

Case Study

Supporting women's shops – by and for the community

Case Study Information

Project location	Year of implementation
Afghanistan	2018
Contacts	Agency
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Key words	
Community-led project, women's shop, income generating activity.	

Context

The project was implemented in Sheikh Mesri, East Afghanistan, a returnee settlement 14 km from Jalalabad city, originally identified for Afghani returnees from Pakistan after the defeat of the Taliban in 2001. Out of the approx. 2,500 families residing there, around 75% of them



are returnees and 25% internally displaced persons (IDPs). Originally, the settlement was established in 2005, but additional informal settlements have been added over the years to the village, increasing the issues around land rights, access to resources like water, agricultural land, education and employment.

NRC has been active in the settlement, implementing CCCM activities such as support to Coordination and Community Engagement as well as in Awareness sessions. The NRC CCCM Teams also established a Women's Committee: thanks to the relationship built with the committee and with some flexible funding available, NRC worked with the members of the committee to implement a community-led project. The first step, the team facilitated a problem identification session to discuss how the funding could support women in the community. The key issues raised by the women included:

- The long distance and unsafe journey to markets in the city, presenting a challenge to women in accessing these markets.
- Women's economic exclusion in general (in terms of both livelihoods and access to markets).
- The lack of safe 'women's spaces' in the community, especially for women who did not have a friendship with, or relation to, the wives of community leaders (who would often host informal gatherings of women).



Based on the workshops, the community and NRC worked together to design a project to establish women's shops. Assessments and consultations on the proposed project took place with the community, local leaders, and neighbourhood committees that are community representation structured supported by the CCCM teams to promote community engagement in site management and service delivery and are composed of 6 members, 2 of which are representatives of the host communities.

Implementation: steps, achievements, and tools

Assessments and consultations on location, market gaps, etc. included community, local leaders and neighbourhood committees. The plan for the women's shops was endorsed by both male and female committee members and leaders. The team used tools from NRC's [Community Coordination Toolbox](#) (CCT) on community-led projects to identify and prioritise the problems above, develop action plans to address these, which included the women's shops.

The women's committee decided on the selection criteria for the individuals to receive grants and support for starting up shops. Five women were identified as shopkeepers from each of the five different neighbourhood of the Sheikh Mesri area (two host community, two IDPs, and a returnee; among which, two were illiterate, and one was head of a household). The committee members themselves selected the women from among their committees, identifying those who had the space, time, skills, and willingness to take on the shopkeeper's responsibility. These women (and their husbands/family) agreed to allocate a room in their household's compound for the shop, where the shops would be managed by the women, and only women could come to buy their needed goods. Approximately, on a daily basis, 30 women used the shops for their needs.

The committee prepared BOQs for items to sell, for materials and labour to prepare the shops, and for transportation costs included in the preparation. The 5 shop owners signed a contract with NRC on their role, NRC's supporting role, and the objective of the shops; to increase access to markets for women, and to create safe spaces in the community for women to meet and purchase needed items (templates and samples of tools can be found in the [CCT](#).)

The women were each given cash grants of 3,500 USD, in two instalments based on producing receipts from their start-up costs. Post distribution monitoring (PDM) included a shop keeper questionnaire and a customer questionnaire. The PDM questionnaires focused on:

- Income generation for the women (direct beneficiaries) and their households, but also for the community (e.g. through employment or selling of their produce).
- Improvements brought to the community in the form of a safer and closer market alternative than travelling to the town market, and in creating safe spaces for women in the community to meet.

By 2023, two of the five shops are still open, and the women of the area are using the shops, while the female owners are reporting they are very pleased with their businesses as they are able to still support their families through the shops. Community members were also happy about the shops still being open, as the women feel safe to go to their locations and meet other women on the premises.



This community-led project approach links to Camp Management Minimum Standard 2.1 on Community Participation: *The site population is able to participate meaningfully in decision-making related to the management of the site.* The women's representatives led the project, from identifying and prioritising the problems to address, developing plans for how to address them, deciding the selection criteria for individual shop keepers, the shop design

and products. Assets were fully handed over to the community, while NRC provided coaching and technical support throughout the process. Monitoring was done to assess impact of the process and potential replication in the future.

Challenges and Lessons Learnt

A major challenge for implementation of this project was the deterioration in the security situation of eastern Afghanistan, particularly the increased targeting by non-state armed groups (NSAGs) of government buildings and public services, including a complex attack on the Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) during which an NRC staff member was injured.

For the first few months of the project, it was still possible to proceed with implementation using low-profile vehicles and maintaining a strong relationship with community members.

However, by August 2018, NRC senior management and security advisors took a decision to significantly scale down the Jalalabad area office and suspend all but essential operations in the East. This meant that for the last two months of the project, NRC had to minimise its field presence – this delayed the implementation of the women’s shop project, and since NRC’s Jalalabad office is now closed, NRC is unable to provide follow-up support for the women. Nevertheless, irregular visits to the area and specific neighbourhoods are conducted by Kabul staff, and information collected on impact of the community-led project.



Another challenge during implementation was the interference of community leaders (the “maliks”, traditional leaders selected by the tribal system and the “shura” members, traditional leaders selected by the community through elections). This was mitigated through holding meetings with these leaders, convincing them that the neighbourhood committees and women’s committees established with NRC’s support would not replace or duplicate the existing community leaders. Instead, it was emphasised

that they would complement their job by ensuring adequate representation of all groups of the community, especially focusing on gender and displacement status. NRC included these leaders in trainings and meetings to make sure they would not feel ‘side-lined’ and to obtain their approval for initiatives, such as the women’s shops. Moreover, NRC worked closely with the community’s youth shura, which also played a great role in decreasing the influence of the Maliks.