

Science IMPACTS



The Challenge:

Fighting poverty is a constant struggle for rural communities in resource-scarce remote parts of Afghanistan, with little support and skills particularly for the women. Years of conflict has made it even harder to find a stable source of income.

Dairy Goat Management Leads to Lasting Gains for Afghan Women

An ordinary goat distribution and rearing project has provided extraordinary benefits to some of the poorest and most vulnerable women, and wider communities in Afghanistan, and continues to multiply its beneficiaries.

For decades, Afghanistan has been grappling with poverty. Rural women, though largely invisible, are at the forefront of this war with poverty. In remote communities, goat rearing is a major source of livelihood, particularly for the women. Most women in rural areas have some level of experience with goat rearing, even if they do not own one.

However, production of goats and products have been severely constrained by a range of factors, including drought, feed scarcity and limited or no access to technical expertise, made worse by years of conflict.



RESEARCH
PROGRAM ON
Dryland Systems

Building Resilient Livelihoods

To enhance the benefits of dairy goat rearing, which is a common source of income for poor families in rural Afghanistan, a project was implemented by the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) and ICARDA, and funded by the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD). Started in 2010, this project was primarily geared to provide poor rural households, especially women, with the skills, knowledge, and initial inputs to engage in profitable dairy goat production – to improve their livelihoods, nutrition, and income.

The initiative aimed to expand the number of Afghan women who have access to dairy goats, specifically targeting three categories of women: those owning between one and three goats but who remain poor; those rearing goats who need technical assistance; and those with no goats but with goat-raising experience. The project worked with 1396 women organized into 154 groups, across 26 villages in Baghlan and Nangarhar Provinces.

The project combined research and development activities in which groups of poor women received technology packages to improve goat and forage production systems. The packages included local goat breeds; approaches for improved dairy production, nutrition, and health; community-based adaptive research; and dissemination of knowledge. Technical support and capacity building activities for the women's groups were some of the key components of this project. Over 1000 women were trained.

Since the supply of forage and feed is critical for the success and sustainability of any goat raising activity, the project also delivered training and support for the development of nutritious feed mixes using locally grown ingredients to replace the imported concentrates.

Sustaining the Benefits

The project, lasting 2010-2014, ensured lasting benefits by going beyond distributing goats and feed to families. Communities were equipped with new practices and knowledge that will continue to reap benefits after the project's completion. Women were trained in all aspects of goat husbandry and milk processing, and a community-based basic healthcare system, linked to livestock service units of the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, was put in place. Vaccination and health services were provided, which reached beyond the target villages. Further, to address the fodder shortage in the country, households were introduced to the uses and benefits of forage crops like saltbush, mulberry, and barley for improved animal nutrition.

Overall, about 60% of beneficiaries reported they have adopted better practices in goat management, enabling lasting solutions for improved nutrition and income for the communities. The milk production increased by an estimated 15-30%, while improved animal care led to more than 90% drop in goat mortality and 66% drop in abortion.



Community-based basic goat healthcare system

"The Project interventions have brought a positive change in the attitude of the communities, the economic status of women and the entire family has significantly improved."

Mr. Abdul Ahmad Khan,
Head of Community Development Council,
Sherum village (Nangarhar)

Spreading the Gains

To ensure that the circle of beneficiaries keeps widening, the project implemented a 'pass-on-the-gift' (PoG) scheme. It motivated each woman who received two goats from the project to pass on one yearling goat as a gift to a new community member during the following season. Thus, new members received two yearlings from two different beneficiaries.

As part of the PoG scheme, 389 yearling goats were distributed to 204 new beneficiaries by neighboring households, strengthening community ties and multiplying beneficiaries.

Impact in numbers

- Nearly four-fold increase in number of goats distributed from 1578 to 7067 from 2010-2014
- A six-fold increase in value of investment to present value of USD 1.11 million
- Over 1000 women trained
- Nearly 204 new women beneficiaries added through PoG scheme

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