

Case study II - Afghanistan

Headline	
EMPOWERING LOCAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH BUILDING (CLIMATE) RESILIENCE AND IMPROVED FOOD AND LIVELIHOOD SECURITY	
Domains of change	
<p><i>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.</i></p>	
Changes in the lives of people facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability, and/or the realisation of their rights	x
Changes in laws, policies , and practices that affect people's rights	
Changes in the capacity of organisations and communities to support people's rights;	
Changes in partnerships and collaborations that support people's rights;	
Changes in the participation of groups facing poverty, marginalisation, or vulnerability in their own development	
Changes in local leadership and ownership of development and humanitarian work.	
Basic Information	
Name of Danish CSO	Mission East – Emergency and Development (MEED) – Afghanistan
Name of Southern partner(s)	ODSAD, AWARSA, CWO
Year of submission	2022
Name of project / programme / approach	<i>Emergency humanitarian assistance, resilience building to natural crises and technical support to build local capacities in crisis affected communities of Takhar and Badakhshan provinces of Afghanistan</i>
Project / programme period	January 2022 - December 2025. The intervention is planned to continue throughout the SPA period, with a new beneficiary group every year.
Country	Afghanistan (North-east): Takhar, and Badakhshan provinces
Constituency	The most vulnerable population groups in the local communities (people with disabilities, pregnant and lactating women, elders, single mother headed households, children headed households)
Summary (1000 characters only, including spaces)	This intervention supported 2,893 rural families in Afghanistan facing severe food insecurity due to protracted drought conditions. The positive change in their lives can be demonstrated through the increase in their income levels and nutrition scores. Through the provision of technical support and high-quality material and organic off-farm inputs, MEED has helped to increase household resilience against drought, improve food production and consumption and diversify available livelihood options. In addition to an increased nutrition score, the families were able to sell the surplus of their agricultural produce, thereby increasing incomes and improving livelihood security. This positive result has been achieved largely thanks to the water system structures (rainwater harvesting system, drip irrigation, irrigation canal rehabilitation) built to increase water storage and availability and the

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	greenhouses established, enabling the cultivation of vegetables all year long.
Contexts	
<p>In Badakhshan and Takhar provinces in Afghanistan a total of 868,395 people (60%) and 447,959 people (40%), respectively, are food insecure (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Phase 3). In both provinces the exposure to floods and drought remains among the highest in the country. These two interrelated stressors (food insecurity and natural disaster frequency) put both regions under the highest fragility scores (category 1) of the last Integrated Context Analysis from the World Food Programme. These different factors have increased the vulnerability of local communities as further verified by the MEED's last vulnerability assessment. The impact on crop production, livestock, local ecosystems, agriculture, and households' coping capacities are extremely negative: 79.5% of the informants had a food consumption score < 35; 95.3% fall back to wage labour as main source of income for their family; and 63% use more than one coping mechanism to survive. Within this vulnerable context, MEED selected 24 villages out of 6 districts that were among the poorest, with many families struggling to meet their basic needs, including access to nutritious food, livelihood opportunities, and clean drinking water.</p>	
Objectives	
<p>In line with outcome 2 of the Afghanistan Theory of Change, the main objective of this intervention was to break the cycle of chronic crisis and poverty for these vulnerable, rural communities, building household resilience to recurring external shocks, and ensuring their exit from an emergency 'crisis' situation towards longer-term self-reliance. To improve household food and livelihood security, the intervention introduced seed diversification, green technology and improved environmentally-friendly and climate-adaptive water and irrigation systems to diversify and increase agricultural production adapted to increasingly unstable and harsh climatic conditions. This further generated new/alternative livelihood opportunities to increase incomes, in respect of the natural environment and helped to build the climate resilience of crisis-affected communities.</p> <p>The intervention targeted the most vulnerable families in the 24 remote rural communities, selected based on vulnerability criteria. These gave priority to pregnant and lactating women, people with disabilities, single mother or child headed households, and took household incomes and poverty index into account.</p> <p>The main activities of the intervention included training on organic farming techniques and greenhouse technology as well as the provision/rehabilitation of irrigation canals, drip irrigation systems and the introduction of water harvesting. This was supplemented by delivery of farm inputs, including organic fertilisers and pesticides, wheat seeds and potato seedlings, and livestock for animal rearing.</p>	
Change	
<p>The most significant change resulting from this intervention supports the domain of change related to <i>'changes in the lives of people facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability and/or the realization of their rights'</i>. The intervention changed the lives of 2,893 families (20,251 individuals) with whom MEED worked as they were supported to pull themselves out of an emergency food insecure situation towards a more resilient farming modality feeding their families and generating additional income. Before this intervention, people's lives were characterized by vulnerability, hunger, lack of infrastructure, agricultural inputs and techniques and diversified economic opportunities. The local communities were heavily reliant on subsistence farming, which was characterized by low productivity, limited access to markets, and a lack of modern agricultural techniques. The monitoring survey result (cf. evidence chapter) that</p>	

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has been conducted at the end of 2022 documented a consistent improvement in household incomes due to the selling of their agricultural produce and a consistent increase in the nutrition score. Through the intervention, beneficiaries have been able to gain valuable knowledge and skills on how to grow the vegetables all year round, using greenhouse technologies and applying organic farming approaches, including organic fertilisers and pesticides. The beneficiaries acquired valuable knowledge on how to manage the water in an efficient cost-effective modality applicable to the drought affected areas where they are living. The repair and maintenance of irrigation canals, the rain harvesting systems and drip irrigation technology provided have made a huge difference in the final harvests and in the preservation of the agricultural lands. As a result, households had gathered access to fresh products, providing them with a more nutritious and diversified diet enhancing their overall well-being. Additionally, many households have been able to generate income by selling surplus of potatoes, vegetables, and processed products (pickled and dried vegetables) contributing to the economic sustainability of their family. The above made a tangible difference in the lives of targeted beneficiaries, improving their quality of life and enhancing the overall resilience of the community.

The intervention was built with the communities, who were supported to become change agents of their own development. The results of the intervention are thus achieved in close collaboration between MEED, partners and beneficiaries through the following channels: **A)** highly consultative approach. **B)** capacity building measures and trainings. **C)** Focus Group Discussions with Community Development Councils and elders. This has served to explore existing best practices and local knowledge, improve beneficiary knowledge of the intervention, and enhance beneficiary contribution, participation and ownership. Focus Group Discussions are conducted with both men and women's groups to understand their prospects and ideas. **D)** Key informant interviews from communities and other stakeholders including NGOs, religious leaders and relevant institutions, to identify the impact of climate change, to learn how people are willing to contribute and what can hinder community participation (especially for women), as well as to explore inter/intra community issues and power dynamics. **E)** Use of different community participation and assessment tools, such as Brainstorming, Hazard Mapping, Resource Mapping, and Historical Timeline. These efforts encouraging project stakeholder participation are likely to have increased ownership of the intervention and identified more durable solutions based on 'indigenous' knowledge and reflecting environmental relevance and cultural appropriateness.

Contribution

The intervention was implemented through local partners, supplemented by direct MEED implementation. The local partners are maturing NGOs that during 2022 didn't have the capacity (staff, operation and office coverage) to serve all the families targeted by the intervention. Of the 2,893 families supported under this intervention, the local partners reached 491 families. During this process, MEED supervised and supported the partners in delivering quality results and reinforced all along the process their project cycle management capacities, finance procedures and reporting as well as complaint mechanism and safeguarding policies. MEED guided the local partners in the above described participatory processes, took part in analysis of needs assessment and played a role of facilitator in realising the solutions and ideas proposed by the local communities.

In the interaction with communities, MEED and local partners provided comprehensive technical support through the trainings and monitoring visits, contributing to the quality of the production of to each beneficiary. Finally, MEED and local partners worked to strengthen the

skills of beneficiaries in the management of their economic activities, enabling beneficiaries to continue the activities independently in the long term.

Lessons

The most important lessons learned from implementing this project include:

- The challenge of ensuring the sustainability and scalability of the project outcomes and impacts beyond the project duration sits in building the technical capacities but equally in linking the farmers with existing or potential markets and economic opportunities, and advocating for their rights and interests at different levels. Food processing activities should hence be linked with a specific market opportunity. The aim will be to create small business diversified activities from the agricultural production.
- The necessity of integrating the environmental protection, disaster risk reduction, and conflict sensitivity into the project design and implementation to ensure that the project does not cause any harm or discrimination to any group or individual, and that it contributes to positive social and environmental change. The organic inputs and rain harvesting system allow farmers to preserve the water resources and to protect the health of the soil. A healthy soil not only allows a more fruitful agricultural production but is also more resistant to flooding and landslides. In this sense the programming should be focussed in the medium term in the strengthening of the organic on-farm inputs, a strong landscape and reforestation programming and water management systems.
- The exit strategy is based on the creation of capacity for the farmers as well as in the set up of community structures that can coordinate the sustainable and equitable management of the natural resources at the village level. These structures are equally vital for improving community capacities for disaster response, risk reduction and preparedness and need to be set up in coordination with the local authorities.

Evidence

Food consumption score:

The project has improved the food intake of the target beneficiaries. When comparing the baseline and endline survey findings, the data collected showed that 67% of the beneficiaries reported to have poor food consumption, while during the endline survey, 44% of the target beneficiaries reported poor food consumption. This shows a 23% decrease in the proportion of households with poor food consumption and the score points to an increased dietary diversity and frequency of consumption as a result of the project intervention. The increase in the borderline food consumption score indicates that additional households have improved their conditions from poor to borderline food consumption (+24%). This marked a further improvement in their nutrition status from the baseline situation (borderline with an acceptable food consumption). However, this also indicates that they still face some challenges in meeting completely their nutritional needs. For further information on this, please see the below table.

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Table 1: Baseline: Food Consumption Score	
Poor food consumption	67%
Borderline	23%
Acceptable	10%
	100%

Table 2: Endline: Food Consumption Score	
Poor food consumption	44%
Borderline	47%
Acceptable	9%
	100%

Household Monthly income:

The project has also improved household monthly incomes. When comparing the baseline and endline findings, there is an increase in the maximum and average monthly income of the households by 2500 AFN. The table below shows the changes in the household monthly income in AFN. The results showed in the two tables have been generated by a diversification of the livelihood activities of the target households by providing them with various income generating opportunities. During the baseline survey more than the half of the families' breadwinners rely on daily labour as their main income source. This suggests that they had a low - and unstable - income level vulnerable to economic shocks. The project diversified their income sources by providing them with skills training, agricultural inputs, and market linkages.

Baseline: Household monthly income?	(AFN)
Maximum	7500
Average	3850
Minimum	200

Endline: Household monthly income?	(AFN)
Maximum	10000
Average	5100
Minimum	200

The beneficiaries expressed their gratitude and appreciation to MEED for the support during the Focus groups discussions as well as during the individuals survey at the HH level, as the excerpts below demonstrate:

"Mission East has helped us a lot with both hard and soft support. They gave us tools, seeds, and training on how to use them effectively."

"We learned a lot from this project. We gained technical knowledge on how to grow vegetables, take care of our land and water, practice hygiene, and set up greenhouses and kitchen gardens. For example, now we can grow vegetables in both winter and summer seasons. We also have a skilled person who can maintain the repaired canal and prevent water loss."

"This project has also improved our income. We can sell our surplus vegetables in the market or use them for our family consumption. We also benefited from the cash for work scheme that provided us with work opportunities in our villages. We used the money to buy food, clothes, medicine, and other essentials."

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Photo 1: Greenhouse activity



Photo 2: Greenhouse activity



Photo 3: Irrigation canal



Photo 4: Irrigation canal