

Empowering Women in Afghanistan

End of Project Overview

In 2018, with funding from the Hilti Foundation, HiH Afghanistan (HiHAO) partnered with CARE Afghanistan to implement the Enterprise Today (ET) programme over 24 months. CARE's Every Voice Counts (EVC) programme had an existing focus on the political and civil empowerment of women, and was thus complemented and strengthened through providing women with knowledge and skills in the business sector, as well as life skills via ET.

Budget: US\$523,495

Objective: Increased gender equality and women's economic empowerment through income generating activities, as well as improved decision-making power inside and outside the household.

Project Dates: December 2018 – December 2020

Location: Balkh, Kabul and Parwan

Impact

Key Milestones	Results
Number of community members enrolled	1,170
Number of enterprises created	1,101
Number of jobs created	1,218
*At least 117 from non-members	
Annual Household Net Income Increase	41 %
Average savings per member	US\$ 31
Average loan size from SHGs	US\$ 51
Number of internal SHG loans	916
Total Amount of internal loans	US\$ 46,338

The project excelled against its targets by the end of the project, despite the setbacks caused by Covid-19:

- All project members have completed the core training and any extra sessions required to ensure success (such as literacy and numeracy training).
- 1,101 enterprises have been launched in total. All benefited from a "start-up toolkit" to set up new businesses in the following sectors: poultry, livestock, tailoring, embroidery, beautician, soap-making, food services, bee-keeping, among others.
- The average monthly net income generated by the members' enterprise is AFN 2,152 (US\$28), up from zero income in most cases. On average, the project has lifted members just above the national poverty line.

- 1,218 jobs were created in total through these enterprises, including an extra 117 jobs for community members. These include assistants for members' tailoring, beauty and shop-keeping enterprises.
- Eight "Community Entrepreneurs Councils" have been formed to support members to continue working together and growing their enterprises beyond project completion. The councils are run by the women themselves, who have received training on how to run the councils effectively. They help ensure the sustainability of the project gains by coordinating Self-Help Group activities of savings and lending and also facilitate the bulk procurement of raw materials, tools and services that, as well as continuing to identify and access the right markets and customers.
- In Afghanistan, where it is very difficult for poor families to access safe and affordable credit, the savings funds launched by the women in the project are vital. They will ensure the women can keep growing their businesses, as well as provide a lifeline against hardships beyond your project's lifetime. This has never been more evident than during the Covid-19 lockdown, when some families' breadwinners were struck with

The challenge

Six months into the programme (2019), researchers from Global Impact Management Consulting (GIMC) conducted a gender analysis to provide baseline data on gender dynamics, and recommendations on women's economic and political empowerment for the CARE & HiH Afghanistan partnership. The analysis compared participants of each of the programmes (Hand in Hand's and CARE's) against those who participated in both (ET).

This analysis found many complementary areas between the programmes that worked toward increasing the impact of both in addressing the following challenges:

- Cultural restrictive social norms: Women still strive for gender equality at the family, community and national levels. Afghanistan has a culture that privileges males over female in every aspect of life. Gender-based discrimination is transferred from generation to generation and it starts inside the household. Both EVC and ET have worked to address such challenges.
- Mobility: In a security threatened context, women's mobility is restricted not only because of violence resulting from political conflict, but because of social restrictions on women's freedom to leave the house, thus limiting women's opportunity to take part in social and economic activities.

Key Findings of the gender analysis:

- Women that participated in both programmes have shown more confidence, awareness of their rights, increased access to resources, more decision making power inside and outside the household; therefore suggesting positive complementarity between ET and EVC. 44 percent of women who received both interventions already reported having more influence and decision-making power in the home. Women with more access to financial resources will increase their social and political participation.

- **Mobility and family support:** When men are engaged in either programme, a positive impact was reported on women's mobility (increased freedom to go out on their own) and in women's social political participation (didn't require husband's approval to join groups or community organizations).
- **Increased Social networks:** Membership in formal and informal groups will boost confidence, communication skills, and eventually help with running and managing an enterprise. Increased income allowed women to attend meetings which they could not afford to travel to in the past, invest in activities that support their family and community development, and guaranteed resources were equally dedicated to their daughters, especially in areas such as education.

The programme

Hand in Hand Afghanistan's four-step model equipped members with the skills and knowledge they needed to launch and grow profitable, market-based enterprises and improve the socio-economic condition of their families and communities by:

- **Providing business and vocational training:** The training provided sufficient skills to better manage enterprises and daily life by enabling members to keep financial records, make calculations of costs, profits, and loans, and read simple notes and letters, for example. For those who require it, basic literacy and numeracy was also provided. Furthermore, members received specific technical skills required to run their enterprise of choice by vocational trainers.
- **Helping members understand how markets work** was a key aspect of the training. Members are now better able to overcome barriers to access markets and add value to their products; for instance, clubbing together to lower transport costs and improving the quality and branding of their products and services and subsequently earn higher profits.
- **Conducting mentoring visits and on-going support.** This allowed our team to understand the challenges being experienced by the women and helped them overcome these.
- **Participating in cross-learning visits** between different groups and members. We have found this peer-to-peer practical learning very helpful for women to adopt new practices in their enterprises as they build knowledge but also confidence. At least 64% of project members attended these visits.

Impact

- ❖ **Women reported increased mobility:** The ability to move independently is an indicator of women's agency and empowerment. Project beneficiaries report increased mobility as a result of the programme. Baseline data had showed restrictive social restrictions on women's freedom to leave the house, thus limiting women's opportunity to access markets to get basic goods and services and inputs for their business.
- ❖ **Positive involvement of men:** A positive impact was reported on women's mobility (increased freedom to go out on their own) and in women's social political participation (didn't require husband's approval to join groups or community organizations). When men

and other community members understand and see the benefits of their wives/daughters participating in the project social norms can change. It was noted that involving men, which happened through the EVC project, was important to bring about change.

- ❖ **Increased decision-making power:** Women reported increased decision-making power inside and outside the household due to their ability to contribute to household income.
- ❖ **Increased savings:** women having access to a route to save is important to help their families through difficult times and the winter months.
- ❖ **Social recognition and leadership:** Beneficiaries reported positive attitudes towards women's participation in the economy not only by family members but *a/so* by their community. Programme participants became role models in their communities.

Looking into the future

We have learned that huge social benefits can be achieved through women's economic empowerment, but to make these gains sustainable in the long term and bring about real change, men must be part of the solution. We are now looking at ways to include men and the wider community into future programmatic interventions.

Women's double burden of domestic unpaid work is one of the main challenges to run successful enterprises, there just isn't enough time. Strengthened monitoring is required to track women's unpaid labour and changes in their traditional roles. An in-depth analysis is required to make sure that increased access to economic resources is not at the same time increasing women's burden of domestic work. Unintended consequences of women's economic and social participation should be accounted for and addressed.



Nafisa | Jawidan Self-Help Group | Pickle Making | Kabul Province



A numeracy training session taking place in Sayed Motahar Village in Khulm District, Balkh Province



A tailoring training session in Deh Meskin Village in Bagram District, Parwan Province



Project members visiting a backyard poultry farm run by a project member in Qalai Ahmad Khan, Kabul Province