

## From Agriculture Extension Services Development to Livelihood Improvement – Institutionalization in Central Highlands of Afghanistan

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**Farming households in the Central Highlands of Afghanistan suffer from high levels of poverty and food insecurity. Agricultural productivity remains low due to insufficient access to agricultural inputs and information. To improve household food security and livelihoods of the poorest farming families in the province of Bamyan, the project; Agricultural Services and Livelihood Improvement (ASLI) is implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL) with the technical support of FAO. The project started in August 2017 and is planned to be completed by the end of July 2021.**

After having assessed the households' needs as a basis for the planning of the interventions and identifying the main livelihood strategies, as well as the most vulnerable households in the districts, the farmers were organized into Common Interest Groups (CIGs). More than 30% of the selected beneficiaries were women.

The formation of CIGs served as an entry point for service delivery by the extension workers of the MAIL in accordance to their identified priorities. The provided services included the introduction of improved agriculture, livestock, horticulture production, and processing practices. In addition, Farmer Field Schools (FFS) were established to foster learning and exchange among farmers. The project also provided seed funding - in the form of free inputs - for the revolving funds managed by the CIGs to allow them to make smaller investments or provide subsidized inputs by themselves. Another important aspect of CIG formation was the facilitation of market linkages, as well as linkages with other government or other development agency initiatives.



Land preparation and potato planting training through FFS, © FAO

The project also worked with local communities to establish green-belt areas in at least eight locations. At least six common-beneficial irrigation and water storage infrastructures were rehabilitated or constructed in the targeted districts.



Sapling distribution and practical training for orchard layout application, © FAO

Furthermore the project piloted the provision of supplementary nutrition to four primary schools, by linking women horticulture CIGs to the four primary schools. This involved establishing and training the CIGs to supply specific types, quantity and quality of food as well as training and equipping a group of women to prepare and serve nutritious food to the students. It was complemented by awareness-raising activities on nutrition and sanitation by trained women volunteers. This pilot replicates successful FAO experiences in Latin America and Africa to address child malnutrition while increasing demand for local products and improving women's income.



Provision of supplementary food to primary school kids, © FAO

In line with context-sensitive programme management (CSPM) principles, the emphasis was put on the active engagement of local farmers and authorities, and on introducing transparent criteria for beneficiary selection. This, together with the quality and relevance of the project's activities contributed to a high level of acceptance, which is key for project implementation in fragile contexts such as Afghanistan. By addressing both the supply (capable public services) and demand (organized and informed farmers) side, the project ensured the sustainability of its interventions.

The ASLI project has so far created 604 CIGs and supported 11,809 households (2,147 women and 9,662 men). As a result, farmers have increased their productivity and the capacity of government institutions to deliver advisory services has improved. As a way forward in the forthcoming phases, activities will shift towards improving storage, processing and packaging, as well as facilitating linkages to traders and local markets. This will allow to consolidate achievements and promote best practices for replication in other districts.



Sheep vaccination and distribution in one of the target area, © FAO