

FAO media tour to the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan

"We are so happy that UN agencies came into our village," were saying farmers in Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces to journalists arrived from Bishkek and Osh city, to see the impact of the joint UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and UN Women projects in the south of the country. "Your assistance is exactly what we need right now, because our land cannot wait, and we need to feed our families every day, "- they said.



FAO/UN Women beneficiaries are happy harvesting 2012 yield of cucumbers.

Photo: Sergey Kozmin, FAO, August 2012

During the joint press tour held on November 9 and 10, 2012 to the South of the country, journalists representing major National as well as international media could see the results of the two FAO/UN Women projects.

One of them, implemented in partnership with WFP, was aimed at the most vulnerable rural families headed by women. The project helped women to come together and work together to improve the financial situation of their families. Women were enriched with the new knowledge

and skills in agriculture of vegetables. Beneficiaries also got seeds, fertilizers and necessary materials to improve soil and get crops of vegetables enough to sell at the market, consumption by their families and store for winter's time.

The amazing impact of the project in a relatively short period of time is that the UN calls "behavior change". Beneficiaries repeatedly stressed in their interviews to journalists, as well as in talking with UN agencies staff chaired by the FAO Representative in Kyrgyzstan Dorjee Kinlay and UN Women Representative Sabine Machl, that farmers within one year refused to sow cotton and tobacco and have switched to growing a variety of vegetables.

"Year after year, for decades, we have traditionally cultivated cotton in our fields, - said the women. Yields have been declining, our earnings were reduced too. And this is with heavy year-round work on the field with no time for family remained. Even our homestead lands remained empty because we were spending all our time in the fields".

When experts of two UN agencies came to support villages and women put into practice the knowledge gained at the training sessions, people immediately felt the difference. First of all, the program has helped them to unite and define common goals. Having got the modern principles of agriculture and using seeds they got from FAO, women sown early vegetables on their allotments and in 45 days have got the first harvest and, respectively the first profit.

With experts' support farmers have researched markets in the nearby city of Osh, successfully sold vegetables, then got good seeds again and grown the second crop, part of which was sold, and the rest have stored for the winter. Plus the whole family diet was improved with vegetables grown on their plots of land. So with FAO agro technologies people could in one growing season make a profit and can now safely make plans for the future.

"A year ago, our fellow villagers did not believe the ideas of the project but now many people are requesting if they can join our self-help groups – say rural women proudly. Now we know how to care our land, how to plant vegetables, how to treat our plants and earn income. And we ourselves can now train other villagers."



Activist of "Erkayim" Rural Fund proudly shows journalists vegetables stored for winter time.

Photo: Olga Grebennikova, FAO, November 2012

After a brief meeting with leaders of self-help groups journalists, representing well known in Kyrgyzstan and internationally news agencies such as Reuters, Vecherni Bishkek, Slovo Kyrgyzstana, Agym, as well as four national television channels, dispersed in the village to gather more information on the impact of the project on changing people's lives.

Women were talking to reporters about what was changed in their lives, proudly showing their beds with cauliflower, a crop of which has not yet harvested and cellars with rows of jars with canned vegetables, stored for the winter time.

"From now on our children will always eat food rich of vitamins especially in winter, - were saying rural women. Before this project their poor families could not even buy vegetables in winter time and basic diet for the family was bread and tea.

In the village of Otuz-Adyr, also in the Osh region journalists could see the long-term results of the first phase of the same project, implemented by FAO and UN Women in 2010 year. The Association of Rural Funds created within the project is already firmly put on the legs and gained legal status. The Association has over 1.5 million Kyrgyz Soms (around 32 thousands USD) of savings which can be used in interest of whole village, including for purchasing of seeds and fertilizers for future crops.

Also the Association started to play a visible role in improving social infrastructure in the village in partnership with the local authorities. For example, meeting with journalists was conducted in the

building of rural kindergarten, renovated and equipped with the grant, the Association won in a contest conducted by the Regional UN Women Programme on Migration.



While young children are in the kindergarten, women can easily do another job

Photo: Kymbat Musaev, FAO, November 2012

"We have free hands now, because our children are cared in a kindergarten. We already can buy good seeds, because FAO taught us exactly which varieties of seeds, fertilizers and means for plant protection to use, - say the leaders of village funds. If the Ministry of agriculture will give us a tractor for leasing, we'll not only handle our fields, but also help all neighbors in order the life in the village become better and better, - they say, taking advantage of presence at the meeting Adviser to the Minister of Agriculture Ulanbek Torogeldiev.

On the second day of the press-tour journalists discovered FAO integrated project in Jalal-Abad province. In the framework of this project in 2010-2011 the irrigation system covering the area of 14500 hectares of irrigated land in pilot Nookan district was modernized. The project helped to create structures for training farmers (25 Field Farmers Schools), area's Water Users' Federation has got tractors supplied with modern laser equipment on leveling the fields.

In the area where the irrigation system was upgraded, also three unique stations for automatic agro meteo forecasting were established and a number of other components were implemented to help farmers use extremely valued irrigation water rationally and bring higher benefit to people.



FAO Representative in the Kyrgyz Republic Dorjee Kinlay replies many questions from media

Photo: Olga Grebennikova, FAO, November 2012

"This year's crop has increased by half, - farmers told reporters. And this is only because we have switched to the optimal usage of irrigation water. In addition, we have set a schedule for watering now, and now we have no reason to quarrel with neighbors because of the irrigation water."

FAO representative in Kyrgyzstan Mr. Dorjee Kinlay, Plant Production Expert Mr. Omurbek Mambetov, Water Management Specialists Mr. Matraim Jusupov and Mr. Kutchubai Jaanbaev, as well as leaders of local water users associations and district authorities accompanied the mission of media so journalists were getting answers to all their questions immediately.

FAO in Kyrgyzstan continues to communicate with participants of the press tour providing them with additional information for publication of qualitative articles. Eight TV news reportages were aired by four Kyrgyz TV channels immediately after the field trip.

*Olga Grebennikova
Communication Expert
FAO in the Kyrgyz Republic*