

Households and sustainable economic livelihoods in Balkh province of Afghanistan

Results summary

Over the course of a 3-year programme, Hand in Hand, in partnership with the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), supported 350 women in the Balkh province of Afghanistan to launch and grow 464 sustainable, climate resilient agri-businesses, creating 350 jobs.



39%

income uplift



96%

of businesses still operational at the end of Hand in Hand's project



42%

of project members are financially resilient

Problem

Afghanistan is ranked among the 25 least developed countries in the world (World Bank) with 54 percent of the 35 million population living below the poverty line (Asian Development Bank). 30 percent of Afghans are undernourished, and over half of those people face severe food insecurity. The high poverty levels compound these challenges as vulnerable men and women face greater barriers in accessing resources, such as water, and technical expertise that could help their livelihood activities to thrive.

During the last ten years, the Afghan government has taken important steps to improve women's living conditions – adopting legislation to establish girls' right to an education and women's right to work and prohibiting violence against women. Nonetheless, the country remains the second-worst in the world (only after Chad) for a woman to live in (UNDP). In a country plagued by poverty and hunger, women are also hit much harder by the lack of economic opportunity: only 2 percent of women had paid work according to a recent national survey (Central Statistics Organization of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan).

Objectives

Following our well-proven model, Hand in Hand aimed to train 500 women, supporting the creation of 500 enterprises, and transforming 3,900 children, women's and men's lives. We aimed to boost:

- incomes
- sustainability: enterprise survival rates
- financial resilience: participants with the capacity to deal with a financial shock without borrowing money or selling assets
- women's bargaining power: women participating in household decision-making

Our solution

The project addressed a lack of stable and profitable income-generation opportunities, specifically for women and youth. This lack of opportunities was a key contributing factor to poverty in the province of Balkh. The work in Afghanistan was transformative as its focus on women's economic empowerment did not just train as many women as possible to run their businesses but broke down the barriers that stopped women from working in the first place, allowing women to be decision-makers in their households and building financially stable families.

To achieve our objective, Hand in Hand employed a proven five-step enterprise development model:

- **self-help group mobilisation:** Hand in Hand's self-help groups learned together and supported each other throughout the project. To mobilise them, we engaged local leaders and local authorities to gain their support and assist with outreach. By the end of the project, Hand in Hand Afghanistan had mobilised 500 women into 33 groups which acted as a safety net for all to join, providing members with access to group savings funds in the event of shocks such as illness.
- **entrepreneurship training:** once mobilised, self-help groups learned Hand in Hand's business training curriculum, engaging in fortnightly training sessions over nine months. The essential skills required to become successful entrepreneurs were covered, such as bookkeeping, marketing, and managing loans.
- **enterprise start-up kits:** enterprise start-up kits were provided to support viable business plans as a culturally compliant variation on micro-credit. The start-up kits provided the initial assets needed to start the enterprises and were given to those members who showed commitment through regular attendance and group saving.
- **market linkages:** we helped women grow their businesses by connecting them with larger markets, enabling them to source cheaper suppliers and more. Members operating similar businesses were supported to join associations to work together and benefit from economies of scale. This way, we ensured that when the project concluded, the women would continue to be successful in the absence of their Hand in Hand trainers.
- **advocacy training:** lead farmers from each association were trained on advocacy skills and participated in advocacy meetings and roundtables with community leaders to support women's active participation in project activities. By linking local structures to relevant government institutions, the target groups were equipped and empowered to continue initiatives advocating for inclusive social and economic development.

The project's approach was based on the belief that skill development and empowerment could create a positive impact on the lives of the beneficiaries and the broader community. By promoting self-sufficiency and economic independence, the project aimed to create a lasting impact that went beyond its duration.

Results



Income

- The overall average monthly net enterprise income is 1,650 AFN (\$95 PPP). This is an increase of 39% since baseline.



Enterprise survival rate

- 96% of businesses are still operating at the end of Hand in Hand's project.



Financial resilience

- 42% of participants said they could raise emergency funds within 30 days without borrowing money or selling assets.

For more information

Or to talk to our monitoring, evaluation and learning team in more detail about our impact and evidence, please contact admin@handinhandinternational.org or call us on +44 (0)20 7514 5091.

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