering 85 percent of Afghan households depend on agriculture for their livelihood.

However, despite formidable reconstruction efforts, Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world. It has been in a state of protracted crisis for decades and rural areas have been particularly affected. Agricultural productivity remains far below its potential, because farms lack access to productive resources, markets and technical knowledge needed to increase their productivity and incomes. As a result, 45 percent of all rural Afghans live below the national poverty line.

There is a pronounced need to develop the institutional as well as the coordination capacity towards integrated approaches that can support rural Afghans to engage in more productive and stable livelihoods. Stability is of particular importance in situations of protracted crisis such as Afghanistan, as it increases rural households' resilience to exogenous threats. Achieving stable livelihoods is an important step toward more productive and decent employment in these rural areas.



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PROJECT DETAILS

Title: Support to Household Food Security and Livelihoods of Vulnerable and Food Insecure Farming Families Project

Date: 2010-2013

Location: Nangahar and Kabul Provinces, Afghanistan

Responsible institution(s): Afghanistan Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation & Livestock and Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation & Development (implementing agencies); FAO (technical agency); Luxembourg (funding agency)

Sub-sector: Crops

Budget: US\$2.1 million

HOW THE ISSUES WERE ADDRESSED

The project was implemented in close collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock's (MAIL) Programme Implementation and Coordination Unit (PICU). The project organized 7,000 beneficiaries into Common Interest Groups (CIGs), and equipped these CIGs to support their members' livelihoods. Implementing agencies worked with each CIG to develop a common livelihood strategy, and identify the inputs and skills needed to bring this strategy to life. The project then supported each CIG to train its members in the necessary agricultural and business skills. It also provided CIGs with the requested inputs (free of charge). CIGs subsequently distributed the inputs to members on a cost-recovery basis and each CIG was endowed with a Revolving Fund, allowing them to continue providing their members with loans, inputs and trainings as needed. The project also developed local institutional capacities to continue supporting rural livelihoods in the targeted communities. It trained a series of farmer facilitators, who in turn established Farmer Field Schools (FFS) to provide community-based extension services. It also developed the capacities of the MAIL to more effectively plan and administer its own support to rural livelihoods.

Criteria used to identify good practices

To be considered a good practice in promoting decent employment in agriculture and rural areas, a programme/project must:

1. Have been directly **relevant** to promoting decent rural employment;
2. Have had a **positive effect on employment** issues among target beneficiaries;
3. Have included measures that will ensure the **sustainability of its effects and/or support**, and;
4. Be **replicable** by other organizations, in other contexts and/or for the benefit of other groups.

IMPACT



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The project supported the livelihoods and improved the food security status of 7,000 rural households – a figure corresponding to about 23 percent of all households in the two target districts of Sorkhrod (Nangahad Province) and Qarabagh (Kabul Province). **The project ultimately reached**

95 per cent of these targeted households by involving them in, and supporting them through, CIGs. Interviews with the beneficiaries found that their incomes and food security status improved considerably due to their membership in the CIGs. Many active CIG farmers increased their productivity and quality of produce, as well as their market participation.

SUSTAINABILITY

The project's components ensured that its effects on, and support for, beneficiaries' livelihoods were sustainable.

First, the project's support was provided through well-funded and capacitated CIGs. This helped ensure that the targeted farming households, as well as others who eventually might want to join the CIGs, continued to receive technical and financial support in the long run. Second, the FFS implemented in the beneficiaries' villages were used as a basis for providing community-based extension services, which could be provided to farming households on an ongoing basis. This was most needed to reach the targeted communities, given government's limited financial and administrative capacities. The participatory approach used by the CIGs to prioritise inputs enabled farmers to have a voice and take more control of their livelihood decisions. Such participatory approach also created a sense of ownership of the project that has helped sustain results after the project has ended. Third, the project's efforts to develop the capacities of the MAIL have contributed to ensure that the government is better equipped to provide food insecure households with the necessary livelihoods support.

REPLICABILITY

The project's approach to support rural livelihoods is highly replicable across different value chains and geographic contexts. It implies first forming CIGs, then working with members of each CIG to develop a common livelihood strategy, and afterward channelling the necessary livelihoods support through the CIGs themselves. Especially in crisis contexts, it has generated more productive and stable livelihoods and has supported rural institutions, providing stability and resilience for the rural inhabitants. In situations where the targeted farmers lack the funds needed to purchase the initial inputs from their CIGs, alternative financing mechanisms can be developed. **The project's focus on providing extension services and training through non-governmental institutions can be replicated in contexts where government financial capacities are limited.** The model of providing community-based extension services is a useful way to support productivity gains in crisis contexts and other situations of limited state capacities.



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FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS GOOD PRACTICE, PLEASE CONTACT:

FAO's Office in Afghanistan: FAO-AF@fao.org

TO SUBMIT YOUR OWN GOOD PRACTICE, CONTACT:

FAO's Decent Rural Employment Team: Decent-Work@fao.org