



Empowering Communities of Rasht Valley



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Introduction

With its independence in 1991, Tajikistan initiated a number of democratic and economic reforms, which unfortunately got interrupted by the civil war soon after its independence. Development challenges accumulated until an agreement for national reconciliation was signed in 1997, when the international community including the UN agencies revamped their development assistance for the country. To date, many significant contributions were made in improving the condition of people’s lives and to help move the country forward towards development changes. Nonetheless, the society still suffers from a number of development challenges such as insufficient healthcare, weak education system, poor access to drinking water and low agricultural productivity. Lack of employment opportunities encouraged citizens to seek jobs abroad, resulting in a very high level of remittances that constitute almost a half of Tajikistan’s gross domestic product (GDP). Remote rural areas of Tajikistan, having less opportunities for local economic growth such as Rasht Valley are particularly at stake of human insecurity.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been actively assisting Tajikistan since 1994, both contributing to policy reform and offering tangible assistance to our partners and beneficiaries on the ground. In the Rasht Valley more specifically, UNDP provided emergency and recovery assistance soon after peace returned to this region. In 2013, the UN initiated a US\$3.5 million three-year project called **“Empowering Communities with Better Livelihoods and Social Protection”**, which is jointly implemented by five UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, WFP and UNFPA) under UNDP’s lead. The project is funded through the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS), which combines contributions from the Government of Japan, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the abovementioned UN Agencies. The joint project aims to improve economic, food, environmental, health and personal securities of the population of Rasht Valley, to consolidate the region’s development in a sustainable manner under the concept of Human Security that promotes “freedom from fear”, “freedom from want” and “freedom to live in dignity”. In implementing the joint project, the UN Agencies are using the “Delivering as One UN” mechanism by embedding a unique methodology and using the Human Security approach, which advocates for *“protecting the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedom and human fulfillment”*.

One of the advantages of the “Delivering as One UN” mechanism is that it greatly contributes to the improvement of coordination and collaboration of different actors and parties that are involved in tackling human security issues, and it helps create synergies between the parties based on their comparative advantages, and using this advantage in ways that yield best results. This approach also brings together communities and helps them to define their issues and problems collectively, and recognize the needs to address them jointly in a participatory way. Concretely speaking, under this joint project, UNDP assists the process of participatory community development planning known as “District Development Programme” in the five districts of the Rasht Valley, which identifies priority socioeconomic needs ranging from reproductive health to child nutrition. Some of these development needs are then addressed by the participating UN agencies, at the same time promoting gender equality and business development through a variety of capacity development initiatives.

The joint Project will be implemented in the next 2 years until June 2016. So far, the following sub-projects have been implemented or are on-going:

“Rehabilitation of 18 Secondary Schools in five Districts of Rasht Valley through Procurement and Delivery of Construction Materials”

The Joint Project provided a unique opportunity for the UN Agencies, local authorities and communities to consolidate their efforts in tackling human security threats in an effective and efficient manner. Following the District Developments Programmes of each target districts, and taking into consideration priority needs of local communities with regards to improved access to education, UNDP and local authorities identified a number of primary and secondary schools which required rehabilitation. Remarkable fact that target communities have played not only the role of beneficiaries but have been proactively involved in implementation of rehabilitation works, whereby UNDP provided construction materials and the local communities in turn, agreed to make in-kind contribution by performing construction works and rehabilitated their schools through their collective efforts. The local governments committed to conduct a regular monitoring of the rehabilitation works, and provided technical expert advice on a need-to basis. Moreover, WFP, another UN Agency implementing the joint Project, provided 16 metric tons of food commodities to the most vulnerable community members involved in rehabilitation projects.



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“Support to improve income generation activities in agricultural sector in five districts of Rasht valley”

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Support to development of agriculture is one of the priorities included in the District Development Programme of each district. The main focus is made on promoting local employment opportunities, increased agriculture production to ensure food security, and increased opportunities for income generation to improve economic and human security of vulnerable households. UNDP, through involvement of an expert organizations, supported implementation of training courses for 500 farmers and other members of the communities on income-generation activities in agriculture sector. The training courses mainly covered the best practices in agriculture and horticulture, use of demonstration plots to show the best practices in growing different kinds of crops, cattle-breeding, livestock management and production. The courses were specifically tailored to meet the

needs of the local farmers and those involved in production of agricultural products in Rasht Valley. As a result 300 women and 200 men not only had an opportunity to attend the training courses, but in turn shared their experience with their communities, contributing to the wider spread of crucial knowledge.

“Get-Ahead capacity-building courses for female entrepreneurs in five Districts of Rasht Valley”

Building capacities of local entrepreneurs is another priority of UN joint program in Rasht, with women being at the forefront of support measures. The goal is to strengthen the capacities of rural women to contribute to economic and food security of their families and to change their status from ‘dependents’ to ‘bread-winners’ and equal members of the society. With that, UNDP supported a 5-day “Get Ahead” training courses for 300 potential women-entrepreneurs from the five districts. During the courses the participants were introduced to the basics of business planning, gender equality, enterprise life cycle, SWOT-analysis, marketing principles, product promotion, business relations, and pricing approaches – all important knowledge and skills required for start-up entrepreneurs and for development and expansion of private enterprises in the Valley. In order to build a local institutional capacity and knowledge base, the ToT trainings were held for 10 women (2 from each district), who in turn conducted entrepreneurship training courses for 300 women throughout the five districts of the Valley. To the date already three female trainees who attended the courses applied for business development grants and managed to open their own business. Capacity development efforts will be continued to support this positive shifts in the female entrepreneurship in Rasht Valley.



I had a dream.....

I had a dream to have my own business since my childhood, but I did not know where to go and whom to speak”, said Ms. Malohat Donaeva, resident of Tavildara district. “Our district is located far from Dushanbe and our closest center is Rasht which is almost 100km away. Now, after attending the entrepreneurship training courses supported by the UN, I got familiar with the concept of starting and running a successful business. I am planning to open my own culinary shop in my district so that our people do not have to travel 3-4 hours one-way for a cake when they celebrate their birthdays and other occasions. I am very thankful to the UN for helping me to achieve my longtime dream”.

I am a full-time business-person.....

This year is one of the successful years in my life thanks to the UN”, said Ms. Gulniso Odilova, resident of Rasht town. “After participating in the training courses organized by the UN, I gained courage to rent a space at the local market and opened my own store. Using the business plan I developed, I secured a loan from a local bank and in three months I was able to pay off the loan and I even managed to increase my working capital threefold. Now I am a full-time business-person, and the knowledge I received from the training courses was very



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United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women



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“Establishment of Demo-Gardens in Nurabad and Tajikabad Districts”

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For the past several years, the Government of Tajikistan has adopted a number of strategic papers and legislative frameworks to support the agriculture sector, where the revival and restoration of the existing fruit and non-fruit gardens and organization of new gardens throughout the country were deemed to be the priority. One of such documents is the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan for the period to 2015, which specifically addresses the issue of deforestation and its ramifications to food security, stressing them out as one of the top priorities requiring an immediate action. However, despite the many efforts, the lack of funds to translate the legal documents and legislative frameworks into actions often becomes an obstacle. In order to support the greater objectives and goals of the strategic documents, and to address the issues related to economic, food, and environmental securities of the target population, the United Nations Development Programme, within its

“Empowering Communities with Better Livelihoods and Social Protection” project supported the establishment of two demonstration gardens, one in Nurabad and one in Tajikabad districts. The premise of this activity is based on the assumption that the new kind of trees planted in the demo-gardens will serve as milestones for reviving the fruit-tree base in the two pilot districts, and the achievements and successes of this activity will be replicated elsewhere throughout the Rasht Valley in the second and third years of the project. Also, the demo-gardens ensure that at least 20 women (10 from each district) from vulnerable households find employment opportunities for the next 3 to 5 years by working on the fields and looking after the tree and, at the same time, using the land to cultivate other vegetables and crops for their own needs, thus enriching their ‘family food baskets’ and selling the excess products at the local markets.



“Construction of Water Supply Lines through Procurement and Delivery of Construction Materials in Five Districts of Rasht Valley”



One of the biggest challenges the people of Rasht Valley face is the lack of access to drinking and irrigation water. As majority of population in the Valley live in high mountainous areas, access to water becomes a major problem for farmers especially during the cultivation season. Lack of irrigation water directly affects people’s livelihoods as they mostly depend on growing agricultural crops and products. Realizing this major issue, and taking into account the fact that the problem has been recognized as one of the priorities in the District Development Programmes of five districts, UNDP supported procurement and delivery of water pipes and other materials for construction and rehabilitation of dilapidated drinking and irrigation water structures throughout the five districts. As a result about 8,000 meters of water pipes for drinking and irrigation water supply structures were provided. It is expected that some 135ha of irrigation fields, and 16,000 residents or more than 3,000 households from 5 villages throughout the Valley receive access to drinking and irrigation water. This activity directly addresses the human security threat, as it improves the economic,

health and personal securities of target population.

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