

GIZ-GENDER COMPETITION 2024

TAJIK RURAL UNITY: EMPOWERING GENDER COMPETENCE FOR INCLUSIVE RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN TAJIKISTAN AS PART OF THE IRDP/TRIGGER PROJECT



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Introduction

Imagine a Tajikistan where equal opportunities prevail without the barriers of gender, and every individual contributes constructively to the economy. This scenario is no longer a distant dream but the impending reality that the ambitious project, 'Tajik Rural Unity: Empowering Gender Competence for Inclusive Development in Tajikistan', aims to achieve. Putting women's empowerment in the driver's seat, this progressive mission envisions an equitable tomorrow where every voice matters - the epitome of unity.

The uniqueness of "Tajik Rural Unity" lies in its core objective: promoting the dynamic power of women's participation in economic activities to an aspiring 50% and above, fostering an environment of gender-competent leadership. It is a thorough extension (cross-cutting topic) of the Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP/TRIGGER) project, carrying forward its founding aims of fostering gender equality in every nook and cranny of rural Tajikistan.

Challenging the status quo, the project takes an uncompromising stand against gender biases, ensuring even representation at all decision-making levels. The project isn't merely striving for equality; it champions empowerment by nurturing value chain management and entrepreneurial skills across genders. With special emphasis on nurturing budding female entrepreneurs, this initiative ensures a level playing field with access to necessary resources, financial assistance, and exclusive mentorship.

Moreover, the Tajik Rural Unity project imbues gender sensitivity into resource management, with sustained efforts in water and watershed management. The project prioritizes equal representation in committees and promotes community-centric, gender-inclusive handling of resources. Through rigorous capacity-building and educational initiatives from the high-governmental level to the remotest region of Tajikistan, it aims to cultivate sustainable management practices among men and women alike.

The project also vows to fortify the role of women within areas impacted by climate change and biodiversity loss in Tajikistan's agricultural sector. It intends to reactivate and connect latent women's networks operating in the agriculture sector, leading to the emergence of more green and sustainable value chains. Its commitment was evident in the first conference dedicated to the International Day of Rural Women in 2022 and 2023, where leading women across all sectors were sharing their experiences, challenges faced, and ways to overcome them. In essence, 'Tajik Rural Unity: Empowering Gender Competence for Inclusive

Development in Tajikistan' represents a paradigm shift in rural development. The equitable world it envisions, where women and men share equal representation and opportunities, makes it a revolutionary endeavor. As an integral part of the IRDP/TRIGGER holistic approach, this initiative promises to rewrite the narrative of gender roles in Tajikistan, championing a future where every gender thrives in harmony.

1. PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

The Tajik Rural Unity project is a transformative initiative deeply rooted in promoting gender equality and driving an all-encompassing change in rural Tajikistan. The mainstay of the project lies in championing women's involvement in economic activities, ascertaining a ground-breaking target of a 50% participation rate that seeks to recalibrate the socio-economic dynamics.

Encompassed within the broader agenda of the Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP)/TRIGGER project, the Tajik Rural Unity project ensures the participation of rural women in all project activities, such as Dushanbe Economic meeting (2021, 2022) Bokhtar Food EXPO (2021, 2022, 2023) Pamir Invest Forum (2021, 2022, 2023) Sughd Fair EXPO (2021, 2022, 2023) International Green Week in Berlin (2023, 2024) and many other small and big activities of the project. Besides communicating the economic benefits and strengthening the livelihood of rural women It aims to mitigate the detrimental impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss on the nation's agricultural sector by capitalizing on the strengthening role of women.

The project's conceptual framework allows effective gender mainstreaming by promoting gender-equitable representation at decision-making levels. It champions gender-responsive budgeting, regular policy-level gender analysis, and persistent advocacy for eliminating gender-biased bottlenecks. Additionally, approaches such as exclusively tailored support networks, mentorship, and training programs have been instrumental in fostering female entrepreneurship. As part of the IRDP/TRIGGER project, the role of Rural Women was emphasized at the National Agrarian Strategy 2023-2030 which was signed by the President of the Republic of Tajikistan

The impacts of the Tajik Rural Unity project are envisaged in a phased manner:

Short-term: *In the initial stages of this project, an increase in women's engagement in economic activities is anticipated. The skill-set development programs focused on value chain management and entrepreneurship are expected to spur women's professional growth. Additionally, the active promotion of gender equality through widespread awareness programs is projected to instigate attitudinal shifts in societal gender perception.*

Medium-term: *The benefits of this project should amplify over time, with increased women representation across decision-making platforms and equal opportunities in economic activities. The inception of gender-sensitive planning for water resource management at the community level is another envisioned medium-term impact.*

Long-term: *The long-term impacts of this project are profound and far-reaching. The project's sustainable aspect will manifest through well-organized, community-driven, gender-balanced committees in charge of water and watershed management. The program also expects the rejuvenation of women's networks within agriculture, fostering sustainable and greener value chains. This progress is predicted to result in poverty reduction, a substantial economic upturn, and a marked improvement in climate change resilience.*

Through these measures, the Tajik Rural Unity project manifests an enduring commitment to gender equality, moving beyond merely being an approach and becoming an integral standard for both present actions and plans.

2. GENDER AS A QUALITY FEATURE OF WORK

The commitment to gender equality forms the cornerstone of the Tajik Rural Unity project. Its unique approach of gender-conscious governance has been recognized for its unwavering stand on promoting equal opportunities and for challenging the stereotypical gender roles prevalent in rural Tajikistan.

The project's underpinning emphasis on driving gender equality has caught the attention of clients, partners, and commissioning parties alike. Acknowledged for its inclusive strategy, the Tajik Rural Unity project has been lauded for its integration of gender equality in every aspect, from policy advocacy to skill development programs and water resource management initiatives. Its efforts to bring about overall rural development whilst promoting gender equality have won esteemed recognition and support from both its beneficiaries and involved parties.

The project's commitment to equal opportunities manifests in its day-to-day operations. Special provisions, such as an exclusive support network and mentorship for women, go beyond symbolic equality and seek to genuinely level the field and encourage female entrepreneurship. Output 4 of the IRDP/TRIGGER project for instance is focused on developing the entrepreneurial skills of rural women through various initiatives and capacity building.

The gender-differentiated approach has been instrumental in ensuring true equality, as seen in the project's water and watershed management. Encouraging equal representation in related committees, ensures both genders have an equitable say. Similarly, the program's emphasis on gender-responsive budgeting and policy revisions demonstrate an inherent commitment to mainstreaming gender perspectives in local governance structures.

Gender equality has been coherently integrated into the project's activities and outputs. Each strand of the project has a clear gender component - be it the promotion of women's role in climate resilience through reactivating dormant agricultural networks, or the increased representation of women at policy advocacy levels. The commitment to gender equality is

not merely topical; it forms the core foundation of the entire Initiative, influencing its strategies and determining its impact.

3. IMPLEMENTING FEMINIST CORE PRINCIPLES

The Tajik Rural Unity project is emblematic of feminist principles in its very nature, using them as a guiding compass in its strategies and operations. At its core, it recognizes and addresses the inequality that stems from ingrained societal norms and structures and strives to dismantle them, offering a more equitable society. A pivotal component of the project is its commitment to human rights-based approaches. It believes in the inherent dignity and equal rights of all individuals, irrespective of their gender. This fundamentally feminist principle is reflected in their targeted commitment to driving women's representation across all levels.

The project also aligns with dismantling structural causes of inequality. To combat these systemic issues, the project champions gender-responsive policies and equal representation of genders at decision-making levels. It collectively amplifies women's voices and provides them access to equal resources and training, thus tackling the deep-rooted economic disparity and fostering gender-competent leadership.

Further, the concept of intersectionality is not overlooked. The project acknowledges the multifaceted discrimination faced by women, particularly considering their role in the rural setup and in occupations like agriculture. The project focuses on issues of gender under the lens of intersectionality, leading to a more inclusive and effective project design.

Lastly, from a power-critical perspective, gender as a cross-cutting topic within the IRDP/TRIGGER project, seeks to level the playing field by empowering women. Through exclusive training, mentorship, and storytelling initiatives, it challenges and changes the imbalance of power, underscoring women's role in society.

4. COOPERATION

Promoting gender equality is a task of monumental proportions, requiring a cumulative effort. The Tajik Rural Unity project has been successful in fostering a culture of collaboration, working hand in hand with colleagues, partners, donors, and civil society representatives.

Working towards the shared goal of gender equality, the diverse set of stakeholders have brought their unique skills, resources, and perspectives together. Through strategic planning and cooperative action on awareness programs, policy advocacy (output 1 and 5), training, and mentorship initiatives (output 2,3,4 and 6), they have driven the project forward. successful advocacy for equal representation of genders at decision-making levels. Under Outputs 2, 3, and 4, we've seen the successful facilitation of skill development programs for

both genders in value chain management and entrepreneurship, ensuring equal access to resources and finance necessary for these activities.

One of the significant challenges faced by the project team and partners is the deeply rooted gender biases ingrained within the societal structure. However, through persistent effort, cultural sensitivity, and respectful engagement with community members, this challenge is gradually being overcome. An example of that is the celebration of Annual Rural Women's Day culturally sensitive regions where each year over 500 women from different rural areas of the country participate and showcase their successes and thus motivate others to follow the path. The Rural Women's day emphasizes the three key success factors for the team have been effective communication, a shared vision, and unwavering commitment. The team's ability to communicate clearly and respectfully has made it easier to disseminate the idea of gender equality in a society resistant to change. Secondly, each member's understanding and commitment to the shared vision of a more equitable society have created a cohesive team driven toward a common goal. Lastly, an unwavering commitment to equality, even in the face of adversity, has been a driving factor in the successful implementation of the project.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO INTERNAL GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gender equality isn't merely a footnote in our work within the Tajik Rural Unity project as well as IRDP/TRIGGER, but a pivotal organizational ethos embodied in all our actions. We recognize the concept of gender mainstreaming as crucial for societal progress, hence its incorporation as a primary goal in every work facet.

Internally, we promote gender equality by ensuring even representation within our project teams and fostering an organizational culture that respects and upholds gender-sensitive communication and gender response. We also ensure balanced participation and equal opportunities for professional growth and leadership, irrespective of gender.

To enhance gender competence among colleagues, we conduct regular engagement sessions, workshops, and training seminars that focus on the nuances of gender roles, equality, and the importance of women's empowerment. By discussing real-world case studies, sharing experiences, and debating solutions, we foster a supportive environment that encourages gender competence.

Our successful approach to periodic awareness programs has facilitated improved knowledge and consciousness of gender issues within our teams. Experiential learning, effective communication strategies, and gender-inclusive language drills are methods we have deployed to spread gender awareness, with compelling results.

6. CONCLUSION

Reflecting on our journey, the Tajik Rural Unity project has not only made significant strides in championing gender equality but has also fostered an environment that encourages continued development in this domain. We have advocated for women's increased involvement in economic activities, fought gender-based biases, and integrated gender equality perspectives in policy and practical matters.

Our project has been a prominent force advocating for equality, fostering parity where there was disparity, igniting hope where there was despair, and weaving a narrative of empowerment and development. This isn't merely an initiative but a stride towards transforming the landscape of rural Tajikistan, impacting countless lives and etching an imprint of lasting change.

We are incredibly grateful for the opportunity to participate in the GIZ Gender Awards 2024. This platform not only recognizes our efforts but also acts as a beacon, inspiring us and numerous others to continue the mission for gender equality. With this shared vision and collective effort, we stride forward, fulfilling our shared dream of a gender-equal world, one step at a time.