

Annex: Case study I

Headline	
GIVING VOICE TO PEOPLE AND CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN TAJIKISTAN	
Domains of change	
Please mark each domain that is significantly covered within the case study. At least one box should be marked, and as many as appropriate. You should only mark a box if there is reported change, not if it is only expected in the future.	
Changes in the lives of people facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability, and/or the realisation of their rights	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in laws, policies and practices that affect people's rights	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in the capacity of organisations and communities to support people's rights;	X
Changes in partnerships and collaborations that support people's rights;	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in the participation of groups facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability in their own development	X
Changes in local leadership and ownership of development and humanitarian work.	X
Basic Information	
Name of Danish CSO	Mission East – Emergency and Development (MEED)
Name of Southern partner(s)	Nuri Umed
Year of submission	2022
Name of project / programme / approach	<i>“Participatory rehabilitation and support of disabled and marginalized groups and development of civil society organizations and WASH and disaster preparedness”</i>
Project / programme period	2022 – 2025
Country	Tajikistan (Sughd region)
Constituency	<p>People/Children with Disabilities, represented by the members of the Community Based Rehabilitation Network in Panjakent, Sughd region, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSOs working with People/Children with Disabilities • Marginalised families with People/Children with Disabilities and their parents and carers • Parent Support Groups and Associations of Parents • District authorities and community representatives of targeted areas • Private sector representatives
Summary	<p>This case-study serves to showcase the success of the <i>Community-Based Rehabilitation Network</i> in Panjakent in bringing together different stakeholders to raise awareness of disability needs and rights in Tajikistan, functioning as an advocacy platform. The establishment of the network was facilitated by MEED's local partner, Nuri Umed in 2021, and MEED's support continued in 2022 under the SPA country engagement.</p>

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	<p>The network consists of representatives of local government, CSOs, Parent Support Groups, as well as Associations of Parents and has 26 members in total. Through awareness raising activities, lobbying and evidence-based advocacy, the network works to de-stigmatise People/Children with Disabilities and promote their rights, whereby the network gives voice to People/Children with Disabilities through their representatives.</p> <p>In 2022, the initiative was replicated by MEED's other SPA partner, Zamzam, who took initiative to establish a similar network in Muminabad, Khatlon region.</p>
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Context

The civil society context in Tajikistan remains fragile and sensitive, with many administrative, political, and cultural challenges to overcome to develop dynamic and representative civil society entities capable of informing policy and holding duty bearers to account. Weak civil society and stigma also mean that attention to disability issues and related services have not been Tajik government priority, compounded by many competing development and economic priorities. Health, nutrition, psychosocial and legal services are not sufficiently accessible or targeted towards addressing the needs and rights of People/Children with Disabilities and adolescents. The World Health Organization estimates that only a minority of the more than 160,000 people living with various forms of disability in Tajikistan are benefitting from state support. This also demonstrates the huge disability data gap that exists in Tajikistan, which is crucial for inclusive policy development by local, regional, and national government departments.

Objectives

Reflecting outcome 2 of the Tajikistan country engagement's Theory of Change (ToC), MEED supports vulnerable people and children with disabilities in rural communities and their representative civil society actors in exercising their rights and entitlements. This is accomplished through increased disability rights awareness, strengthened capacity for advocacy and networking, and through improved and sustainable access to health and protection services such as community-based rehabilitation. The *Community-Based Rehabilitation Network* of Panjakent was established in 2021 facilitated by MEED's local partner, Nuri Umed, under a CISU funded project and has 26 members representing different disability stakeholders in Sughd region. The members include government representatives from Panjakent *Executive Authority, Social Protection Department, Social Insurance and Pension Department, Social Assistance Home Units, Department of Education, Adult Training & Rehabilitation Centre officials, and Department of Primary Care Aids*, as well as lawyers, mass media, and local organizations working with disabilities. The network meets every three months to discuss activities and priorities, to decide on the use of collected funds collected by individual members and to involve local private sector in network activities to fund and support different events for children with disabilities.

In 2022, MEED supported this network, aiming at further strengthening their capacity and success in impacting laws, policies, and practices facilitating the realization of the rights of People/Children with Disabilities to allow positive changes in the lives of this target group. Furthermore, to inspire and promote replication elsewhere, in 2022 MEED encouraged the local partner and the network to share experiences with authorities and civil society in other regions, including Khatlon where the SPA country engagement is also implemented.

Change

The changes realized in 2022 falls within several different change domains. The Community-Based Rehabilitation Network in Panjakent has helped to build the capacity of local CSOs and grassroots groups such as *Parents Support Groups* and *Associations of Parents* as well as government authorities, especially those in the social protection sector. The capacity building involves the strengthening of skills and procedures for civil society to actively monitor and evaluate social service provisions for children with disabilities, feeding into evidence for advocacy. This has enabled **‘changes in the capacity of organisations and communities to support people’s rights’**, and through this empowerment being instrumental for **‘changes in local leadership and ownership of development and humanitarian work’**.

Additionally, membership of the network in Panjakent has changed the mindset and motivation of Parent Support Groups by giving them a platform to voice their needs and challenges. This has been the most important change as it has helped “*the parents to realize for the first time that they are not alone and together they can improve the situation of their children and families by standing up for their rights*” (CISU External Evaluation 2021). Notably, this has given them, the **‘people facing poverty, marginalization and vulnerability’** the opportunity to **‘participate in their own development’** and to fulfil their rights.

Decisions taken in the network’s *Disability & Inclusion Stakeholder Coordination* meetings and actions spearheaded by its members within fundraising and lobbying, enabled individual People/Children with disabilities to access certain services and opportunities, including:

- Access and acceptance of children with special needs into secondary, home-based and specialized schools and colleges;
- Physiotherapy free of charge in sanatorium and spa institutions;
- Free/sponsored hospitalization and hospital treatments;
- Access to essential surgical treatment and orthopaedic support devices;
- Support for obtaining identity documents and documentation to claim available entitlements, state disability pensions etc.;
- Involvement in art exhibitions, craft clubs and vocational trainings.

However, while these important changes could be argued to have resulted in **‘changes in the lives of people facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability, and/or the realisation of their rights’**, monitoring such spill-over effects of the support to the network is outside the scope of MEED’s work, why evidence cannot be provided.

Another key achievement of the Community-Based Rehabilitation Network has been the facilitation of cross-learning events and study visits, promoting knowledge transfer, exchange of best practices and lessons learnt between the different actors engaged in the sector in different areas of the country. Local organisations (including MEED partner Zamzam) and representatives of local authorities from six districts of Khatlon region were taken to Panjakent, Sughd region to participate in network meetings and to learn from the experiences of local partner Nuri Umed on the Community-Based Rehabilitation model and rights-based disability and inclusion approaches. After the study visit, these participants have been observed to be much more engaged and active in working on disability and inclusion issues in their region (Khatlon). Following this event, local partner Zamzam took initiative to replicate the approach and establish a Community-Based Rehabilitation Network in Muminabad, Khatlon region.

Contribution

In 2022, MEED continued its efforts from the previous year to link the regional network with national level stakeholders. MEED plays the key role of facilitator and changemaker, helping to strengthen the capacity of the CSO network members to advocate on key policies and approaches on inclusion and safeguarding. By supporting the network and its members, MEED has been instrumental in building CSO capacity to participate in and engage with district and regional stakeholders and networks in raising awareness of disability rights and needs. Through these efforts, MEED has given grassroots groups working on disability a platform for congregation and sharing of experiences and challenges, using those in evidence-based advocacy.

As the 2021 external evaluation of the CISU-funded project pointed out, *“MEED’s long-term partner, Nuri Umed, recognizes the immense capacity building support they have received from MEED over the years. They have been empowered to become trainers themselves to build the capacities of local partners and service providers such as medical staff and government personnel. They are able to organize and lead community projects and rehabilitation centres. They have become known in their region and beyond, which helps attract (local) donors and clients (parents) for their rehabilitation centres.”* Most significantly, support provided by MEED to Nuri Umed in running the Community-Based Rehabilitation Network in Panjakent has helped to boost their leadership role in advancing disability rights in the region and for them in turn, to support the participation of emerging informal civil society groups such as Associations of Parents and Parents Support Groups in the network, giving them the space and opportunity to hold duty-bearers/government authorities accountable for the provision of basic services and the fulfilment of the essential rights and entitlements of People/Children with Disabilities.

Lessons

- Exit strategies should be developed with clear plans for phasing out the support and handing it over to the local stakeholders and community actors who form the Community-Based Rehabilitation Network. This could also include plans for “a next step” for the Network, expanding it to become nation-wide and re-direct focus to e.g. become even more advocacy oriented.
- Changes in laws, policies and practices, affecting the rights, entitlement and services provided to People/Children with disabilities requires strategic analysis, efforts and planning. As the network mature, trainings for the members of the Community-Based Rehabilitation Network should hence be conducted on advocacy strategies targeting specific programmes or laws.
- Regular awareness raising on disability and inclusion issues among community and private sector members needs to be conducted for promotion of disability rights.
- Involvement of more private sector representatives in the Community-Based Rehabilitation Network should be encouraged and more sustained support should be provided to newly established Parents Support Groups and Associations of Parents.
- There is a need to officially establish the Community-Based Rehabilitation Network and the Coordination Council under the existing local government structure, and to follow up more stringently with government authorities for greater sustainability.

Evidence

The 2021 external evaluation of the CISU-funded project concludes: *“Looking at the good results that have been achieved despite the limited time, one can see that the approach of this project works and MEED contributes to a sustainable change towards an inclusive society. As far as this could be assessed, Nuri Umed has additional intrinsic qualities that make it worthwhile to consider continuing the cooperation.”* With the ending of the CISU-funded project in 2021 and the starting up of the SPA-funded project in 2022, MEED’s cooperation with Nuri Umed on supporting the Community-Based Rehabilitation Network in Panjakent was sustained and expanded.

This priority of MEED is based on the assessment that the initiative provides very good future opportunities for broader lobbying to reach and influence the government also at higher political levels, advocating for the rights of People/Children with Disabilities. The formation of the cross-sectional and multi-stakeholder network in Panjakent has already helped to involve the government in advocacy and to discuss disability issues with them: *“Coordination meetings with the government in previous projects did not really work, but in this project the Community-Based Rehabilitation group was created and now we are getting stronger, the government hears us, it starts to work.”* (Project partner staff, CISU external evaluation 2021).

Documenting how awareness creation, de-stigmatisation, lobbying, and advocacy directly leads to specific changes in laws, policies, practices, and through that in lives, is complex, particularly at an early stage when efforts are not embedded in strategic planning. However, below is provided two examples of how individual initiatives by the network can drive action:

Example 1:

As a result of participation in the Community-Based Rehabilitation Network’s meetings, one of the network members, a local entrepreneur – Manager of "Rakhsh taxi" in Panjakent city, decided to fund and organize a "Best Artist" competition. To this end, the *Rakhshon Rehabilitation Centre* organized an inclusive event with the participation of 19 Children with Disabilities and 11 children without disability. At the event, the children displayed their special artistic skills and each participant received a certificate of merit and a gift. After meeting the participants, another entrepreneur was inspired to organize such events on a regular basis. These individual acts of philanthropy by the network members have enabled the space for creative interaction to be created both for children with and without disabilities, creating greater understanding and empathy for the challenges faced by children with disabilities in Tajikistan.

Example 2:

Co-funded by the SPA and a concurrently running EU grant, MEED and its CSO partners marked the International Day of People with Disability in November-December 2022 with great fanfare through a week-long series of awareness-raising as well as artistic and cultural events. These events involved the participation of more than 100 People/Children with Disabilities and their parents, non-disabled children from kindergartens and schools, government institutions, mass media, local entrepreneurs, the crew from a regional puppet theatre, and other technical partners. The events were hosted in Panjakent by Nuri Umed, the Community-Based Rehabilitation Network, and local district authorities.

Spread over a total of eight districts, this series of events helped to raise awareness in schools on the rights and attributes of people with disabilities with the title “We are all equal”. More than 2,500 students and 200 teachers across different locations were engaged. The artistic and

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cultural events brought about 600 people together to observe the International Day of People with Disability and gave the opportunity to Children with Disabilities to mingle with non-disabled children from local kindergartens and schools. Activities included poetry recital, speeches by parents of Children with Disabilities, drawing and painting, puppet shows, singing and dancing etc. The events led the People/Children with Disabilities and their families to hope that they were no longer marginalized and shunned by mainstream Tajik society and that people were ready to accept them and give them their due place in society. Baidulloeva Hilola, head of a Parent Support Group from Panjakent stated, *“Today, we mothers are very happy to be here and participating in this event, our children will never feel alone, and they are also very happy”*. These strengthened advocacy and awareness-raising activities and the subsequent improvements in social inclusion for People/Children with disabilities can be directly be attributed to the support provided under the SPA country engagement, to the successful running of the Community-Based Rehabilitation Network and to the local CSO partners facilitating this network and its activities.



Title: Music and dancing by all participants, including Children with Disabilities, at the events organized to mark the International Day of People with Disability in Panjakent, November 2022.

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Title: Singing by Children with Disabilities at the events organized to mark the International Day of People with Disability in Panjaket, November 2022.



Title: Handmade items by People/Children with Disabilities at the events organized to mark the International Day of People with Disability in Panjaket, November 2022.