



EVALUATION BRIEF

UN WOMEN, FAO, IFAD, WFP RURAL WOMEN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT JOINT PROGRAMME IN KYRGYZSTAN

Context

One in three rural women in Kyrgyzstan lives below the poverty line. Poverty often leads to food insecurity because poor households lack the resources required to access enough nutritious food to live a healthy active life. Poor households have to spend a high share of their expenditure on food, and they are likely to be more vulnerable to shocks, such as high food prices, loss of employment, and natural disasters. Rural households are more likely to be food insecure than urban ones.



The Kyrgyzstan Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women supports poor rural women to increase income, improve livelihoods and food security through enhanced agricultural productivity, to build leadership skills to demand their rights on local and national levels, as well as promotes a more gender responsive policy environment in the country. The evaluation assessed the programme progress and performance from the point of view of relevance, effectiveness, organizational efficiency and sustainability using transparent and participatory process.

Key Evaluation Conclusions

1. **Relevance:** Complementarity of mandates of partner UN agencies involved in the joint delivery of the programme and explicit focus on engaging women in income generating activities makes the Joint Programme highly relevant to national strategic priorities and needs of rural women in Kyrgyzstan.
2. **Effectiveness:** Programme effectiveness in achieving better livelihoods, increased income, food security and leadership role of participating women is facilitated by promotion of solidarity economic models like self-help groups and group economic initiatives, providing access to training and interest-free commodity and cash loans, as well as recruiting participants who are eager and able to allocate a lot of time and effort to work. The negative side of this programme model is that most vulnerable women are not able to join the programme, and participating women lose their leisure time which is disempowering. The latter unintended negative effect is mitigated by the use of Gender Action Learning System instruments that promote more equal distribution of domestic tasks between women and men.

3. **Sustainability:** The Joint Programme established a number of mechanisms to ensure sustainability of its results, including creation of village associations of Self-Help Groups and regional producer organizations. But these mechanisms are not yet fully sustainable themselves. Explicit exit strategy could enhance sustainability of the Joint Programme results.
4. **Joint Delivery:** Relying on shared processes increases efficiency of joint delivery. Combining FAO, WFP and IFAD expertise on building capacity of individual farmers with the UN Women expertise with normative and community work enables the JP RWEE to promote both individual capacities of rural women and a more favorable social context for them. In Kyrgyzstan this multilevel approach is used only by the Joint Programme and differentiates it from the government and USAID projects that were also contributing to economic empowerment of rural women in 2014-2018. Joint delivery created synergies by combining activities based on the expertise of separate agencies leading to better results for rural women.
5. **Efficiency:** Relying on common processes increases efficiency of teamwork. The joint programme could benefit if the programme consistently followed this approach in the next stages of implementation.



"Frankly speaking, I do not understand why apparently only men can repair cell phones? I think it does not matter if you are a man or a woman; as long as you have the right skills and equipment, you can repair anything," says Zhipariza Nurlanbek kyzy, 17 years-old, Kara-Tal Village, Naryn Province. Photo: Altyn Kapalova for UN Women Kyrgyzstan

Recommendations

1. For the next stage of the Joint Programme implementation the partner UN agencies shall use the operational model that enhances all aspects of rural women economic empowerment as defined by the *Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index*.
2. In the second phase of the Joint Programme *Gender Action Learning System* instruments shall be applied in the second cohort of villages to mitigate the negative impact of the programme on women leisure time.
3. Under the second phase the Joint Programme shall continue supporting four producer organizations until they are fully self-sustainable.
4. Partner UN agencies shall consider developing and testing the strategy for replication of women economic empowerment model in the villages and rural municipalities where the Joint Programme has already worked.

How rural women assess the Joint Programme?

Evaluation team reached **100** rural women who participated in the Kyrgyzstan Joint Programme. All of them thought that the programme led to **very useful** changes in their lives. (96% of women assessed usefulness of changes as 10 on a scale of 0 to 10.)

“In the past we did not know how to earn money for the family. We were taking loans and repaying them was difficult. UN project proved to be very helpful for us. We went through many trainings on how to grow vegetables, how to sell them, how to make money and spend them. The project has taught us that we should try hard.

We started to consult with family members. We started to share household duties. We started to grow tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots, beets, onions. We got a good harvest. We sold part of it, processed another part by making preserves and drying to use later for household consumption. I used the revenue to buy an automatic washer. I also bought new kitchen ware and a kettle. I bought agricultural instruments: spades, hoes, a cap for myself.

As a group we took an interest-free loan to start a production facility. Our group started making dumplings, selling them to people in the village and at a grocery store in At-Bashy. We used the revenue to buy a freezer. We bought materials to repair our production facility.



Gulzada amazed everybody when she came to the UN Women training with her “one-month-old baby in her arms.” Kyzyl-Tuu Village, Naryn Province. Photo: Kina Yusupova for UN Women Kyrgyzstan

I don't worry anymore about money. I work on my land, sell produce, and I always have money.

We started with small things and now set big goals to ourselves. We really need UN programmes. They should continue the project so that many other rural women can improve their lives. Due to this programme in the village we now have dumplings facility, sewing facility, handicraft group, kurut (cheese) facility. We wish that this project would never stop. Thanks!”