

Project Overview: achievements and next steps

A unique methodology

Background

The Women's Wealth and Influence (WW&I) project funded by the UK Government was implemented by Save the Children (SC) in Tajikistan from January 2012 until April 2016. The project focused on establishing and supporting Women's Groups in the regions of Khatlon in South Tajikistan and in selected districts near the capital, Dushanbe. Women were mobilized by SC coaches, forming groups to collect and share "indifferent" sums of money. Some 4,200 groups were formed in 17 districts involving 61,721 women from rural areas. The project's aim was to increase the wealth and influence of women and to enable them to more actively participate in decision-making processes at both at home and in public, to develop greater economic prospects, and increase control over household assets.

The project methodology

SC initiated the WW&I project using a methodology designed around the use of a collection of stories of how women in Tajikistan had positively changed their lives. This storybook outlined our four 'pillars', or operational principles, of SCs approach to women's social and economic empowerment. The four pillars are:

- 1) **Promoting self-reliance of groups through the collection of funds from group members. The funds collected are referred to as 'indifferent money'**, i.e., non-essential money that has no value in the household. SC does not provide any funds to the groups or group activities. The groups manage their savings and loans activities solely based on women's own contributions.
- 2) **Promoting the 'You decide' principle.** SC does not prescribe how the women should run the group and what activities they should give priority to.
- 3) **Promoting transparency and accountability,** embodied in the concept that 'money likes to be counted'. It is as much a reinforcement of their own sense of empowerment as it is a means to ensure transparent and accountable handling of the group funds, savings and loans.
- 4) **Using testimonials as a powerful tool** for motivating women's groups and individuals. Each woman should be able to find herself in a story, and be able to relate to the experiences of other women creating solidarity amongst women.

SC staff (project coaches) engaged and mobilized women using this methodology. Over the course of the project, two more pillars have been identified.

These are:

- 5) **Improving women's knowledge about women's rights** and encouraging them to claim these for themselves and their daughters
- 6) **Enabling women's groups and individual women to partner with and access existing support** services and training opportunities for improved livelihood security and personal welfare.

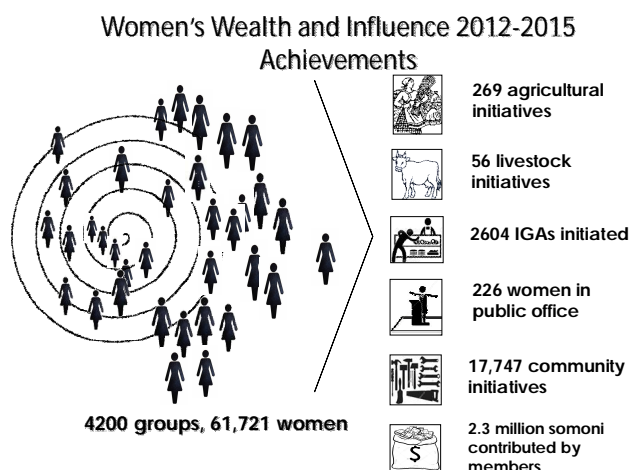
WWI's theory of change for women's social and economic empowerment centres upon five types of activity which incorporate the methodology's key pillars: 1) developing a culture of savings, 2) facilitating informed decision-making and actions 3) facilitating better income-generating options 4) emphasizing work with younger women and 5) working with men to mitigate the 'double standard' impression about women's capabilities and roles in and outside the home.

Key results

From 2012 to 2015 61,271 women in 17 districts of Tajikistan have formed over 4200 groups of women, who collected and mobilized 2, 285,401 somoni (approximately £210,000) for community works projects, personal emergency relief funds, education expenses, and income generating activities.

The money collected far exceeded expectations and led to women's conviction of having resources in a state of poverty. The money collected was used for different activities including 17 747 community initiatives through which women used their funds to leverage improvements in their communities such as building schools or health centres.

We've seen women's confidence and aspirations for themselves and their daughters increase. At the start of the project the most common aspiration women had for their daughter was marriage. By the end of the project, a significant number had changed their opinion and prioritised education instead.



Women's Wealth and Influence

Key achievements – implications for Tajik women and their families

- The programme has provided a platform for women to initiate and influence decision making at the community levels to bring about needed change in their communities;
- The programme has effectively encouraged women to pursue local public office;
- Women's confidence and aspirations for themselves and their daughters have increased;
- The programme has prompted the initiation of community projects/collective activities such as installing village water pumps, building health centres, setting up sewing workshops, cleaning gardens, farming, road repairs, bridge construction, and arranging funerals and weddings;
- Some women have used group funds to start new income generating activities;
- Group savings were accessed in times of need and empowered women in emergency situations and other unforeseen events

Using lessons learnt

The collective reviews and assessments over the life of the programme generated valuable insights, identifying both positive outcomes and remaining challenges. These evidence-based findings were pivotal for reinforcing successful elements and revising other aspects of the project as we embark on a second phase of the project. The following table summarises lessons learned and how they will be used in future to support women's empowerment in Tajikistan.



Lessons Learnt	Design Adaptation
Collective action by groups may impede (basic) wealth creation at the household level.	Coaching will deliver information and guidance on ways women can protect and enhance their income security and wider economic opportunity. Coaches will facilitate women's informed decision making around how group funds are employed.
Women are filling gaps in service provision (e.g. infrastructure maintenance) and not holding local authorities and local service providers accountable.	The groups will receive more intensive coaching on group management, leadership accountability and transparency as well as having access to improved information on existing support and training opportunities through newly established district information platforms
While women in the groups are increasingly confident, men's and the wider communities' attitudes towards women and inequitable gender relations have not changed.	We will start reaching out to men and the wider community in order to promote a more gender equitable social environment.
Inter-generational inequalities persist with highly restricted scope for younger women to make decisions.	Tailored coaching and new testimonials will promote a situation where women of all ages have an equal voice and equal opportunities within the groups and in everyday life.
The project has demonstrated the potential to create positive child wellbeing outcomes, particularly around girls' education and women's aspirations for their daughters' and grand-daughters' future.	The project will develop a clear strategy for tapping into the existing potential and opportunities in order to maximize the project's positive impact on children, particularly girls who tend to have very restricted life chances compared to boys.

In the project's next phase, group coaching will be combined with gender transformative behaviour change activities in communities. The development of information platforms will improve women's access to existing support and training opportunities. The project will continue to use a "storybook" of personal testimonies to unify women's experiences and reflect on universal messages of gender empowerment. In this way, SC aims to increase women's income and/or assets; and promote greater gender equality in Tajikistan. These achievements will help to realise our overall goal to reduce poverty, empower women and improve child wellbeing in Tajikistan.