

UNODC Country Office for Afghanistan – Anubha Sood - Script

Hello from Afghanistan, my name is Anubha Sood and I head the Alternative Development Programme for UNODC in Afghanistan.

I will be talking specifically about women's economic empowerment in my presentation.

Afghanistan ranks 168th both in Gender Development Index and Gender Inequality Index of 2017, it is a testament to the social isolation, economic marginalization and limited influence of women in public and family domains, which severely limits their ability to contribute to the welfare of their families and development of their communities. Mapping women's contribution to family and household income against poppy cultivating provinces shows that the leading poppy cultivating provinces are also the provinces where women's contribution to family income is the lowest. In Afghanistan, opium is cultivated in areas with a very strong culture of gender inequality and is more likely to occur in villages where girls have no access to school. According to the UNODC World Drug Report of 2018, this is in line with the strong correlation observed between gender equality, the empowerment of women, and peaceful societies.

Look at the map on your right, Helmand, one of the provinces, which is very high on opium-poppy cultivation also has the lowest income contribution by women, approximately 2.6%. [NEXT SLIDE]

Women are involved in opium cultivation and production, through weeding, clearing fields, lancing, breaking opium poppy capsules, removing and cleaning seeds, preparing opium gum, where they are often unpaid or work as day laborers. Using income generated from opium poppy cultivation and production to resolve economic problems, including paying for household essentials and their children's education, was identified as the main driver for women in the absence of economic opportunities or alternatives. [NEXT SLIDE]

UNODC continues to work with the Government of Afghanistan, neighbouring countries, and the wider region to promote integrated responses in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the recommendations of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, with the aim of countering the increase in opium cultivation and production, including through support to the Government of Afghanistan to implement the National Drug Action Plan 2015-2019.

Alternative Development Programme of UNODC in Afghanistan aims to work with the women to enhance their awareness, strengthen capacity, support their economic engagement, and promote their leadership development and participation in decision-making. [NEXT SLIDE]

I am going to present two testimonies to showcase the contribution of women in Alternative Development projects.

Sahera and her family rely on agriculture as primary source of income. Sahera's husband works as a daily wage labourer in poppy fields. Together they make 5400 Afghanis a month, which is approximately US \$ 70 a month, which is not enough to pay for their food and medication or children's education.

In 2017, Sahera got involved in UNODC supported AD programme. She was provided training/equipment's and market linkage support for a dairy project. Soon, she found the business productive and established her own dairy processing group consisting of 24 women members.

Sahera has her own small business now and earns approximately US \$ 300 a month, her husband is no longer involved in poppy related activities and helps Sahera in collecting and selling of milk. Her children are attending school now. According to Sahera, *“Working and owning a small business was a dream and luckily it has happened”*.

Sahera is not only a champion of change in her family but also in her community, she motivated and encouraged other women in her community to step out of home and stand on their own feet. [NEXT SLIDE]

Shah Pari, along with her 8 children and a husband, who is struggling with opium addiction and mental condition, is the main provider in the family. Prior to receiving support under the AD programme of UNODC, she worked as a cleaner, her monthly income was about 2000 Afghani which is \$ 50 a month. She could hardly make ends meet.

In 2017, the AD project established a greenhouse for her and provided seeds, fertilizers and training to look after the green house and market linkage support.

She started cultivating vegetables like cucumber, tomato, squash in her green house. Now, she harvests three times in a year and earns approx. \$90 per harvest. In second half of 2018, she established another greenhouse with the money she saved and hired other women to support her in greenhouse cultivation and management. After three years, she has a monthly income of approximately US \$400 a month, she says all her economic problems are solved.

According to Shah Pari: “Coming out from the miserable economic situation, what I have today was a dream for me. Now I’m an employer and have other women supporting me”.

I am going to now handover the presentation to Madame Ambassador, she will walk you through a success story from Afghanistan, where a group of women, led by a woman entrepreneur, have established a successful soap business [inaudible]. Thank you.