



# **Women's Livelihood Program**

## **Final Report**

**2025**

Prepared by

**Shining Star Educational organization of  
Afghanistan**

**Central Asia Institute**

Afghanistan Program

**Final Program Progress Report for the Months of July – September**

Name of the Grantee: Shining Star Educational Organization of Afghanistan-SSEOA

Grant Agreement #: CAI-FY25-AFG-003-SSEOA

Name of the Project: Women Livelihood Program in Afghanistan

Project Agreement Period: May 1, 2025 to September 30, 2025

Project Budget: \$ 62,500

Progress Report Submission Date: 15, Oct, 2025

**1. Project progress by objectives and outcome indicators:**

The Women Livelihood Program (WLP) is designed to uplift 67 marginalized women and girls in Badakhshan by addressing economic exclusion and food insecurity through sustainable dairy and mushroom agribusinesses. The program empowers women with training, resources, and market access to build self-reliance and long-term livelihoods.

During July–September 2025, SSEOA implemented the WLP in Faizabad district, focusing on creating job opportunities through the establishment of link between the 3 components including dairy processing, cow husbandry, and mushroom cultivation. Initially, for dairy product development, 20 women from Itarchi village were selected through a transparent survey process and subsequently received two weeks of vocational training on dairy hygiene, yogurt, cheese, and Qourot production, along with entrepreneurship skills. Each participant was provided with a complete dairy processing kit, enabling immediate practical application and income generation. Secondly, in cow husbandry, 27 beneficiaries received local dairy cows with calves and feed. Beneficiaries delivered fresh milk daily to 4 dairy processing/production centers, producing 70–94 kg per household over 47 days, with estimated income of 3,500–4,700 AFN (\$51–\$68 USD). Households retained milk for family consumption, improving nutrition. Thirdly, for mushroom cultivation, 20 women underwent 3-day technical training on cultivation, harvesting, processing, and business management. Each received a starter kit to begin home-based mushroom farming, generating weekly incomes of around 2,000–10,000 AFN (around \$160 USD). The overall goal of this project has been the establishment of supply linkages between cow-owning households and dairy processing units, strengthening the local value chain. Dairy centers generated 400–500 AFN per unit daily, while households earned around 200 AFN/day (around \$3 USD) from milk sales.



Mushroom products were sold directly from farms, with strong local demand. And during this period, the project faced with Challenges such as administrative delays with MoU approvals, limited market access, unreliable electricity, and transportation constraints, which the SSEOA team has continued to address.

In summary, the WLP successfully trained women, distributed cows, established value chains, and enabled income generation through dairy and mushroom agribusinesses. Beneficiaries now have improved livelihoods, family nutrition, and economic resilience, demonstrating strong potential for long-term impact and sustainability. Additionally, throughout the project, the M&E team closely tracked implementation progress, beneficiary participation, milk production, sales, and mushroom cultivation outputs. Regular field visits, data collection, and reporting ensured timely identification of challenges and informed decision-making, contributing to effective program management, accountability, and the achievement of project objectives. This report outlines the activities carried out based on the designed project objectives and reflects the achievements, progress, and challenges encountered during the reporting period from June to September 2025. They are outlined as below:

### **Objective #1: Train and equip 20 women from 4 zones of Faizabad in dairy product development and enterprise management**

#### **Outcome Indicators:**

##### **1. Signing MoU with the De-facto authorities**

To initiate project activities in the targeted areas of Faizabad, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) needed to be signed with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Economy (MoA/MoEc) covering all the 3 components: dairy processing, cow husbandry, and mushroom cultivation. Initially, the MoU was signed and approved for only 60 beneficiaries (20 for each component). Subsequently, following the approval of an additional budget to include 7 more beneficiaries in the cow husbandry component, official authorization was required to increase the total to 27. After several follow-ups, both MoA and MoEc granted the necessary approval and official documentation, allowing the inclusion of the additional beneficiaries and enabling the full commencement of field activities.

##### **2. Selection of 20 women for dairy training**

To empower women and improve their livelihoods, SSEOA carefully selected 20 beneficiaries from Itarchi village in Faizabad district. These women and girls were identified in early July through a survey that captured their real needs and potential. The selection process was carried out openly, with the presence



of representatives from the Badakhshan's DoA/DoEc, ensuring transparency and fairness. All selected beneficiaries fully met the program's eligibility criteria and were part of the primary target group, giving them a real chance to benefit from this intervention. For the dairy processing and production component, the selection took place in June. 20 women were chosen based on pre-approved criteria shared with CAI, bringing hope and opportunity to families who need it most.

### **3. Two weeks training in dairy process and production**

During the project implementation period, SSEOA planned and carried out a series of activities aimed at building the capacity of beneficiaries and enhancing their practical skills and knowledge. Based on a structured plan for the target area, trainers were recruited and subsequent to the recruitment of the trainers, specialized training sessions were organized for women & girls engaged in dairy processing. Both trainer recruitment and dairy process/production training are detailed as below:

- **Trainer Recruitment:** In Etarchi village of Faizabad district, SSEOA officially recruited 2 trainers, one male and one female through a formal process that included recruitment and a competency-based examination. Both demonstrated strong expertise and practical knowledge in dairy processing and were selected to deliver targeted training for the 20 beneficiaries in the area.
- **Specialized Training in Dairy Processing:** SSEOA provided vocational training focused on dairy processing and production for 20 targeted girls and women, with an emphasis on value-added product development. The 2-week program was delivered in 2 rounds: the 1<sup>st</sup> round (July 24 to July 31) for 10 beneficiaries, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> round (August 1–8) for the remaining 10 beneficiaries. The curriculum was carefully designed to combine technical knowledge with entrepreneurship skills, ensuring a strong focus on sustainability.

The training covered key topics such as dairy hygiene, yogurt production, cheese making, and Quroot (dried curd) processing. To recognize participants' achievements, certificates were awarded successfully subsequent to the post-training assessments. Additionally, transportation support was provided to ensure full accessibility and participation for all beneficiaries.

### **4. Provision of dairy processing kits**

To strengthen the practical application of newly acquired skills and ensure the long-term sustainability of beneficiaries' activities, SSEOA distributed essential dairy processing and production kits to participants of both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> rounds of training. Each beneficiary received a complete set of tools, enabling them to immediately apply their skills and generate income. The procurement process was provided



transparently and accountably, with Requests for Quotation (RFQs) issued for the dairy processing kits and other essential materials. Following a thorough evaluation of vendor proposals, a reliable supplier was selected to ensure timely and cost-effective delivery. These items included all the necessary provided items. For the **dairy processing tools and kits the list is added here below:**

No	Item	Qty	Unit	No	Item	Qty	Unit
1.	Solar Battery 150Amp	1	PCS	11.	Milk Collection Container Can 40 liters	5	PCS
2.	Solar Panel with Frame 560 watt	1	PCS	12.	Weighting Scale 100 weight digitally	1	PCS
3.	Solar Freezer Single Door	1	PCS	13.	Ladle Lang Hand	2	PCS
4.	Milk Cooking Pot 25 liters Aluminum	2	PCS	14.	Cream Collector Bowl	5	PCS
5.	Milk Collection Bucket with Lid 10 liter Plastic	5	PCS	15.	Pack of Yogurt Cups Medium Size	500	PCS
6.	Thermometer	1	PCS	16.	Pack of Masks 50 pcs each	5	Box
7.	Manual Butter Churner 20 liter	1	PCS	17.	Pack of Gloves 100 pcs each	5	Box
8.	Milk Strainer Large Size	2	PCS	18.	Work Coat	5	PCS
9.	Gas Cylinder with Regulator 10kg 3m pipe	1	PCS	19.	Work Apron	5	PCS
10.	Burner Stove 40x40	1	PCS				

## **Objective #2: Provide 20 cows to a separate group of 20 women to enable sustainable milk production and income generation**

### **Outcome indicators**

#### **1. Selection of 20 cow recipients**

To enhance women's livelihoods, SSEOA successfully selected 27 beneficiaries in Itarchi village, Faizabad district. Among them, 20 women and girls were identified in early July through a pre-conducted survey. The selection process was open and transparent, conducted in the presence of representatives from the Badakhshan DoA and DoEc. All selected beneficiaries met the program's eligibility criteria and belonged to the primary target group. Selection for the cow husbandry component was taken place in 2 stages. In the initial stage, 20 beneficiaries were chosen in June based on pre-approved criteria shared with CAI.



Following a budget increase that would allow program expansion, an additional 7 beneficiaries were added to the cow husbandry component. The process experienced delays due to the requirement for approval from the aforementioned de facto authorities, which had to be obtained before start of the selection for the 7 beneficiaries. The SSEOA team made persistent efforts and, after several discussions and follow-ups, the authorities finally granted approval. And with this, the selection of the 7 additional beneficiaries successfully began in July, bringing the total to 27.

## **2. Distribution of Dairy cows**

During the reporting period, SSEOA distributed dairy cows to the selected beneficiaries in Etarchi village, Faizabad district, following a thorough vaccination and quarantine process. A total of 27 cows were planned for distribution. In the initial phase, 20 cows were provided to beneficiaries identified through the baseline survey and included in the signed MoU. The remaining 7 cows were distributed in a 2<sup>nd</sup> phase to the newly 7 joined beneficiaries, following a budget revision and official approval from the MoEc, the DoA, and relevant local authorities.

Both distribution phases, conducted during July and August, included complete vaccination and medical check-ups for all cows to ensure their health and productivity, supporting the beneficiaries' sustainable livelihoods. Each beneficiary received a local dairy cow with a calf and 6 bags of cows feed.

## **3. Milk supply to dairy units**

In addition to the above initiative, to enhance the project's value chain and ensure effective use of acquired skills, SSEOA-supported households that received cows under the cow husbandry component, as well as beneficiaries trained in dairy processing, have actively applied their knowledge. Beneficiaries owning cows now deliver fresh milk daily to the nearby dairy processing centers. On average, each cow produces 3–5 liters of milk per day. During the current reporting period (13 August to 30 September, 47 days), the total milk production per cow-owning household ranged from 70.5 kg to 94 kg. Milk produced is divided into two portions: one for household consumption and the other for delivery to the four designated dairy centers in Etarchi village, establishing a direct supply link. Each beneficiary retains a minimum of 2 kg of milk per day for family use, supporting improved nutrition and food security. Based on the average local market price of 25 AFN per liter, the total milk produced during this period represents a substantial economic benefit. The estimated value per beneficiary ranges between 3,500 AFN (70.5 kg × 25 AFN) and 4,700 AFN (94 kg × 25 AFN), equal to approximately \$51–\$68 over the 47-day period. **The**



cumulative milk production and its associated economic value from the start of cow distribution until the end of the project are summarized in the table on the next page.

#### 4. Support regular milk income and monitoring

During the WLP project implementation period from 13 August to 30 September, beneficiaries of cow husbandry have been constantly and successfully able to generate daily and weekly fruitful income from the milk produced by their cows. And by supplying fresh milk to nearby dairy centers, families gained the opportunity to earn a steady income, where each cow producing a consistent 3–5 liters on a daily base. Every beneficiary maintained a steady income through the sale and delivery of their milk at the dairy production centers, as shown in the table below. Over the 47-day period of the implementing project, all beneficiaries earned a substantial income. The dairy centers purchased this milk directly from the beneficiaries, supporting a reliable market and supporting household livelihood. In addition, as part of the project's objectives, the team closely monitored milk collection at the 4 dairy units/centers and tracked daily milk sales by the cow-owning beneficiaries. These monitoring activities proved highly effective, ensuring that sales and income generation ran smoothly, consistently increasing throughout the period. The total milk sold to the centers summarized in the table below:

**Milk Purchase Table from Distributed cow from 13 Aug to 30 Sep 2025 (During 47 days)**

No	Unit Name	Product	Qty	Price per Kg	Total Purchase in AFN (During 47day)	Total purchase in USD Dollar (During 47)
1.	Kodbano	Milk	658 Kg	25 AFN	16,450 AFN	\$ 241.91
2.	Watani	Milk	592.2 Kg	25 AFN	14,805 AFN	\$ 217.72
3.	Etrachi	Milk	658 Kg	25 AFN	16,450 AFN	\$ 241.91
4.	Shiwa	Milk	423 Kg	25 AFN	10,575 AFN	\$ 155.51
<b>Grand Total</b>					<b>58,280 AFN</b>	<b>\$ 857.05</b>



Table for Distributed cow Milk product, their sales and its delivery to diary centers between 13 Aug - 30 Sep

No	Beneficiaries	Units/ Center	Daily Milk product			Total product for selling (During 47) days	Price per Kg	Total Price/Income in AFN	P i
			Total Milk Amount	for family Use	For Sale				
1	Rahima	Kodbano	4kg	2kg	2kg	94kg	25 AFN	2,350 AFN	
2	Qalam nesa		5kg	3kg	2kg	94kg	25 AFN	2,350 AFN	
3	Zubaida		4kg	2kg	2kg	94kg	25 AFN	2,350 AFN	
4	Pashton		3kg	1kg	2kg	94kg	25 AFN	2,350 AFN	
5	Alam Nesa		4kg	2kg	2kg	94kg	25 AFN	2,350 AFN	
6	Asle Nesa		4kg	2kg	2kg	94kg	25 AFN	2,350 AFN	
7	Marukh		4kg	2kg	2kg	94kg	25 AFN	2,350 AFN	
8	Munira	Watani	3kg	1.20kg	1,80Kg	84.6kg	25 AFN	2,115 AFN	
9	Saida		4kg	2.20kg	1,80Kg	84.6kg	25 AFN	2,115 AFN	
10	Mohasaba		3kg	1.20kg	1,80Kg	84.6kg	25 AFN	2,115 AFN	
11	Qamargul		2kg	0.20	1,80Kg	84.6kg	25 AFN	2,115 AFN	
12	Nazera		4kg	2.20kg	1,80Kg	84.6kg	25 AFN	2,115 AFN	
13	Arzo		5kg	3.20kg	1,80Kg	84.6kg	25 AFN	2,115 AFN	
14	Shakila		4kg	2.20kg	1,80Kg	84.6kg	25 AFN	2,115 AFN	
15	Massouda	Etrachi	3kg	1kg	2kg	94kg	25 AFN	2,350 AFN	
16	Saltanat		3,5kg	1.5kg	2kg	94kg	25 AFN	2,350 AFN	
17	Sadafgull		2kg	0kg	2kg	94kg	25 AFN	2,350 AFN	
18	Bebe Asma		3kg	1kg	2kg	94kg	25 AFN	2,350 AFN	
19	Bebe Zaynab		3kg	1kg	2kg	94kg	25 AFN	2,350 AFN	
20	Nourzada		2kg	0kg	2kg	94kg	25 AFN	2,350 AFN	
21	Hamida		4kg	2kg	2kg	94kg	25 AFN	2,350 AFN	
22	Mehrnesa	Shiwa	1.50kg		1.50kg	70.5kg	25 AFN	1,762.5 AFN	
23	Tajnesa		1.50kg		1.50kg	70.5kg	25 AFN	1762.5 AFN	
24	Karima		1.50kg		1.50kg	70.5kg	25 AFN	1762.5 AFN	
25	Ehsaya		1.50kg		1.50kg	70.5kg	25 AFN	1762.5 AFN	
26	Zarmina		1.50kg		1.50kg	70.5kg	25 AFN	1762.5 AFN	
27	Maili		1.50kg		1.50kg	70.5kg	25 AFN	1762.5 AFN	
<b>Overall Total</b>									



## **Objective #3: Train 20 females in mushroom cultivation and equip them to start home-based mushroom farms**

### **Outcome Indicator**

#### **1. Mushroom Cultivation Beneficiary Selection**

At the initial stage of the WLP program, a total of 20 women and girls were identified as beneficiaries for mushroom cultivation through a comprehensive baseline survey as previously reported. The beneficiaries were selected from 2 target villages, Shurabak and Torgany, areas with limited access to basic services, particularly education and livelihood opportunities for women. The selection process followed predefined and transparent criteria that were aligned with the findings of a market needs assessment, ensuring that the intervention responded to actual demand and community potential.

#### **2. 3-Day Technical Training on Mushroom Cultivation**

To ensure high-quality and effective capacity-building, SSEOA recruited 2 qualified trainers (1 male and 1 female) through a formal process that included recruitment and a competency-based examination. These trainers delivered 2 rounds of intensive 3-day technical training sessions in late July, focusing on the cultivation, harvesting, and processing of mushrooms, as well as on the development of value-added mushroom products. The training was held for the selected 20 female beneficiaries and the training curriculum was thoughtfully designed to integrate both technical cultivation skills and entrepreneurship development, emphasizing sustainability, hygiene, and market-oriented approaches. Participants received hands-on practice in preparing mushroom beds, maintaining growth conditions, and harvesting. In addition, they were introduced to business-oriented concepts such as packaging, pricing, and basic financial management. By the end of the sessions, all 20 beneficiaries reported enhanced knowledge and practical skills, with expressing confidence in their ability to replicate the process independently.

#### **3. Provision of Mushroom Starter Kits**

To support practical learning and ensure the sustainability of beneficiaries' activities, SSEOA organized the timely purchase and distribution of mushroom starter kits. The procurement team completed the Request for Quotation (RFQ) on July 9–10, after which all required materials were successfully obtained from the authorized supplier. Each provided kit contained the necessary tools and inputs for mushroom cultivation, enabling beneficiaries to put their training into practice immediately. A total of 20 starter kits were delivered to the selected women, with the supplier handling both delivery and transportation. This provision allowed beneficiaries to begin mushroom farming at home without delay. As a result, women



now have both the technical know-how and the resources needed to generate income, strengthening household financial stability and creating livelihood opportunities within the community. **The mushroom kits provided to the beneficiaries during the stage of provision is added here below in the table:**

No	Item	Qty	Unit	No	Item	Qty	Unit
1.	Mushroom Spam	2	kg	13.	Cooking Pot 25 liters	1	PCS
2.	Wheat Straw	25	kg	14.	Basket	1	PCS
3.	Plastic Grow Bags	50	Bags	15.	Needle Thread Marker	1	Package
4.	Lime	1	kg	16.	Bran	3.5	KG
5.	Bleach	1	Bottle	17.	Chalk	1	Package
6.	Hand Sprayer	1	PCS	18.	Cloth	3	Meter
7.	Hand Gloves	2	Pair	19.	Packaging Material	1	Package
8.	Mask	1	Box	20.	Cutter	1	PCS
9.	Gas Cylinder with Regulator 10kg, 3m pipe	1	PCS	21.	Urea	0.5	Kg
10.	Burner Stove 40x40	1	PCS	22.	Ilik	1	PCS
11.	Large Plastic Sheet 3mx4m	1	PCS	23.	Ladle	1	PCS
12.	Thermometer	1	PCS				

#### **Objective #4: Establish supply linkages between cow-owning women and nearby dairy processing units**

##### **Outcome indicator:**

##### **1. Coordination and linkage facilitation**

During this reporting period between July-Sep, a strong local value chain emerged among the project components, particularly:

Linking dairy production and cow husbandry in Etarchi village. Following the completion of all necessary training sessions and distribution of inputs, the project focused on strengthening the coordination between the two components—dairy processing and cow husbandry—to ensure sustainable and effective implementation of activities. Throughout the entire project period, this integrated approach facilitated the practical application of skills, improved production efficiency, and enhanced the overall value chain. period the project facilitated direct linkages between cow-owning families and nearby dairy processing



centers, ensuring a consistent supply of fresh milk and enhancing the overall efficiency of the local dairy ecosystem. Trained dairy processing beneficiaries now source fresh milk directly from cow-owning families on a daily basis. Each cow produces an average of 4–5 liters, providing households with an income of approximately 200 Afghani per day (around 3 USD). The processing centers procure milk from these families and, when needed, supplement their supply from local farmers to ensure uninterrupted operations. Each processing unit now generates around 400–500 Afghani per day (around 7.5 USD), with total daily sales ranging between 1,500–2,000 Afghani (around 29 USD). This coordinated system, reinforced by support from De Facto authorities, has successfully established a sustainable value chain that benefits households, dairy processing units, and the broader community. Under this objective, a vigorous relation is established during the entire period from the month of May to September, the 3 sections specifically dairy processing and dairy cow husbandry established a linkage where with development of the chain the dairy centers beneficiaries began their initial milk sales, while cow-owning beneficiaries maintained proper feeding mechanisms for their cows. The coordination between these 2 components established a robust value chain, especially benefiting the dairy centers.

- Sales of Dairy Products (From August 13 to August 30, 2025 (During 17 days))

No	Unit Name	Product	Quantity /per day	Unit Price	Dairy Products Sales in AFN During 17 days	Dairy Products Sales in USD During 17 days
1.	Kadbano	Yogurt	32 boxes	35 AFN	19,040 AFN	\$ 280
		Cream	5 boxes	50 AFN	4,250 AFN	\$ 62.5
2.	Etarchi	Yogurt	30 boxes	35 AFN	17,850 AFN	\$ 262.5
		Cream	6 boxes	30 AFN	3,060 AFN	\$ 45
3.	Watani	Yogurt	50 boxes	35 AFN	29,750 AFN	\$ 437.5
		Cream	8 boxes	30 AFN	4,080 AFN	\$ 60
4.	Shiwa	Yogurt	20 boxes	35 AFN	11,900 AFN	\$ 175
		Cream	4 boxes	50 AFN	3,400 AFN	\$ 50
<b>Grand Sales Total</b>					<b>93,330 AFN</b>	<b>\$ 1,372.5</b>

No	Unit Name	Product	Quantity	Unit Price	Dairy Products Sales in AFN During 30 days	Dairy Products Sales in AFN During 30 days
----	-----------	---------	----------	------------	--	--



1.	Kadbano	Yogurt	50 boxes	35 AFN	52,500 AFN	\$ 772.06
		Cream	8 boxes	50 AFN	12,000 AFN	\$ 176.47
2.	Etarchi	Yogurt	41 boxes	35 AFN	43,050 AFN	\$ 632.35
		Cream	10 boxes	30 AFN	9,000 AFN	\$ 132.35
3.	Watani	Yogurt	60 boxes	35 AFN	63,000 AFN	\$ 926.47
		Cream	10 boxes	30 AFN	9,000 AFN	\$ 132.35
4.	Shiwa	Yogurt	30 boxes	35 AFN	31,500 AFN	\$ 463.24
		Cream	6 boxes	50 AFN	9,000 AFN	\$ 132.35
<b>Grand Total</b>					<b>278,050 AFN</b>	<b>\$ 3,577.06</b>

- **Sales of Dairy Products From 1<sup>st</sup> Sep to 30<sup>th</sup> Sep 2025 (During 30 days)**

- **Mushroom Cultivation and Market Access:** The mushroom cultivation component has also strengthened the local value chain by providing additional income opportunities. Beneficiaries in Shurabak and Torgani villages of Faizabad district have increased mushroom production through regular 40–45-day maintenance and care. The cultivation-to-harvest process is gradual and requires careful adherence to ensure a high-quality product. During mid to late September the mushrooms Harvested and are sold directly from farms based on the local high demands for the products with weekly incomes ranging from 2,000–3,000 AFN (around 40 USD). and will be delivered to local markets in case of the products increase to the local markets, if production increases further, surplus mushrooms can also be brought to markets or dairy centers, enhancing both income generation and community access.

- **Mushroom sales from 16 September up to 30 September (Torgani village-farms)**

No	Beneficiaries	Quantity	Price per KG	Total sales in AFN per day	Total sales in AFN (During 14 days)	Total sales in USD Dollar (During 14 days)
1	Rohina	12kg	200 AFN	2,400 AFN	2400 AFN	35.29 \$
2	Manizah farman	6kg	200 AFN	1,200 AFN	1200 AFN	17.64 \$
3	Mena	6kg	200 AFN	1,200 AFN	1200 AFN	17.64 \$
4	Nafas gul	8kg	200 AFN	1,600 AFN	1600 AFN	23.52 \$
5	Muzgan	8kg	200 AFN	1,600 AFN	1600 AFN	23.52 \$
6	Amena	8kg	200 AFN	1,600 AFN	1600 AFN	23.52 \$
7	Karima	3kg	200 AFN	600 AFN	600 AFN	8.82 \$
8	Manizah	10kg	200 AFN	2,000 AFN	2000 AFN	29.41 \$
9	Hajera	5kg	200 AFN	1,000 AFN	1000 AFN	14.70 \$
10	Farhat deba	10kg	200 AFN	2,000 AFN	2000 AFN	29.41 \$
<b>Grand Sales Total</b>				<b>15,200 AFN</b>	<b>15,200 \$</b>	<b>223.47 \$</b>



- Mushroom sales from 16 September up to 30 September (Shorabak village-farms)

No	Beneficiaries	Quantity	Price per Kg	Total sales in AFN per day	Total sales in AFN (During 14 days)	Total sales in USD Dollar (During 14 days)
1	Bebe Hawa	20kg	300	6000 AFN	84,000 AFN	1,235.29 \$
2	Hadisa	7kg	250	1750 AFN	24,500 AFN	360.29 \$
3	Aziza	23kg	200	4600 AFN	64,400 AFN	947.05 \$
4	Zeyagul	7kg	200	1400 AFN	19,600 AFN	288.23 \$
5	Shouiba	5kg	200	1000 AFN	14,000 AFN	205.88 \$
6	Saliah	10kg	200	2000 AFN	28,000 AFN	411.76 \$
7	Suraya	5kg	200	1000 AFN	14,000 AFN	205.88 \$
8	Bebe Paye	4kg	200	800 AFN	11,200 AFN	164.70 \$
9	Farzana	5kg	200	1000 AFN	14,000 AFN	205.88 \$
10	Saira	6kg	200	1200 AFN	16,800 AFN	247.05 \$
<b>Grand Sales Total</b>				<b>20,750 AFN</b>	<b>290,500 AFN</b>	<b>4,272.01 \$</b>

**Objective #5: Strengthen local value chains for dairy and mushroom products through market development and technical support.**

#### 1. Support with branding, packaging, and vendor access

- **Dairy processing centers branding and packaging:** To empower product identity, each center labeled its products with the center's name and dairy type subsequent to the skill and knowledge enhancement acquired in training for improving and developing their products and sales applied an initiatives under the designed objective in work plan to increase their sales, they supported their products, each center initiated labeling their dairy items and products with the center's name and the type of product. And now their products will be more on sale and popular and will bring them good income. **For reference Pictures are added as annex 3:**
- **Harvest mushroom branding and packaging:** Beneficiaries who have established mushroom cultivation farms are now approaching the stage of branding and packaging their harvested products for market introduction. After the harvest, the mushrooms will be carefully, and sorted to ensure quality before being packaged under locally designed labels.

#### 2. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation



As part of this activity, the SSEOA team has closely monitored mushroom, milk production and related processes at the dairy centers since the project's inception. The team observed that all 3 components have been implemented diligently and according to plan. Findings indicate that during the 47 days of project implementation, every beneficiary actively engaged in their respective field. Focusing on dairy processing/production, this component has achieved significant success in meeting the project's objectives. During this period, all established units and centers in Etarchi village made remarkable progress, outperforming other components in terms of outputs and productivity. Detailed findings and product results are attached as an annex for reference. Additionally, monitoring conducted from August 13 to September 30, 2025, in the targeted villages in all the target components revealed the following:

- **Daily dairy product** sales are steadily increasing: Monitoring data indicates that sales from the 4 dairy units/centers in Etarchi village are growing consistently day by day. This steady increase reflects both higher production and stronger market demand. Beneficiaries are gaining experience in managing sales, interacting with customers, and maintaining quality standards, which contributes to the overall stability and growth of their income.
- **Milk production** has grown compared to the previous month: The quantity of milk collected from cow-owning beneficiaries has shown a noticeable increase compared to the previous month. This growth is attributed to the proper feeding and care practices adopted by the beneficiaries, as well as their adherence to the training provided during the project. Improved cow health and nutrition have directly impacted milk yield, ensuring a more reliable supply for dairy centers and enhancing income opportunities for the beneficiaries.
- **Mushroom cultivation** is progressing, with beneficiaries expected to begin marketing their products soon: Beneficiaries in Shurabak and Torgani villages have been actively maintaining their mushroom cultivation units over a 40–45-day growth cycle. Regular care, proper environmental management, and the application of techniques learned during training have resulted in healthy mushroom growth. Harvesting is now underway or imminent, and the beneficiaries are preparing to sell their products in local markets. Early observations suggest strong market demand, and each farm has the potential to generate significant weekly income, strengthening household economic resilience.

## 5. Overall Challenges:



During the reporting period, one of the key challenges has been the prolonged process of registering the project with the MoEc and finalizing the MoU with the MoA. This extended timeline has affected project activities, resulting in some delays relative to the original implementation schedule. The SSEOA team is actively addressing these challenges to minimize their impact on overall progress. In addition, several operational and logistical constraints continue to affect the project's efficiency:

- **Limited access to larger markets:** Beneficiaries faced difficulties in reaching broader markets, which restricts sales potential and income generation.
- **Inadequate electricity infrastructure:** Unreliable or insufficient electricity supply hinders production, storage, and processing activities, particularly in dairy and mushroom units.
- **Insufficient transportation facilities:** The lack of proper transportation options makes it challenging to deliver products to markets or other centers, limiting distribution and timely sales.

Annexes:

Annex 1. Pictures.



Monitoring and evaluating the sales performance of the dairy center



Tracking and assessing milk production in Etarchi village.



Beneficiaries of Kodbano Dairy Center and their new announcements/signs.



During monitoring process, sharing comments with beneficiaries



Beneficiary involved in milk processing at the Dairy Production & Processing Center



Dairy processing beneficiaries While discussing ways to improve the quality of products.



Harvested mushrooms from Torgani village, Faizabad district.



Beneficiary collecting harvested mushrooms in Shurabak village, Faizabad district



Monitoring the mushroom farm in Shurabak village



Monitoring of the mushroom cultivation farm in Torgani village



Beneficiaries in Etarchi village, Faizabad district received concentrated cow feed



Beneficiary tending a cow provided through the distribution



**Certification:**


I certify that the above information is accurate and correct.

\_\_\_\_\_ Pardes Ullah Wayand \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Program Implementation Manager \_\_\_

Grantee's Authorized Representative's Name

Title

\_\_\_\_\_ 

\_\_\_\_\_ 15/10/2025 \_\_\_\_\_

Signature

Date

## The Story of Zahra,

### An addict mother but then a successful business holder

Zahra, a widow woman from Shurabak village in Faizabad district, Badakhshan, was left alone to care for her 5 children after the sudden death of her husband in a road accident. With no income, no assets, and limited opportunities for women, Zahra struggled to provide even basic food for her family.

The mounting stress and despair led her into drug use for several months, causing severe mental and emotional distress. In a tragic attempt to survive and feed her family, she sold one of her children. Her days were filled with worry, guilt, and hopelessness. She states, **“Before I joined the program, my days were full of hunger, fear, and pain. I felt lost, anxious, and helpless. I even sold one of my children just to keep the rest alive. I did not know how I could survive or protect my children.”** Her father, desperate to help, sought guidance from villagers who was then directed to the SSEOA team. The team advised him to first ensure Zahra received treatment for her addiction, and reassured him that support of her recovery and guidance throughout the process would be provided. Hence after some time of recovery with her father’s guidance and SSEOA’s treatment support in 2024, Zahra joined the Mushroom cultivation program and received practical training and start-up materials for oyster mushroom cultivation, a home-based livelihood suitable for women. With structured work, psychosocial support, and ongoing encouragement, she committed to stay drug-free, gradually regaining confidence, stability, and hope.

Today, after months, based on the team regular visits, Zahra, who once was suffering and not able to afford and support her children and family is now able to be the hope and cater for her children and today successfully produces mushrooms, provides for her family, and mentors other women who want to make income and earning to their family and she use from her experience and knowledge she gained during the program trend. Beside this Her younger daughter, Farida 7, and another child who is just 9 are now both enrolled in CBE classes in Shurabak village, learning safely and regularly. She expresses, “Now, after the training and support, I work every day in my mushroom business. I earn enough to feed my family, feel proud of what I do, and watch my two children go to school. I thank SSEOA for giving us hope, education, and a new future for me and my children.”

## Fatima's story

### once An addict woman and but now a cow owner

Etarchi village rests in the cold arms of the mountains, where poverty settles quietly into daily life. In a small mud house at the edge of the village lived Fatima, a woman in her late thirties, whose strength had been tested far beyond her years. Her husband, Shir Agha Samadi, once carried the responsibility of the family. After the Taliban takeover, he lost his job, and prolonged unemployment pushed him into deep depression. Over time, he became dependent on cigarettes and hookah as a way to cope with his frustration and sense of failure.

As his condition worsened, Fatima became the only shield between her 4 children and hunger. With no steady income and no opportunities for women in the village, the pressure slowly crushed her. At her lowest point, Fatima herself turned to cigarettes and drug in absence of her husband not out of habit or pleasure, but as a way to calm her anxiety and silence the constant fear of not being able to provide for her children. What began as occasional use during moments of emotional exhaustion gradually became dependence. The stress of the household and her own struggle had begun to affect her children. Fatima noticed that her child, 12-year-old boy, was beginning to imitate her husband's and mother's habits spending long hours outside, showing interest in cigarettes and hookah, and talking about wanting to "escape" like adults. This frightened Fatima deeply, as she realized the cycle of addiction could continue if no intervention happened. "I used to try cigarettes and hookah like my parents, but now I help my mother and I feel proud. I don't want to use them or leave home like before," said her 12-year-old son, his voice filled with hope and pride.

Long before any livelihood support reached her, Fatima was first identified by the team as a woman in crisis. She was emotionally drained, physically weak, and at serious risk. The team intervened immediately, arranging psychosocial support and covering the cost of her treatment and medication. For the first time, Fatima felt that her struggle was understood rather than judged. "I used hookah and cigarettes to escape my fear and stress," Fatima said. "I didn't want to hurt my children, but I felt lost." The treatment helped her regain stability, but the root problem remained. Once the immediate assistance ended, Fatima returned to the same fragile environment poverty, responsibility, and uncertainty. Without income or daily purpose, both she and her children remained at risk. During follow-up visits, the team recognized that recovery alone was not enough. Fatima did not only need support to stop using, she needed a livelihood that would protect her and prevent her children from following the same path. After careful assessment of her household condition, vulnerability, and responsibility for three children, she was identified as a priority beneficiary for the cow husbandry

program. Through the full selection process, Fatima was enrolled. When the cow arrived, Fatima was still fragile, but determined. Caring for the animal gave her routine. Feeding and milking it filled her days with responsibility. Selling milk provided her with a regular source of income — on average, she now earns 200–300 AFN per day, selling part of the milk at the Watani dairy center in Etarchi village and part directly in the village market. This income has allowed her to meet her family’s basic needs consistently, repay small debts, and save for future expenses, restoring her sense of dignity and independence.

Most importantly, it gave her children, especially her 12-year-old, a positive example and structure, keeping them away from harmful habits and guiding them toward hope and work. Within months, Fatima was able to meet her family’s needs without borrowing. She completely stopped using cigarettes and hookah, and her children grew more secure and confident. Her oldest child began helping with household chores and livestock care, learning responsibility in place of addiction. With emotion, Fatima shares her gratitude: “If SSEOA had not come to help me, I do not know where I would be today. They did not only help me stop smoking; they helped me stand again. Because of this program, I earn with my own hands, my children eat with dignity, and my heart is finally at peace.”

### **Fatima’s photograph**



# Once in need, now dreams with future hope

## Story of Hajera

### 1. Individual Profile

**Name:** Hajera

**Age:** 24

**Role:** Mushroom Beneficiary

#### • **Background and experience**

Hajera is a 24-year-old young woman from Targani Village. After completing 12<sup>th</sup> grade, she enrolled in the Faculty of Agriculture and studied for 3 years with strong dedication and hope for a better future. However, the collapse of the government abruptly ended her academic journey, forcing her to leave university before completing her degree. “Leaving university was the most painful moment of my life. I felt my dreams disappear overnight,” Hajera recalls. Despite her educational background and willingness to work, the lack of employment opportunities and worsening economic conditions left her unemployed and uncertain about her future.

#### • **Family information**

Hajera lives in a large and poor family. Her father is illiterate and works as a laborer, finding work only during the summer months and remaining unemployed throughout the winter. Her mother, also illiterate, is a housewife with no source of income. One of Hajera’s brothers lives with disability, which has added significant financial and emotional pressure on the family. “There were times when we worried about how to afford food and basic needs,” Hajera says. “Watching my family struggle was very painful for me.” For many years, the family has lived under serious economic hardship.

### 2. Need for support

With no stable source of income and growing household responsibilities, Hajera and her family urgently needed livelihood support to escape long-term poverty. The household relied mainly on seasonal daily labor, which was unreliable and insufficient to cover essential expenses such as food, healthcare, and winter needs. “Some days we had work, and many days we had nothing,” her husband explains. “I was worried not only about today, but about tomorrow.” As a young woman with limited employment options, Hajera needed a home-based, practical livelihood opportunity that could provide income, dignity, and stability. Her father shares: “We did not want charity. We wanted an opportunity that would help us stand on our own feet.”

#### • **How the support improved her life**

After joining the mushroom cultivation program and receiving mushroom seeds and technical support, Hajera began mushroom farming at home. Through training and practice, she gradually learned how to cultivate, harvest, and sell mushrooms. “When I sold my first mushrooms and earned money with my own hands, I felt proud for the first time,” Hajera says. The income she earned allowed her to support household expenses, reduce financial stress, and save part of her earnings for the future. Her husband adds “Her income reduced our worries. Now we can plan our expenses better and feel more secure.”

#### • **Key takeaways (lessons learned)**

Hajera’s experience demonstrates that practical livelihood opportunities can empower women economically and psychologically. “This program gave me confidence and self-respect,” Hajera explains. “Now I believe women can stand on their own feet.”

- **Future plans**

Hajera plans to expand her mushroom cultivation activities by increasing production, improving techniques, and strengthening local market connections. “This is only the beginning for me,” Hajera says. “I want to grow more, earn more, and make sure my family is secure.” In the long term, she hopes to save enough income to manage emergencies, support her brother’s medical needs, and invest in sustainable income-generating activities. She shares, “Now I am getting closer hope. I am better future and planning for a larger store where I can expand my business to better deliver the service and make big income and support my family and many more families instead of worrying only about survival.”

### **3. Impact on family and community**

Hajera’s income has significantly reduced the financial pressure on her family and improved their living conditions. Her success has also inspired other women in the community to engage in similar livelihood activities. “Other women come to me and ask how they can start,” Hajera says. “That makes me very happy.” Her father proudly adds: “Hajera has become an example in our community. People now believe women can contribute economically.”

- **Achievements through this opportunity**

Through this opportunity, Hajera has achieved significant economic empowerment, strengthened her confidence, and improved her mental well-being. She now plays an active and respected role as a key financial supporter of her family, while also nurturing renewed hope for a brighter future. The support has not only enhanced her skills and income but also given her a sense of dignity and purpose in her household and community. “This opportunity has changed my life I can now provide for my family with pride and look forward to a future full of hope.”

#### **Her gratitude**

Hajera expresses her sincere appreciation to this program supporter for this chance to rebuild her life. “I am deeply thankful to the supporters and SSEOA for believing in me and giving me this opportunity. Without this support, I could not have helped my family or regained hope. This assistance did not just give us income it gave us dignity and a future.”

# Once in need, now dreams with future hope

## Story of Hajera

### 1. Individual Profile

**Name:** Hajera

**Age:** 24

**Role:** Mushroom Beneficiary

- **Background and experience**

Hajera is a 24-year-old young woman from Targani Village. After completing 12<sup>th</sup> grade, she enrolled in the Faculty of Agriculture and studied for 3 years with strong dedication and hope for a better future. However, the collapse of the government abruptly ended her academic journey, forcing her to leave university before completing her degree. “Leaving university was the most painful moment of my life. I felt my dreams disappear overnight,” Hajera recalls. Despite her educational background and willingness to work, the lack of employment opportunities and worsening economic conditions left her unemployed and uncertain about her future.

- **Family information**

Hajera lives in a large and poor family. Her father is illiterate and works as a laborer, finding work only during the summer months and remaining unemployed throughout the winter. Her mother, also illiterate, is a housewife with no source of income. One of Hajera’s brothers lives with disability, which has added significant financial and emotional pressure on the family. “There were times when we worried about how to afford food and basic needs,” Hajera says. “Watching my family struggle was very painful for me.” For many years, the family has lived under serious economic hardship.

### 2. Need for support

With no stable source of income and growing household responsibilities, Hajera and her family urgently needed livelihood support to escape long-term poverty. The household relied mainly on seasonal daily labor, which was unreliable and insufficient to cover essential expenses such as food, healthcare, and winter needs. “Some days we had work, and many days we had nothing,” her husband explains. “I was worried not only about today, but about tomorrow.” As a young woman with limited employment options, Hajera needed a home-based, practical livelihood opportunity that could provide income, dignity, and stability. Her father shares: “We did not want charity. We wanted an opportunity that would help us stand on our own feet.”

- **How the support improved her life**

After joining the mushroom cultivation program and receiving mushroom seeds and technical support, Hajera began mushroom farming at home. Through training and practice, she gradually learned how to cultivate, harvest, and sell mushrooms. “When I sold my first mushrooms and earned money with my own hands, I felt proud for the first time,” Hajera says. The income she earned allowed her to support household expenses, reduce financial stress, and save part of her earnings for the future. Her husband adds “Her income reduced our worries. Now we can plan our expenses better and feel more secure.”

- **Key takeaways (lessons learned)**

Hajera’s experience demonstrates that practical livelihood opportunities can empower women economically and psychologically. “This program gave me confidence and self-respect,” Hajera explains. “Now I believe women can stand on their own feet.”

- **Future plans**

Hajera plans to expand her mushroom cultivation activities by increasing production, improving techniques, and strengthening local market connections. “This is only the beginning for me,” Hajera says. “I want to grow more, earn more, and make sure my family is secure.” In the long term, she hopes to save enough income to manage emergencies, support her brother’s medical needs, and invest in sustainable income-generating activities. She shares, “Now I am getting closer hope. I am better future and planning for a larger store where I can expand my business to better deliver the service and make big income and support my family and many more families instead of worrying only about survival.”

### **3. Impact on family and community**

Hajera’s income has significantly reduced the financial pressure on her family and improved their living conditions. Her success has also inspired other women in the community to engage in similar livelihood activities. “Other women come to me and ask how they can start,” Hajera says. “That makes me very happy.” Her father proudly adds: “Hajera has become an example in our community. People now believe women can contribute economically.”

- **Achievements through this opportunity**

Through this opportunity, Hajera has achieved significant economic empowerment, strengthened her confidence, and improved her mental well-being. She now plays an active and respected role as a key financial supporter of her family, while also nurturing renewed hope for a brighter future. The support has not only enhanced her skills and income but also given her a sense of dignity and purpose in her household and community. “This opportunity has changed my life I can now provide for my family with pride and look forward to a future full of hope.”

#### **Her gratitude**

Hajera expresses her sincere appreciation to this program supporter for this chance to rebuild her life. “I am deeply thankful to the supporters and SSEOA for believing in me and giving me this opportunity. Without this support, I could not have helped my family or regained hope. This assistance did not just give us income it gave us dignity and a future.”

## **Hajia's Story**

### **From Struggles at Home to Hope and Independence**

#### **Background and Experience**

Hajia is a 23-year-old woman from the farming village of Etarchi, a community known for livestock and agriculture. Since childhood, she worked alongside her parents, helping with household chores and animal care. But like many families in her village, her family only knew traditional, limited methods of dairy processing. “We used milk only in the old ways—mostly for tea or a simple dish. Much of it spoiled, and we could not sell anything in the market,” Hajia recalls. As a child, she dreamed of becoming a doctor. But when schools closed in her area, she lost her chance for education and with it, much of her hope. The uncertainty of her future left her anxious and discouraged. “I used to be sad and cry at night, wondering what would happen to me. Without education, I felt my future was finished,” she says quietly.

#### **Family Information**

Hajia lives with her family of six members. Her father passed away after a stroke, leaving her brother as the only breadwinner. Their main source of income comes from farming and raising animals, but expenses often outweigh earnings. Her brother explains: “I was the only one bringing income. It was heavy on me, but we had no choice. Sometimes I wished there was another way my sisters could also contribute.”

#### **Why Did She Need Support?**

Although the family owned a dairy cow, they had no knowledge of how to turn milk into other products or how to preserve it for sale. A lot of milk went to waste, and there was no extra income to cover basic needs. “I wanted to help my brother, but I didn’t know how. All I knew was the milk we used at home,” Hajia says.

#### **Struggles Before Assistance**

For nearly five years, Hajia’s family struggled without access to training or new opportunities. During this time, Hajia was mostly confined to her home, with no path for personal growth. When the dairy program was introduced to her village, many women, including Hajia, eagerly joined. It was the first time in years that she felt a door opening for her. “When I heard there would be training for women, I told myself—this is my chance. I must not lose it,” she remembers with determination.

#### **How the Program Changed Her Life**

After completing a 7-day training and receiving equipment, Hajia learned how to produce yogurt, qurut (dried yogurt), cheese, buttermilk, and cream. Her family noticed the changes immediately. Her mother proudly shares: “Now the milk doesn’t go to waste. We eat healthier, and Hajia sells the rest. I never thought my daughter could become the one supporting us like this.” With her new skills, Hajia began selling her products in the local market, creating a steady source of income. She not only improved her family’s financial

stability but also became a source of encouragement for other women. “When I sold my first batch of yogurt in the bazaar, I felt like I had wings. For the first time, I saw myself as independent,” Hajia beams.

### **Achievements Through This Opportunity**

- Built a sustainable source of income through dairy sales.
- Improved her family’s financial situation.
- Gained confidence and became actively involved in village economic life.
- Reduced dependence on male family members.

Her brother now proudly says: “Before, I carried the family burden alone. Now, my sister stands beside me. She is my partner, not just my sister.”

### **Hajia’s Reflection**

“Before, I thought milk was only for tea. Now I know it can change lives. This program gave me hope, income, and independence. Today I can sit in community meetings and share my ideas with confidence. I want to help other women who never had the chance to study or work—so they too can change their lives.” She express her gratitude to the project’s provider and supporter, “Thanks from your kindness and generous support that you helped us in such condition.” And she suggest, “If only this program could extend in this area or other areas because there are hundreds of families that have skills but have no facilities and support to start any business.”

### **Hajira’s Photograph**



## Once poor producer now distinctive improver

### Zarmina dairy producer's success story

#### 1. Individual Profile

**Name:** Zarmina

**Age:** 40

**Role:** Dairy processing beneficiary

- **Background and experience**

Zarmina is a 40-year-old woman with many years of informal experience in handling milk and producing traditional dairy products at the household level. Before receiving support from SSEOA, she worked from home with very limited tools and knowledge, producing small quantities of yogurt and butter mainly for family consumption and occasional local sales. Due to the lack of proper equipment, training, and market access, her income from dairy activities remained very low and unstable. "I worked every day, but my effort was only enough for survival, not for progress."

- **Family information**

Zarmina is married and a mother of 5 children. Her family depended mainly on daily labor and small livestock for income. The household faced ongoing financial difficulties, especially in covering food, healthcare, and education expenses for the children.

#### 2. Need for support

- **Why did she need support?**

To improve the quality of her dairy products, increase production capacity, and secure a reliable and dignified source of income for her family, Zarmina required technical guidance and professional training in hygienic dairy processing. She also needed basic dairy-processing equipment to move beyond household-level production, along with financial management support to better plan costs, pricing, and savings. Without these essential inputs, her efforts remained limited and her income uncertain. "I was working with all my strength, but without training and proper tools, my work could not grow or support my family the way I hoped.

- **How long had she been struggling without assistance?**

For more than ten years, Zarmina struggled to sustain her livelihood using only traditional methods and personal experience, without access to professional training, modern equipment, or institutional support. Despite her commitment and hard work, she was unable to transform her skills into a stable source of income.

- **Why was support important for her?**

The support was crucial in helping Zarmina transform her existing skills into a sustainable livelihood. It enabled her to improve her household income and strengthened her role in supporting her family with dignity and confidence.

#### 3. Impact of the experience

Through the support received, Zarmina gained practical training in hygienic dairy processing, quality control, and basic business management. She was provided with essential equipment, which allowed her to increase production and sell good-quality dairy products in the local market. As a result, her income increased significantly and became more stable. "Now my products are trusted, and my work is respected in the market."

- **How did this experience improve her life?**

This experience improved Zarmina's life by giving her a reliable source of income and new skills that increased her confidence. She is now able to contribute more effectively to her family's needs and plan for the future with greater security. "Today, I work with confidence, knowing my effort has real value."

- **What are the main takeaways from her story?**

Zarmina's story shows that skills development combined with proper equipment can create sustainable livelihoods. It also highlights that women's economic empowerment directly improves family well-being and that small-scale dairy processing can become a reliable income source when adequate support is provided.

- **What are her future plans?**

Zarmina plans to expand her dairy processing unit and diversify her products by producing cheese and flavored yogurt. She also hopes to access nearby markets and share her knowledge by training other women in her community and neighboring villages. "I want to expand on my dairy products and establishing a site where my sons can work and make some income through this business. Besides I want to establish a training center where I can train other women to learn basic knowledge about dairy and grow, just like I did."

- **How did this impact her family or community?**

Zarmina's increased income has improved her family's living conditions and enabled her children to attend school regularly. In her community, she has become a role model for other women who are interested in income-generating activities. "When my children go to school without worry, I feel proud as a mother."

- **What has the individual achieved through this opportunity?**

Through this opportunity, Zarmina has secured a stable income, improved her dairy-processing skills, and gained confidence. She now plays a stronger role in household decision-making and contributes actively to her family's economic stability. "Today, I earn not only an income with dignity but also valuable skills and technical expertise that help me build a better future for my family."

### **Zarmina's words and appreciation**

"Before, my work was only enough to survive. Now, it allows me to dream and build a better future for my children." She states. And she appreciate the support, "Thanks a lot for this generous support and for giving me the chance to change my family's life and meet our needs with confidence."

**Zarmina's photograph is added below**



## Bibi Hawa, A mushroom beneficiary

### Once an ordinary woman now an entrepreneur

Bibi Hawa's life changed forever the day her husband died. Overnight, she became the sole provider for her five children the eldest child is only ten, the youngest is still a baby. With no land, no savings, and no steady income, in a house owning 2 rooms, her small two-room home became both a shelter and a daily reminder of struggle. One room was for her and the children to sleep side by side, the other a damp storage space. Even their loyal dog—ironically named Mushroom by the children stood guard outside as if sharing in their hardships.

“I was desperate,” she remembers. “Every night I wondered how I would feed my children. Every morning, I looked at their faces and feared the future.” When SSEOA announced the selection of beneficiaries for mushroom cultivation training, Bibi Hawa stepped forward. It was not just curiosity it was a mother's resolve to find a way. She was accepted and, during a 3-day training, learned everything about mushroom cultivation: preparation, care, harvesting, and marketing. For her, this was more than a skill. “It was the first time I felt I could change my situation with my own hands,” she says.

Motivated, she returned home and made a bold decision subsequent to the training: as part of the project she decided to partition her tiny living space half for her children, half for mushroom production. It was cramped and uncomfortable, but it was her only chance. She followed the techniques she had learned, and within weeks mushrooms began to grow. Her first harvest was small, but it sold quickly at the local market. Week after week, she continued, and soon she was earning around 200 Afghani (about 3.3 USD) regularly. This small but steady income brought food to the table, medicine for the children, and a sense of dignity that hardship had once stolen.

Her children, once worried about the future, now help her care for the mushroom bags. Even their dog, Mushroom, seems to guard the little enterprise with pride. Bibi Hawa did not stop at her own success. Inspired by the opportunity, she began teaching others in her community. So far, she has been training 30 women and girls in her village to cultivate mushrooms, giving them the same hope she once received. “I used to live in fear,” she says. “But now I feel stronger. Mushrooms gave me courage.”

With determination in her voice, she adds: “There are so many women like me, living in poverty and struggling without choices. But if we are given materials, a small budget, and proper facilities along with training, we can change our lives. We can feed our children, stand on our own feet, and build a better future. This is not just about me, it is about dozens of families in my village who can find hope through this small idea.”





# From no means to cow ownership

Story of success of...

Nazera, a cow recipient woman

## 1. Individual profile

**Name:** Nazera

**Age:** 44

**Role:** Cow recipient

### • Background and experience

Nazera is a 44-year-old rural woman live in Etarchi village in Faizabad district of Badakhshan province who has been involved in home-based activities and small livestock management. Before receiving support, she had basic experience in animal care and lacked sufficient resources, improved breeds, and technical knowledge to expand her livestock activities and generate sustainable income.

### • Family information

Nazera is married and lives with her husband and four children. Her family primarily depended on small-scale farming, which was not enough to meet their basic needs.

## 2. Need for support

### • Why did she need support?

since she was in dire need for assistance to improve household income, ensure food security, and advance her livestock activities. Receiving a cow and related support would help her produce milk for her family and for local sale, creating a pathway to economic stability. “I knew that ownership of livestock such as sheep, goat or a cow could change our lives, but I didn’t have the means or knowledge to make it happen.”

### • How long had she been struggling without assistance?

She had been struggling for more than five years without any formal assistance or access to livestock development support.

### • Why was support important for her?

to help improve milk production, increase income, and reduce her family’s vulnerability to poverty The support was crucial. She shares, “With proper support, my small efforts could finally turn into a stable income and hope for my children.”

## 3. Impact of the experience

### • How did this experience improve her life?

Receiving the cow has significantly improved Nazera’s livelihood. She now produces milk daily, which she uses both for family consumption and for sale in the dairy processing unit established by SSEOA in her village. Her family’s nutrition has improved, and she can contribute steadily to household income. “as we received the cow so it changed our life. I now have milk for my children, and I can sell extra to support my family.”

### • Key lessons from her story

1. Distribution of cow support can greatly improve rural livelihoods.
2. Women can successfully manage income-generating activities when given proper resources and guidance.

- **Future plans**

Nazera plans to expand her livestock activities by saving income to purchase another cow. She is improving feeding and care practices for her current cow and calf. Once her calf grows bigger, she plans to sell it and reinvest in purchasing a new cow, gradually building a sustainable family business. “I want to grow my herd and create a small business that can support my family for years to come.”

- **Impact on family and community**

Her family now enjoys better nutrition and access to dairy products. Her increased income has improved household stability and her children’s well-being. In the community, Nazera has become a role model for other women interested in income-generating activities and livestock management. “Seeing my success, other women in the village are inspired to work hard and believe in themselves.”

- **Achievements through this opportunity**

Through this opportunity, Nazera has secured a stable source of income, gained confidence, and improved her family’s living conditions. She now has the knowledge, resources, and motivation to grow her livestock activities into a small family business. “This support changed my life. Now I can support my family, provide milk for my children, and feel hopeful about the future. It has become a business for me and my family.”

**Appreciation and request:**

The support Nazera received has made a significant difference in her life, and she expresses her heartfelt gratitude to the program’s sponsor, “I personally thank you so much for this act of kindness and humanity. Because of your support, I am now able to support myself and my family.” She also shares a hopeful request for the future, “If similar support is provided to us and other women in this area, it will help us a great deal and empower more families like mine.”

## **Nazera’s photograph**



# Story of Mohaseba

## A mother with her basic and big hopes

In the faraway village of Eitarchi in Faizabad district, most families survive through livestock and farming, always at the mercy of harsh winters and uncertain harvests. A 21-year-old woman carries a quiet strength that hides years of disappointment and struggle. She completed her schooling up to grade 12 and dreamed of becoming a teacher. But after the regime change, those dreams were shattered overnight. The schools closed for women, and she found herself trapped at home, watching time pass by. Without an official certificate, finding work was impossible.

“There were days I woke up with no reason to get out of bed,” she recalls. “I felt invisible, like my life had stopped. I didn’t know if I would ever be able to do anything meaningful.” She lives in a large family of 16 people her parents, brothers, sisters, and her brothers’ wives all depending on livestock and farming for survival. With no stable income and rising prices, every day was a struggle. But three months ago, hope returned in the most unexpected way. The SSEOA, with the generous support of its donor, launched a program to help unemployed women in her village. They provided dairy cows and the necessary feed and materials, giving women a real chance to start earning for themselves. “When they came and explained the program, I couldn’t believe it was real,” she says, smiling through tears. “For the first time in months, I felt like I could dream again. I am so thankful to SSEOA and the donors who believed in women like me. You have changed my life.” She continues, “I wake up every day excited to work, to take care of the cows, and to see the milk I produce. This is not just income it is hope, dignity, and independence for me and my family. I will always be grateful to those who made this possible.”

When Mohaseba learned that she had been selected to receive a cow, she could not believe it. She describes that day as “a good light entered my home again.” “When I saw the cow standing in front of me, I felt my heart fill with hope. I told myself, maybe this is how my life begins again.” Since then, Mohaseba has devoted herself to caring for her cow every single day. The milk she collects around six liters daily brings not just income but dignity. It helps her family buy food and essentials, and more importantly, it reminds her that she can make a difference. “Before this, I felt forgotten,” she says. “But now, every morning when I milk my cow, I feel alive. I feel proud to be someone who can work, earn, and help my family.” Her eyes brighten as she speaks about her plans to one day save enough money to buy another cow to build something lasting from what began as a single act of

kindness. With deep gratitude, Mohaseba adds: “I want to thank the SSEOA and all the generous supporters and sponsors behind this program. You didn’t just give me a cow you gave me hope, purpose, and the courage to believe in my future again. May you be rewarded for changing the lives of women like me who had lost everything, even their dreams.”



## Story of an Etarchi's Mother

### From zero income life to financial independence

Saida daughter of Mohammad Amir, a resident of Eitarchi village, is 26 years old. At 17, she became engaged to Ahmadullah and later married him. Saida completed grade twelve and spent 7 years living in her husband's home. During that time, she became a mother to 2 children: a 7-year-old son and a 4-year-old daughter. Life took a sudden and painful turn when her husband went to Iran for work. Four years later, he abruptly decided to divorce her, taking their children with him and sending Saida back to her father's house. Heartbroken and overwhelmed with sorrow, Saida returned to her family home and has been living there for the past three years, grappling with the loss of her children and the life she once knew.

"The hardest days were when I would wake up and remember my children were not with me," she recalls. "I felt lost and hopeless, and sometimes I thought I could not go on." The separation, coupled with economic struggles and emotional strain, took a heavy toll on her mental health. Saida suffered sudden attacks that caused her to lose consciousness for hours, forcing family members to constantly watch over her to prevent accidents. She narrowly escaped danger several times—almost being hit by a car, and once falling into a river, though she was rescued in time.

Without financial resources or income, Saida depended entirely on her family. She sometimes asked her father for money, but it was not always available. During these darkest moments, feeling helpless and hopeless, she even contemplated ending her life—but fate had other plans. One day, hope appeared in the form of SSEOA, whose staff had come to the village offering women's empowerment programs in livestock keeping and dairy processing. Saida shared her struggles and expressed her interest in dairy production to the community representative. After a careful evaluation, she was selected to join the program.

Through SSEOA's support and guidance, Saida, along with 4 other women, began working at a dairy production and processing center. They received a 7-day intensive training covering every step of dairy production, from preparation to marketing. The project office also provided them with a proper essential equipment, and funds to buy raw materials. Every day, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., the women worked together to produce high-quality dairy products for the market.

"This training gave me hope," Saida says. "For the first time in years, I felt I could take control of my life and provide for my children. I knew I could do something meaningful." This opportunity transformed Saida's life. Her mental health gradually improved, she regained stability, and she became independent, no longer reliant on her family. Today, she earns a steady income and plays an active role as a financial supporter of her household, sharing in family expenses and responsibilities. "I am proud that I can now help my family," she shares with a smile. "I am no longer just surviving; I am building a life for myself and my

children.”

Saida’s aspirations have grown alongside her confidence. She dreams of creating employment opportunities for herself and for other women facing similar hardships in neighboring villages and districts, helping them achieve independence and a better future. She also hopes to continue her education. “If I am given more support, materials, and facilities, I could teach more women and change even more lives,” she says. She Thanks the SSEOA and this program sponsor, “I and my family thank you for this act of kindness and supportive program that helped me and my children which will open ways to make money.” And now Saida has become a beacon of hope and an inspiring role model for the women in her community.



# A Small Start, A Big Change

## Saleha's Mushroom Cultivation story

### 1. Individual Profile

**Name:** Saleha      **Age:** 30      **Gender:** Female      **Role:** Mushroom cultivator

- **Background and Experience:**

Saleha, A women who grew up in Shorabak, one of Faizabad's most remote and underserved villages. She successfully completed 14 grades of education which is something few women in her village can achieve. However, despite her education, life offered her very few opportunities. She says, "I always believed my education would open a door for me, but for years every door stayed shut. It was one of the hardest feelings of my life." For years, she remained at home, unable to find a job or use her skills.

- **Family Information:**

Saleha lives in a family of 12 members. Her father is elderly and unable to work, her mother is an illiterate homemaker, and only one brother earns a small income as a taxi driver. The family constantly struggled to meet daily needs.

### 2. Need for Support

- **Why did this individual need support?**

Although she was educated, unemployment left her dependent on her family, capable yet without opportunity, and hopeful but gradually losing confidence. As she explained, "I felt stuck for years. I had education but no chance to use it. I needed something that could bring me back into life again."

- **How long had they been struggling without assistance?**

She had been struggling for several years with unemployment, emotional isolation, and financial pressure.

- **Why was support important for them?**

This support was vital, helping her regain confidence, learn new skills, and provide for her family, while giving hope for a secure future. As she explains, "This assistance came at a time when I felt forgotten. I needed something that could remind me that my life still has value, that I can still stand on my own and help my family. This program became that lifeline for me."

### 3. Impact of the Experience

- **How did this experience improve their life?**

The mushroom cultivation training revitalized Saleha's life, equipping her with practical skills, giving her a steady income, lifting her out of depression, and helping her reconnect with other women through collaborative work. As she shared, "This program not only gave me training, but it also gave me a reason to wake up with hope every morning." She added, "Now, because of this program, my sister helps me with the mushroom work. It has brought us closer and made me feel truly supported."

- **What are the main takeaways from their story?**

- When women gain skills, they gain power.
- Small opportunities can spark major transformations.
- Group-based learning builds solidarity and reduces isolation.

- **What are their future plans?**

Saleha hopes to scale up her mushroom production and eventually train other women in her community. She states that, "My dream is to grow more mushrooms and someday teach other women too, so they can stand on their own feet just like I did."

- **How did this impact their family or community?**

Her income now supports family needs, her increased confidence uplifts the household atmosphere, and her success has sparked inspiration among other women in the village. As she said that, "When people in my village see what I achieved, they say it gives them hope. Even my family looks at me differently now with pride."

- **What has the individual achieved through this opportunity?**

Saleha has achieved economic independence, emotional healing, valuable agricultural skills, and a renewed sense of purpose. She shares, "This program didn't just teach me mushroom cultivation it brought confidence, income, friendship, and a new life. I finally feel like a woman who can build her own future."





---

## Rayhana's Story

### Courage in the Face of Hardship

---

In the remote village of Torgani, Faizabad district, Badakhshan province, life was harsh, and childhood for Rayhana was filled with responsibilities no child should bear. Her father had passed away when she was still young, leaving the family without guidance. Her mother was disabled and unable to walk or work, relying entirely on Rayhana and her siblings for daily care. Rayhana's younger brother and sister were too small to do much at home, but her brother helped her by going to the near the local market to collect dirty clothes from neighbors, which they would wash for a small fee. Every morning before sunrise, Rayhana and her brother worked tirelessly. Rayhana scrubbed, rinsed, and wrung each piece of clothing by hand, sometimes cutting her fingers on the rough fabrics. They earned only 20 Afghani per piece, barely enough to buy a few eggs or a small loaf of bread. Nights were long and difficult. Hunger gnawed at their bellies, and Rayhana often stayed awake listening to her mother cough or sigh, wondering how she would feed her siblings tomorrow. One day, life began to change when SSEOA conducted a beneficiary selection process in her area.

Rayhana was selected to participate in a 3-day mushroom cultivation training, where she learned step by step how to grow, care for, and harvest mushrooms. At the end of the training, she received a complete mushroom cultivation kit, including basic tools, giving her the resources to start her own small enterprise. With determination and hope, Rayhana began her first harvest. She cared for the mushrooms carefully, checking them every day, and prayed they would grow. Her first harvest brought her around 3,000 Afghani ( 44 USD), a small fortune compared to her previous income. Over three cycles, she earned around 9,000 Afghani (132 USD), enough to buy food, medicine, and small necessities for her family. Her younger brother continued helping by carrying the baskets of harvested mushrooms to the local market, and for the first time in years, the house was filled with laughter and relief.

Reflecting on her journey, Rayhana says, "If it weren't for mushrooms and the support from SSEOA, I don't know where we would be. Some nights I stayed awake worrying if my siblings would go hungry. Now, I can sleep knowing they are fed and safe." Despite the challenges that remain, Rayhana dreams bigger. She hopes to expand her mushroom business, learn advanced cultivation techniques, and support other women in her village who, like her, struggle quietly every day. Her story is a testament to resilience, courage, and the quiet hope that even in the hardest times, one small opportunity can transform a life.



# Market Assessment Report

For Women's Livelihood Project (WLP)  
Faizabad, Badakhshan.

Supported by:



Central Asia Institute

PREPARED BY :  
SSEOA  
MAY- 2025

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Executive Summary</b> .....	4
<b>2. Introduction</b> .....	9
<b>Objectives:</b> .....	9
<b>3. Details on the Methodology Adopted.</b> .....	11
<b>3.1. Research Design</b> .....	11
Phase 1 (Qualitative)::.....	11
Phase 2 (Quantitative):.....	11
<b>3.2 Team &amp; Training</b> .....	12
<b>3.3 Data Collection Tools</b> .....	12
<b>4. Key Findings</b> .....	13
<b>4.1. Qualitative Survey Findings (KII Based)</b> .....	13
<b>Ranked Sectors (Top to bottom):</b> .....	14
<b>Ranked Skills:</b> .....	14
<b>4.2. Qualitative Survey Findings (KII Based):</b> .....	15
<b>Detailed Table of Finalized Sectors and Skills</b> .....	15
<b>Selection Rationale</b> .....	16
<b>4.3. Quantitative Survey Findings (Questionnaires)</b> .....	17
<b>Key Findings from Data Analysis of Age Group 20-49 Yrs.</b> .....	23
<b>Summary:</b> .....	24
<b>5. Analysis &amp; Discussion</b> .....	25
Comparative Analysis: Qualitative vs. Quantitative Findings .....	25
Comparative Table: Ranked Sectors and Skills from FGDs, KIIs, and Questionnaire .....	26
Key Observations:.....	27
Top Common Skills .....	29
Top Training Needs .....	29
Skills Gap Analysis.....	30
<b>Link findings to economic opportunities for women</b> .....	35
<b>6. Recommendations</b> .....	36
1. <b>Support for Women-led Businesses:</b> .....	36
2. <b>Infrastructure Development:</b> .....	36
3. <b>Policy Framework for Microfinance:</b> .....	36
4. <b>Market Linkage Programs:</b> .....	36
5. <b>Address Socio-cultural Barriers:</b> .....	36

<b>7. Conclusion</b> .....	38
<b>8. Annex and Appendices</b> .....	40
<b>Annex: Case Study – Female-Run Photo Studio in Faizabad, Badakhshan</b> .....	44

## **Preface**

This report presents the findings of a Market Assessment conducted by the Shining Star Educational Organization of Afghanistan (SSEOA), in Faizabad District of Badakshan Province. The purpose of this assessment is to understand the current market dynamics, identify gaps and opportunities, and provide actionable insights that can inform programmatic interventions aimed at supporting livelihoods and vocational training initiatives.

The assessment specifically focuses on understanding labor market trends, existing demands, and skill gaps within the target regions. The study's methodology combined desk research, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews to ensure that the analysis reflects the perspectives of both market actors and beneficiaries.

This report is part of our continued efforts to enhance evidence-based programming and contribute meaningfully to Afghanistan's economic recovery and community resilience.

Program and Research Team,

SSEOA.

KHARKA Ravi, Director Programs,  
PhD Research Scholar, Uttarakhand Open University (India)

## **Acknowledgement**

On behalf of the Shining Star Educational Organization of Afghanistan (SSEOA), I am honored to extend my sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to the successful completion of this Market Assessment Report in Faizabad, Badakhshan.

This important piece of work was made possible through the generous support and collaboration of Central Asia Institute (CAI), our core developmental partner. We deeply appreciate their unwavering commitment to advancing community-led development and empowering women across Afghanistan.

I would also like to acknowledge the exceptional efforts of our colleagues, particularly Mr. Pardes Wayand, whose technical guidance and tireless contributions were critical throughout the design and implementation phases of this assessment. Their expertise ensured that the process remained evidence-based and responsive to local realities.

A special note of appreciation goes to our dedicated Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) team, whose professionalism and rigorous fieldwork formed the backbone of this study. Their work in data collection, validation, and analysis was both commendable and essential to the report's quality and credibility.

Finally, I extend heartfelt thanks to the women and community members of Faizabad who graciously shared their time, experiences, and insights. Their voices are central to this report and will continue to shape our efforts in promoting inclusive and sustainable livelihoods.

We hope the findings of this assessment will inform impactful programming and foster stronger partnerships for the economic empowerment of women in Afghanistan.

**Niamatullah Rahi**

**Executive Director.**

**Shining Star Educational Organization of Afghanistan (SSEOA)**

## 1. Executive Summary

In **Faizabad, Badakhshan**, women and girls face significant barriers to economic participation, including limited access to skills training, market opportunities, and financial resources. To address these challenges, this **market assessment** was conducted to identify viable livelihood sectors and in-demand skills that align with local market needs, cultural context, and women's capabilities.

This market assessment was conducted in Faizabad, Badakhshan, to identify the economic challenges faced by women and girls in the region, including limited access to skills training, culturally sensitive market opportunities, and financial resources. The primary purpose was to identify viable livelihood sectors and in-demand skills that align with local market needs while considering cultural appropriateness and women's capabilities. Specifically, the study aimed to identify high-potential income-generating sectors, map existing skills and gaps among women entrepreneurs and job seekers, understand current market demands for goods and services, and provide evidence-based recommendations for vocational training programs and entrepreneurship support initiatives. By focusing on sustainable and scalable opportunities, the assessment sought to promote long-term economic empowerment for women in the region.

The assessment covered urban and peri-urban areas of Faizabad, targeting women and girls seeking employment or business opportunities, existing female-led enterprises such as tailoring shops and poultry farms, and key stakeholders including NGOs, government agencies, and private sector actors. It examined multiple sectors, including agriculture, textiles, food processing, beauty services, hospitality, and emerging areas like e-commerce.

The methodology adopted consist a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative surveys will sample 378 women (actual 408 women), using stratified random sampling for diverse representation. Qualitative data will be gathered through six focus group discussions and ten key informant interviews, exploring cultural norms, business challenges, and skill needs.

These discussions explored challenges, opportunities, and skill gaps in women-led businesses and prospective. The quantitative phase involved a structured 33-question survey administered to 408 women and girls, including unemployed individuals, existing entrepreneurs, and market-

savvy participants. Twelve trained enumerators conducted face-to-face interviews to quantify skill demands, sector preferences, and business constraints.

Key stakeholders engaged in the process included female entrepreneurs, local business associations such as handicraft cooperatives and agriculture groups, and government and NGO representatives who provided insights into policy and programmatic interventions. The findings from this assessment will inform the design of gender-sensitive vocational training programs, guide microfinance and startup grant allocations, strengthen market linkages for women producers, and advocate for policy improvements in women's economic empowerment.

Analysis of the **KII** data reveals a strong correlation between identified sectors and mentioned skills. **Agriculture** (including specialized areas like mushroom and saffron cultivation) and **Food Processing** emerge as prominent sectors, aligning with skills in preservation, packaging, and cooking. **Handicrafts** and **Textiles** are also significant, linked to embroidery, tailoring, and weaving. **Beauty Services** and **Local Restaurants** show a direct tie to relevant vocational skills. Digital literacy and management skills cut across various sectors, indicating their broad importance for entrepreneurship. This suggests a landscape where traditional skills in agriculture and crafts are complemented by growing needs in service and digital domains.

Analysis of the **FGD** data identifies Handicrafts & Textiles and Tailoring as top sectors, closely linked to the prominent skill of Embroidery & Tailoring. Agriculture and related Dairy Production, alongside Food & Beverage and Food Processing, signify strong agro-based economic activities, supported by skills in processing and animal husbandry. Service sectors like Hairdressing & Beauty Services and Hospitality & Catering also feature prominently. Essential business skills like Sales & Marketing and Financial Management are recognized across sectors, highlighting their foundational importance for entrepreneurial success.

The analysis of 408 women respondents reveals a dualistic economic landscape, characterized by both traditional and modern skill sets, and facing significant challenges. A substantial portion of respondents possesses traditional skills such as cooking (13.48%), handicrafts (8.33%), and tailoring (5.88%), indicating a strong foundation in cultural practices that can be leveraged for economic activity. Simultaneously, a notable segment has acquired specialized competencies, including mushroom cultivation (7.11%), confectionery (4.41%), and dairy production (3.68%),

demonstrating an adaptive capacity towards potentially higher-value agricultural and food-related sectors.

However, the prevalence of home-based businesses, accounting for 78% (358) of respondents, coupled with the limited availability of dedicated workspaces (workshops at 8% and centers at 4%), suggests a constrained operational environment. This spatial limitation, combined with the fact that 81% of respondents anticipate monthly earnings of \$100 or less, points towards a potentially large informal sector characterized by low income and challenges in scaling up operations.

A near-universal 99% (402) of respondents express a need for microfinance support, and 65% (395) identify "lack of finance" as a primary obstacle to starting a business. This underscores a critical capital deficit, further compounded by challenges related to skills (14%) and cultural/family restrictions (14%). The demand for "financial assistance" (31%, 353), "marketing support" (16%, 181), and "safe workspace" (15%, 177) highlights the multifaceted nature of the support required.

Community needs are oriented towards agriculture (20%) and dairy (19%), but there is also a demand for clothing/handicrafts (16%). Women are seen to have feasible business opportunities in embroidery (14%) and home-made food (11%).

In conclusion, while the women demonstrate a range of skills and are actively engaged in or aspire to start businesses, their progress is impeded by financial constraints, limited access to suitable workspaces, and a need for more comprehensive support systems, including financial assistance, training, and market access. Addressing these challenges through targeted interventions is crucial for unlocking their full economic potential and fostering sustainable growth.

## 2. Introduction

**Background:** In Badakhshan province, where traditional gender norms and economic constraints limit women's participation in the workforce, this assessment was conducted to systematically identify viable economic opportunities for female empowerment. Faizabad's unique market dynamics - combining agricultural traditions with emerging service sectors - present both challenges and untapped potential for women's livelihoods. The study responds to the critical need for gender-inclusive economic development strategies in northeastern Afghanistan, where sustainable income generation for women can significantly impact household welfare and community resilience. With limited formal employment options, most women rely on home-based production or informal trade, making it essential to identify sectors that align with cultural acceptability while offering growth potential.

### Objectives:

- Identify key market sectors and skills for females.
- Understand challenges and opportunities.
- Provide data-driven recommendations.

### Demographic Overview and Justification of Sample Size – Faizabad, Badakhshan

Faizabad, the capital city of Badakhshan province, serves as a socio-economic and administrative hub for northeastern Afghanistan. The district has an estimated population of approximately **130,000 to 150,000**, with a significant proportion residing in peri-urban and semi-rural communities. Women and girls constitute nearly **50%** of the population, though their participation in the formal labor market remains limited due to cultural norms, restricted mobility, and limited access to education and vocational opportunities.

The population is predominantly young, with a large segment falling within the **15–35 age range**, which represents the most economically active demographic. Literacy rates for women, while improving in urban areas, still lag behind national averages, especially in remote neighborhoods. The majority of women in Faizabad engage in home-based informal labor or small-scale businesses in traditional sectors such as textiles, food production, and agriculture.

Given this context, the assessment employed a **sample size of 408 women**, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across various age groups, marital statuses, education levels, and occupational categories (e.g., unemployed, self-employed, job seekers, and skilled workers). This sample is statistically valid for a population of up to 150,000 at a **95% confidence level** with a **5% margin of error**, ensuring both reliability and generalizability of the findings within the Faizabad context.



The survey further captured voices from diverse socio-economic segments, including married and unmarried women, women with formal education, as well as those from marginalized communities. This comprehensive demographic representation strengthens the credibility of the study and enables the formulation of inclusive, evidence-based recommendations.

### 3. Details on the Methodology Adopted.

#### 3.1. Research Design

The assessment employed a sophisticated mixed-method approach to ensure depth and breadth in understanding women's livelihood opportunities in Faizabad. Phase 1 focused on qualitative insights through six focus group discussions with 60 women and 10 key informant interviews involving entrepreneurs, sector experts, and government officials. Phase 2 validated findings with a 33-question survey administered to 400 women across 10+ sectors, analysing skills, market demands, startup costs, and barriers. This integrative methodology provided nuanced and actionable insights.

The assessment adopted a **mixed-method approach**, integrating qualitative and quantitative data to ensure comprehensive insights.

#### **Phase 1 (Qualitative): Explored lived experiences, challenges, and sectoral opportunities through:**

- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):**
  - Conducted **6 FGDs with 10 participants each** (total **60 women**), ensuring representation across age groups, literacy levels, and business experience.
  - Participants included female entrepreneurs (e.g., tailors, beekeepers, bakery owners) and job seekers from rural/urban Faizabad.
- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):**
  - **10 KIIs with 12 respondents** (1–2 participants per session), including:
    - Business owners (e.g., poultry farms, handicraft cooperatives).
    - Sector experts (agriculture officers, NGO representatives).
    - Local government officials (Department of Women's Affairs).

#### **Phase 2 (Quantitative): Validated qualitative findings through:**

- A **33-question survey** administered to **400 individuals**, targeting:
  - Women already engaged in income-generating activities (60%).
  - Unemployed women seeking opportunities (40%).
- **Sectors/Skills Covered:** 10+ prioritized sectors (e.g., agriculture, textiles, e-commerce), with questions on:
  - Existing skills, market demand, startup costs, and perceived barriers.

---

### 3.2 Team & Training

To ensure data quality, a rigorous recruitment and training process was implemented:

- **Qualitative Team:**
    - **Recruitment:** 12 candidates interviewed; **4 selected** based on experience in gender-sensitive data collection and local language proficiency (Dari).
    - **Training:**
      - **1-day intensive training** on FGD/KII facilitation, ethical guidelines (consent, confidentiality), and note-taking.
      - **Pilot testing:** Conducted mock FGDs/ KIIs (1 day) to refine tools and techniques.
  - **Quantitative Team:**
    - **12 enumerators** hired (100% female to ensure respondent comfort), with criteria including:
      - Prior survey experience, familiarity with Badakhshan’s districts.
    - **Training:**
      - **1-day workshop** covering questionnaire administration, data recording, and ethical protocols.
- 

### 3.3 Data Collection Tools

Standardized tools were developed and pretested:

- **Qualitative Tools:**
  - **FGD Guides:** Semi-structured questions on sector opportunities, skill gaps, and cultural barriers.
  - **KII Guides:** Tailored for stakeholders (e.g., NGOs: "What support do women need to scale businesses?").
- **Quantitative Tool:**
  - **Structured Questionnaire:**
    - **Demographics:** Age, education, marital status.
    - **Skills/Sectors:** Ranking of preferred trades, training needs.
    - **Challenges:** Access to capital, markets, social restrictions.

## 4. Key Findings

### 4.1. Qualitative Survey Findings (KII Based)

Major Sector	Allied Skills	Sub-sectors	Count*/ Occurrence	Remarks
<b>Agriculture</b>	Saffron cultivation, mushroom farming, livestock management, herb gardening	Greenhouse farming, dried fruit processing	9	High potential for sustainable livelihood; integrates traditional practices.
<b>Handicrafts &amp; Textiles</b>	Embroidery (Khamak Dozi, Mure Dozi), tailoring, jewelry making, rug weaving	Textile production, lapis lazuli carving	8	Significant cultural and export value; supports artisanal heritage.
<b>Food Processing &amp; Production</b>	Baking, confectionery, pickle making, food preservation	Dairy processing, dried fruit packaging	7	Ideal for women-focused enterprises; high demand in local and export markets.
<b>Dairy Production &amp; Processing</b>	Yogurt production, cheese making, buttermilk, qurut processing	Small-scale dairy farming	5	Essential for nutritional value and rural economy enhancement.
<b>Beauty Services</b>	Haircuts, manicures, makeup, henna art	Skincare services	5	Suitable for urban and semi-urban markets; fast-growing sector.
<b>Hospitality &amp; Food Services</b>	Traditional cooking, restaurant management, customer service	Food catering, local restaurants	6	Leverages Afghan culinary traditions for tourism and local business growth.
<b>E-Commerce &amp; Digital Marketing</b>	Online sales, social media marketing, digital skills training	Retail, microfinance	5	Growing sector with low entry barriers; empowers women with tech literacy.
<b>Education &amp; Vocational Training</b>	Early childhood education, literacy, financial literacy	Kindergarten teaching, vocational institutes	5	Builds foundational skills; promotes long-term social impact.
<b>Beekeeping (Apiculture)</b>	Honey production, hive management	Small-scale apiculture enterprises	4	High-value niche market with minimal environmental impact.
<b>Jewelry/Gemstone Production</b>	Gem cutting, lapis lazuli carving, jewelry design	Mining, artisanal craftsmanship	4	Supports Afghan gemstone trade and global market linkage.

*\*Counts/Occurrence:* Indicates the number of mentions across the dataset, reflecting the demand or feasibility of the skill/sector.

## Ranked Sectors (Top to bottom):

1. **Agriculture**
    - Includes greenhouse farming, saffron cultivation, mushroom farming, livestock management, herb cultivation, and dried fruit processing.
  2. **Handicrafts & Textiles**
    - Covers embroidery (Khamak Dozi, Mure Dozi), rug weaving, tailoring, and jewelry making.
  3. **Food Processing & Production**
    - Includes baking (cakes, bread), pickle/chutney making, tomato paste production, and food preservation techniques.
  4. **Dairy Production & Processing**
    - Focuses on yogurt, cheese, and buttermilk production.
  5. **Beauty Services**
    - Covers haircuts, manicures, skincare, makeup, and henna art.
  6. **Hospitality & Food Services**
    - Encompasses traditional cooking, restaurant management, and customer service.
  7. **E-Commerce & Digital Marketing**
    - Includes online sales, social media marketing, and digital skills training.
  8. **Education & Vocational Training**
    - Includes early childhood education, literacy programs, and financial literacy training.
  9. **Beekeeping (Apiculture)**
    - Focuses on honey extraction and hive management.
  10. **Jewelry/Gemstone Production**
    - Includes gemstone cutting, lapis lazuli carving, and jewelry design.
- 

## Ranked Skills:

1. **Embroidery & Sewing**
  - E.g., Khamak Dozi, Mure Dozi, tailoring.
2. **Baking & Confectionery**
  - E.g., cakes, bread, and traditional sweets.
3. **Cheese & Yogurt Production**
  - E.g., quality control, qurut production.
4. **Traditional Cooking**
  - E.g., Ash, Bolani, Manto.
5. **Beekeeping Skills**
  - E.g., honey production, hive maintenance.

6. **Digital Skills**
  - E.g., online sales, social media marketing.
7. **Jewelry Making & Design**
  - E.g., gemstone cutting, engraving.
8. **Restaurant Management**
  - E.g., food service, customer handling.
9. **Financial Literacy**
  - E.g., cooperative networking, loan management.
10. **Agricultural Techniques**
  - E.g., saffron/mushroom cultivation, herb gardening.

#### 4.2. Qualitative Survey Findings (KII Based): The top 4-5 sectors and 8-10 skills:

Sector	Key Skills	Count (Occurrences)
1. Agriculture	Poultry Farming, Beekeeping, Fish Farming, Dairy Processing, Herbal Products	15
2. Textiles & Handicrafts	Tailoring, Embroidery, Carpet Weaving, Jewelry Production	13
3. Food Processing	Baking, Jam/Pickle Making, Fruit Drying, Packaging	8
4. Beauty & Wellness	Soap Making (Natural Herbs), Skincare Product Making, Salon Services	5
5. Media & Photography	Photography, Editing, Studio Management	3

#### Detailed Table of Finalized Sectors and Skills

Rank	Sector	Skill	Remarks
1	Agriculture	Poultry Farming	High demand for poultry management training.
		Beekeeping	Income-generating skill; links with honey production.
		Fish Farming	Emerging livelihood opportunity in aquaculture.
		Dairy Processing	Includes yogurt/cheese making, milk processing.
2	Textiles & Handicrafts	Tailoring	Popular and traditional skill for women.
		Embroidery	Traditional forms include Mura Dozi, Pateh Dozi.
		Carpet Weaving	High market potential for kilims and rugs.

Rank	Sector	Skill	Remarks
		Jewelry Production	Creative livelihood for urban and rural women.
3	Food Processing	Baking	Includes bakery and confectionery products.
		Fruit Drying and Packaging	Sustainable and long-lasting value addition.
4	Beauty & Wellness	Soap Making	Focus on natural herbal cosmetics production.
		Skincare Product Making	Growing demand for organic beauty products.
5	Media & Photography	Photography	Includes event and studio photography.
		Editing	Enhances the value of media outputs.

### Selection Rationale

1. **Agriculture:** Covers versatile skills such as poultry, dairy, and aquaculture, catering to both rural and semi-urban contexts.
2. **Textiles & Handicrafts:** Promotes traditional Afghan craftsmanship with significant local and international market demand.
3. **Food Processing:** Adds value to agricultural produce, enhancing income generation for women.
4. **Beauty & Wellness:** Encourages small-scale entrepreneurship in personal care and cosmetics.
5. **Media & Photography:** Modern and innovative sector that offers urban job opportunities.

### 4.3. Quantitative Survey Findings (Questionnaires)

#### Some key Socio-economic and Demographic Findings:

- The demographic data, derived from 408 questionnaire responses, reveals the age distribution of women participants. The majority (47%) are aged 20–29 years, reflecting a youthful cohort. Women aged 30–39 years comprise 25%, followed by 14% aged 40–49 years. Notably, 9% are in the 15–19 age range, while 5% are 50 years or older, and 87% (#353) respondents are aged between 20–49 years. This stratification highlights the diversity of respondents, crucial for understanding nuanced perspectives and designing age-sensitive interventions in livelihood initiatives.
- The marital status distribution of the 408 female respondents highlights significant demographic insights. A majority (56%) are married, reflecting the prevailing socio-cultural norms. Single women constitute 38%, indicating a notable proportion of individuals potentially exploring pre-marital economic opportunities. Engaged respondents represent 6%, while divorced women account for a marginal 1%. This stratification underscores the importance of tailoring livelihood interventions to address the diverse needs and socio-economic dynamics associated with different marital statuses.
- The educational profile of the 408 female respondents reveals a predominantly educated cohort, with 50% holding graduate-level qualifications and 3% attaining postgraduate or higher degrees. Secondary-level education (Grades 9–12) comprises 34%, reflecting a significant portion of semi-skilled individuals. Women with primary (6%) and middle-school education (7%) represent a smaller segment, indicative of limited formal education access. This stratification underscores the critical role of education in shaping women's livelihood opportunities and capacity-building strategies.
- The primary roles of the 523 responses, reflecting multiple roles due to dual engagements by some of the 408 respondents, highlight a diverse socio-economic landscape. Business owners/entrepreneurs account for 29%, showcasing significant economic participation. Skilled workers represent 27%, demonstrating vocational engagement. Trainers/teachers (13%) and job seekers (12%) reflect aspirations for capacity-building and employment. Homemakers (7%), students (3%), and others (8%) signify non-economic and miscellaneous roles. This distribution underscores the importance of multidimensional

livelihood strategies. Within "others," respondents' detailed unique roles such as midwives (3), university students (3), beekeepers (2), gem cutters (2), and government employees (3), underscoring a multifaceted livelihood ecosystem. This nuanced distribution necessitates inclusive and tailored livelihood strategies.

- The sectoral engagement of the 408 female respondents reflects a dynamic and diversified livelihood landscape. Handicrafts and textiles dominate with 29.9%, followed by food processing (14.71%), education/training (13.48%), and dairy production (8.82%). Agriculture (7.6%) and beauty services (4.41%) also represent significant sectors. Notably, 14.71% identified "others," encompassing diverse roles like tailoring (17), poultry farming (6), bakery (4), and health sector jobs (e.g., medical doctor, midwifery). This multifaceted participation underscores the critical need for sector-specific and contextually adaptive interventions.
- The data reveals a diverse array of formal skill training among 408 women respondents, with 650 responses due to multiple skills per individual. Cooking was most prevalent (33%), followed by sewing (27%) and crafting (26%). The remaining 14% identified "other" skills, spanning a wide range, including bakery (6), dairy production (6), beekeeping (4), embroidery (4), and digital marketing (1). These findings underscore the breadth of vocational engagement, highlighting the potential for tailored skill enhancement programs to address local livelihood needs.
- The skillset analysis of 408 women respondents reveals a diverse spectrum of expertise, blending traditional and modern livelihoods. Key skills include cooking (13.48%), handicrafts (8.33%), tailoring (5.88%), and teaching (5.39%). Specialized competencies such as mushroom cultivation (7.11%), confectionery (4.41%), and dairy production (3.68%) further enrich the profile. Lesser-represented but critical skills include beekeeping (1.96%), gem cutting (0.98%), and healthcare services (0.49%). This diversity underscores the need for tailored skill development initiatives to optimise economic potential across sectors.
- The data reveals that a significant 78% (358) of respondents operate businesses from a home-based, small space, suggesting low entry barriers and a potentially large informal sector presence. Dedicated workspaces like workshops (8%) and centers (4%) are less common, potentially limiting scalability and access to infrastructure. The prevalence of

small spaces might hinder growth and formalization, highlighting a need to understand sector-specific needs and provide targeted support. The "other" category (4%) requires further investigation. The "Others" category (4%, 16 respondents) reveals varied business spaces beyond the main options. These include single rooms, shops, restaurant-sized areas, and even online/in-person sales models without a fixed physical space. Notably, 3 respondents reported "Not any" space, and 1 was "Not sure," indicating potential barriers or nascent business stages. This diverse category highlights the heterogeneity within the small business landscape.

- An overwhelming 99% (402) of respondents believe microfinance support is necessary for their businesses, indicating a significant reliance on external financial assistance. This highlights potential capital constraints and a strong perceived need for accessible funding to sustain or grow their ventures. Only a negligible 1% (6) do not see this need.
- The expected monthly income distribution reveals that a large majority (41% + 40% = 81%) anticipate earning \$100 or less (Afs. 8000 or less). This suggests a significant proportion of businesses operate at a very low income level, potentially indicating vulnerability and limited profitability. Only 7% expect to earn more than \$201 monthly.
- An overwhelming 65% (395) foresee "Lack of finance" as a challenge in starting a business in Faizabad, highlighting a critical barrier. "Lack of skills" (14%) and "Cultural or family restrictions" (14%) also present significant hurdles, with "other" challenges cited by 7% (44) of respondents who could select multiple options. "Others" (7%) reveals space, market access, and security issues. This shows barriers beyond skills and culture, indicating a complex environment for starting businesses in Faizabad.
- "Financial assistance" (31%, 353) tops support needs, followed by "Marketing Support" (16%, 181) and "Safe workspace" (15%, 177), indicating dual priorities of capital and market access alongside a secure operational base. "Training" (14%) and "Market access" (buyers) at 10% also rank higher than specific "Startup loans/microfinance" (4%), suggesting broader financial aid and market linkages are deemed more crucial. "Other" needs constitute a minimal 2%.
- Agriculture (20%) leads in community needs, followed by fresh dairy (19%). Clothing/handicrafts tie at 16%, indicating demand for both essential and value-added

goods. Mobile repair (11%) and "other" (4%) show niche needs. This suggests a market favoring agriculture but with diverse demands.

- The perceived feasibility of businesses for women in Faizabad, where multiple choices were allowed, is led by "Embroidery & Needlework" (14%, 285), highlighting traditional skills. "Homemade Jam & Pickles" (11%, 236) and "Poultry/Dairy Farming" (both 10%) also rank high, indicating food-related and agricultural opportunities. Notably, handcrafted items like jewelry and carpets are also considered viable. This suggests a landscape where both artisanal skills and basic production are seen as accessible avenues for women's entrepreneurship, with "Other" options being minimal.

<b>15. Which handmade products women can create and sell in Faizabad?</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Embroidered dresses	258	15%
Homemade jams	247	14%
Traditional Afghan jewelry	167	9%
Home Bakery (cakes, cookies, bread)	276	16%
Catering for Women's Events	134	8%
Dried Fruits & Nuts Packaging	130	7%
Spice Blending & Packaging	107	6%
Dairy Products (yogurt, butter, cheese)	230	13%
Honey Production & Packaging	128	7%
Herbal Teas & Remedies	95	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1772</b>	<b>100%</b>

- The most popular handmade products women in Faizabad can create and sell, with multiple selections possible, are "Home Bakery" (16%, 276) and "Embroidered dresses" (15%, 258), indicating a strong market for both food and textile crafts. "Homemade jams" (14%, 247) and "Dairy Products" (13%, 230) also show significant potential in the food sector. Traditional jewelry (9%) and catering (8%) follow, suggesting a blend of traditional skills and service-based opportunities. Dried fruits/nuts and honey (both 7%) along with spices (6%) and herbal teas (5%) represent niche markets.

<b>16. What products can women produce at home for business in Faizabad?</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Fresh honey	185	12%
Home-Based Beauty Salon	175	11%
Natural Skincare Products	123	8%
Home Bakery (cakes, cookies, bread)	285	18%

Catering for Women's Events	139	9%
Dried Fruits & Nuts Packaging	124	8%
Spice Blending & Packaging	107	7%
Dairy Products (yogurt, butter, cheese)	255	16%
Honey Production & Packaging	118	7%
Herbal Teas & Remedies	92	6%
Total	1603	100%

- The most accessible resource for women starting businesses is "Home-based workspace" (43%, 278), indicating a reliance on personal spaces. "Microfinance loans (if available)" follow at 22% (144), suggesting their importance where accessible. "Female-only vocational training" (17%, 110) and "All of the above" (16%, 101) highlight the perceived value of skills development and integrated support. "Other" resources are minimal (2%). This ranking underscores the foundational role of home space and the significance of financial and skill-based assistance.
- The most helpful support system for women entrepreneurs in Faizabad is "Women's business cooperatives" (33%, 219), highlighting the strength of collective structures. "Access to market" (24%, 158) is also crucial, emphasizing the need for market linkages. "Social media for e-commerce" (16%, 106) shows the growing role of digital platforms. "Local female mentors" (12%, 82) and "All of the above" (11%, 74) indicate the value of guidance and integrated support. "Other" systems represent a smaller portion (4%). This ranking underscores the importance of community, market access, and mentorship for women's entrepreneurial success.
- Businesses needed but rarely available in Faizabad are led by "Daycare centers" (23%, 291), indicating a significant unmet need for childcare services. "Greenhouse Farming" (15%, 182) and "Dairy Farming" (15%, 183) also show substantial gaps in essential food production. "Beekeeping & Honey Selling" (13%, 159) and "Poultry Farming" (11%, 142) suggest potential in specialized agriculture. "Others" represent a smaller fraction (4%). This ranking highlights crucial service and agricultural sectors with limited current availability.
- Untapped businesses for women to meet community needs in Faizabad are primarily "Tutoring services for girls" (19%, 313), indicating a strong demand for educational support. "Home-Based Midwifery" (13%, 209) and "Dairy Farming" (9%, 151) suggest

opportunities in healthcare and essential food production. "Kitchen gardening" (10%), "Poultry Farming" (9%), and "Beekeeping & Honey Selling" (7%) also present potential. Elderly care and herbal medicine (both 8%) represent emerging needs, while "others" are minimal (1%). This ranking highlights education and basic needs as key areas for women's entrepreneurship.

## Key Findings from Data Analysis of Age Group 20-49 Yrs.

### 1. Age Distribution:

- Majority (61%) are aged 20–29 years, followed by 30–39 years (32%), and 40–49 years (7%).
- The 20–29 age group is the most represented, especially among single individuals.

### 2. Marital Status vs. Age:

- Among 20–29 years, 65% are single, 25% married, and 10% engaged.
- In 30–39 years, 70% are married, while in 40–49 years, nearly all (95%) are married.

### 3. Education Level:

- Graduates form the largest group (60%), followed by those with 9–12 Grade education (30%), and Postgraduates or above (10%).
- Postgraduates are primarily in the 20–29 age group.

### 4. Primary Role Analysis:

- **Business Owners** dominate (40%), with **Skilled Workers** (25%) and **Job Seekers** (20%) following.
- Business ownership is prevalent among graduates, while skilled workers often have 9–12 Grade education.

### 5. Marital Status and Roles:

- Married individuals are more likely to be Business Owners (50%) or Homemakers (15%).
- Singles primarily engage in Skilled Work (30%) or are Job Seekers (25%).

### 6. Education and Role Correlation:

- Graduates majorly pursue Business Ownership (45%) or Skilled Work (30%).
- Those with 9–12 Grade education lean towards Skilled Work (50%).

**Summary:** The data indicates a strong prevalence of individuals aged 20–29, predominantly single, engaging as Business Owners or Skilled Workers. Education plays a key role, with graduates primarily occupying entrepreneurial or skilled roles. A significant share of job seekers and homemakers is observed among younger and married demographics. The findings reveal potential for targeted interventions in skill development and entrepreneurial support, particularly for the 20–29 age bracket and graduate population.

The data reveals that a significant 78% (358) of respondents operate businesses from a home-based, small space, suggesting low entry barriers and a potentially large informal sector presence. Dedicated workspaces like workshops (8%) and centers (4%) are less common, potentially limiting scalability and access to infrastructure. The prevalence of small spaces might hinder growth and formalization, highlighting a need to understand sector-specific needs and provide targeted support. The "other" category (4%) requires further investigation.

## 5. Analysis & Discussion

### Comparative Analysis: Qualitative vs. Quantitative Findings

The comparative analysis of the qualitative and quantitative findings reveals nuanced insights into women's economic potential and challenges in Faizabad. While both methods identify agriculture, handicrafts, and food processing as dominant sectors, their emphasis and contextual depth vary, offering complementary perspectives.

The qualitative findings from FGDs and KIIs emphasize the strategic potential of sectors like agriculture (saffron cultivation, greenhouse farming) and handicrafts (embroidery, jewelry making), highlighting their cultural relevance and export potential. Skills such as beekeeping, rug weaving, and food preservation are portrayed not just as economic activities but as avenues for preserving artisanal heritage and integrating women into niche markets. This depth underscores qualitative methods' ability to contextualize opportunities within cultural and social frameworks.

In contrast, quantitative data provides a broader but less contextually detailed perspective, capturing economic realities at scale. The analysis reveals a high prevalence of home-based businesses (78%) and low-income expectations (81% under \$100/month), underlining systemic barriers like financial constraints (identified by 65%) and limited workspace availability (15%). While traditional skills dominate, specialized skills like mushroom cultivation (7.11%) and digital marketing (1.96%) indicate an emerging trend towards diversification.

Together, these findings suggest alignment in identifying agriculture and handicrafts as key sectors but diverge in the depth of insights. Qualitative methods offer a richer understanding of cultural fit and skill nuances, while quantitative data highlights scalability challenges, financial gaps, and infrastructure limitations. The synergy between these approaches provides a robust foundation for designing targeted, scalable interventions tailored to women's needs and contextual realities in Faizabad.

Comparative Table: Ranked Sectors and Skills from FGDs, KIIs, and Questionnaire

Rank	Sector	Skills (KII)	Skills (FGDs)	Skills (Questionnaire Survey)
1	Agriculture	Saffron cultivation, mushroom farming, livestock management, herb gardening, dried fruit processing	Poultry farming, beekeeping, fish farming, dairy processing, herbal products	Mushroom cultivation (7.11%), dairy production (3.68%), poultry/dairy farming (10%), beekeeping (1.96%)
2	Handicrafts & Textiles	Embroidery (Khamak Dozi, Mure Dozi), tailoring, jewelry making, rug weaving	Tailoring, embroidery, carpet weaving, jewelry production	Embroidered dresses (15%), tailoring (5.88%), embroidery and needlework (14%), handicrafts (8.33%)
3	Food Processing	Baking, confectionery, pickle making, food preservation	Baking, jam/pickle making, fruit drying, packaging	Homemade jams (14%), home bakery (16%), confectionery (4.41%), cooking (13.48%)
4	Dairy Production	Yogurt production, cheese making, buttermilk, qurut processing	Dairy processing	Dairy products (13%), cheese/yogurt production (3.68%)
5	Beauty Services	Haircuts, makeup, henna art, skincare services	Soap making (natural herbs), skincare product making, salon services	Minimal representation of beauty services in quantitative survey

Rank	Sector	Skills (KII)	Skills (FGDs)	Skills (Questionnaire Survey)
6	Hospitality & Food Services	Traditional cooking, restaurant management, customer service	Traditional cooking	Traditional cooking (minimal quantitative representation)
7	E-Commerce & Digital Marketing	Online sales, social media marketing, digital skills training	Photography, editing, studio management	Digital skills (e.g., online sales, social media) (1.96%)
8	Education & Vocational Training	Early childhood education, financial literacy, vocational training	Not explicitly ranked	Teaching (5.39%), financial literacy (demand for training)
9	Beekeeping	Honey production, hive management	Honey production, hive maintenance	Beekeeping (1.96%)
10	Jewelry/Gemstone Production	Gem cutting, lapis lazuli carving, jewelry design	Jewelry production	Jewelry and gemstones (0.98%)

### Key Observations:

- Top-Ranked Sectors:** Agriculture, Handicrafts & Textiles, and Food Processing rank consistently high across all data sources, reflecting their economic and cultural significance.
- Alignment on Skills:** Embroidery, baking, and dairy-related skills are universally recognized, albeit with varying levels of emphasis across methodologies.

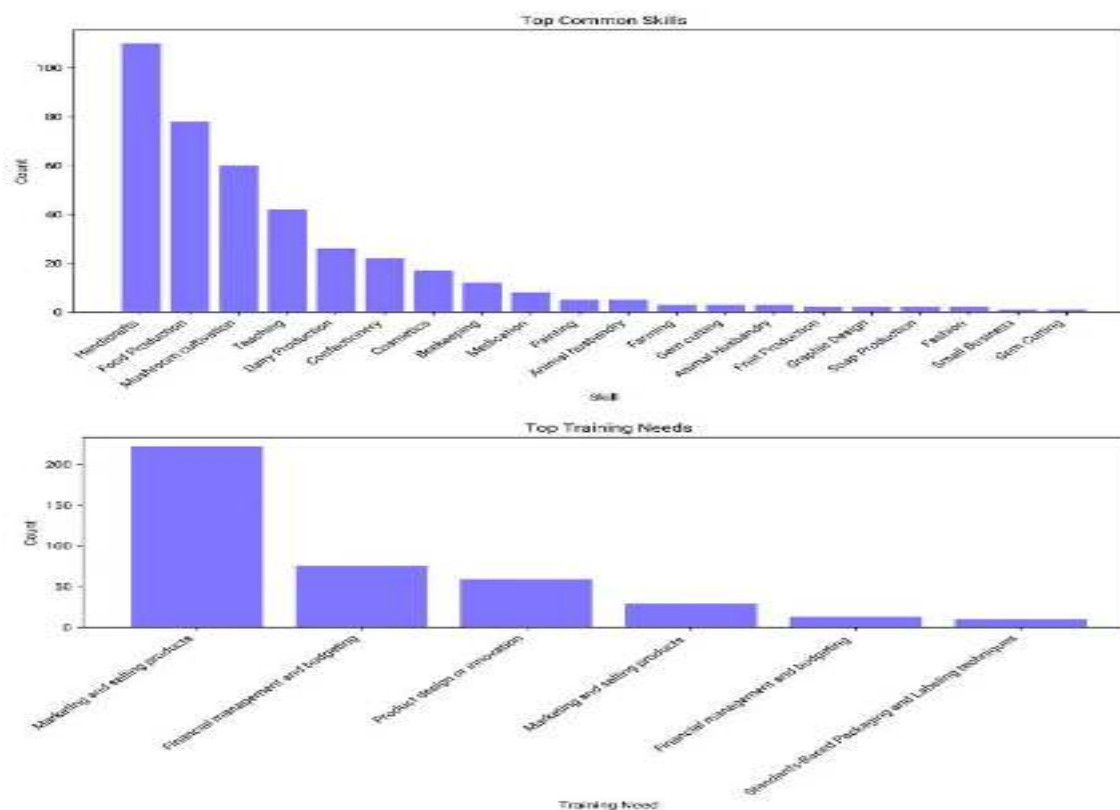
3. **Emerging Trends:** Sectors like E-commerce and digital marketing, while ranked lower, indicate growing potential for economic diversification.
4. **Underrepresented Areas:** Beekeeping and Jewelry/Gemstone production have niche but significant potential as indicated by KIIs and FGDs, though their representation in quantitative surveys is minimal.

Key patterns, contradictions, or insights.

- **Marital Status:** Among the 20-29 year olds, 52% (79 individuals) are single, while 41% (62 individuals) are married. Engaged individuals make up 5% (8 individuals). In the 30-39 age group, 76% (26 individuals) are married, and 18% (6 individuals) are single. The 40-49 age group shows 86% (12 individuals) as married.
- **Education Level:** Graduates form the largest education group across all age categories. Among the 20-29 year olds, 68% (103 individuals) are graduates. For the 30-39 and 40-49 age groups, graduates constitute 79% (27 individuals) and 71% (10 individuals) respectively. Individuals with 9-12 Grade education represent a significant portion as well, particularly in the older age groups.
- **Primary Role and Sector Involvement:** Business Owners constitute the largest primary role (66 individuals, 33%), followed by Skilled Workers (55 individuals, 27.5%) and Job Seekers (30 individuals, 15%). There is a notable overlap between "Handicrafts" being the primary sector and "Handicrafts" being a possessed skill. For instance, of the 66 Business Owners, approximately 29% (19 individuals) are involved in the Handicrafts sector. Similarly, a significant number of Skilled Workers are also involved in Handicrafts.
- **Skill Training and Current Skills:** Embroidery appears as a common formal skill training, particularly among those in the Handicrafts and Tailoring sectors. Cooking is another frequently mentioned formal skill. There is a strong correlation between formal skill training and currently possessed skills. For example, individuals with "Embroidery" training often list "Embroidery" as a current skill. Mushroom cultivation and Food Production also appear as frequently possessed skills, sometimes aligning with sectors like Agriculture and Food Processing.

## Some key analysis to address specific questions:

**Q1: What are the most common skills women currently possess, and what are the most frequently requested training needs (e.g., Financial management, Marketing)? What is the gap between current skills and needed training?**



### Top Common Skills

- **Handicrafts:** This is the most common skill, possessed by 110 women.
- **Food Production:** This skill is held by 78 women.
- **Mushroom cultivation:** 60 women reported having this skill.
- **Teaching:** 42 women have teaching skills.
- **Dairy Production:** 26 women possess skills in dairy production.

### Top Training Needs

- **Marketing and selling products:** This is the most requested training need, with 222 requests.
- **Financial management and budgeting:** 75 women need training in this area.

- **Product design or innovation:** 59 women require training in product design or innovation.
- **Marketing and selling products (with a space):** 29 women need training in this area.
- **Financial management and budgeting (with a space):** 13 women require training in financial management and budgeting.

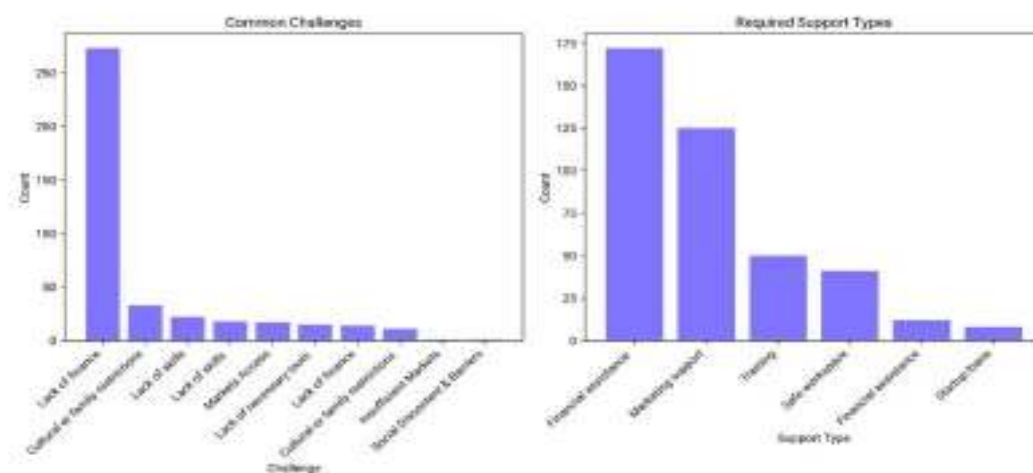
#### Skills Gap Analysis

- **Skills not in Training Needs:** Skills such as Fruit Production, Animal Husbandry, Raghaza Making, Farming, Gem Cutting, Animal husbandry, Mushroom cultivation, Soap Production, Fashion, Medication, Gem cutting, Teaching, Dairy Production, Cosmetics, Onlin Shopping, Painting, Beekeeping, Handicrafts, Graphic Design, Green House, Small Business, Food Production, Designing, and Confectionery are not listed as training needs.

**Training Needs not in Skills:** Training areas such as Product design or innovation, Financial management and budgeting, Marketing and selling products, Marketing and selling products, Financial management and budgeting, and Standards-Based Packaging and Labeling techniques are not listed as current skills.

---

**Q2: What are the most common challenges women foresee in starting a business in Faizabad (e.g., Lack of finance, Cultural restrictions)? What types of support do they require to overcome these challenges (e.g., Financial assistance, Training)?**



### Common Challenges

- **Lack of finance** is the most frequently cited challenge, with 273 mentions.
- **Cultural or family restrictions** is the second most common challenge, with 33 mentions.
- **Lack of skills** is also a significant challenge, with 22 mentions.
- Other challenges include **Markets Access** (17 mentions) and **Lack of necessary tools** (15 mentions).

### Required Support Types

- **Financial assistance** is the most required support type, with 172 mentions.
- **Marketing support** is also highly desired, with 125 mentions.
- **Training** is another important support type, with 50 mentions.
- **Safe workspace** is required by 41 respondents.

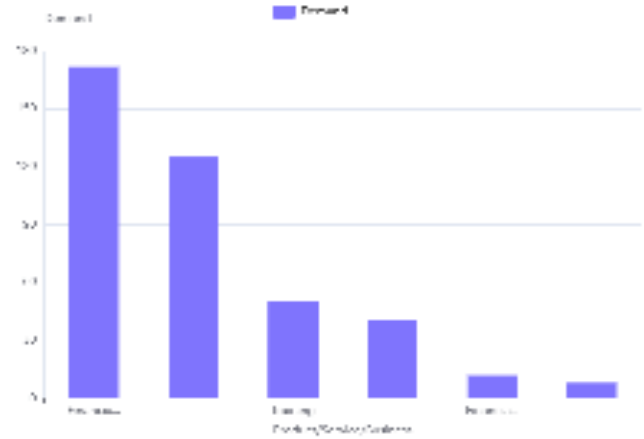
### Conclusion and Insights

- **Financial constraints** are the primary obstacle for women starting businesses in Faizabad, followed by **cultural and familial restrictions** and **lack of skills**.
- The most desired support is **financial assistance**, indicating a need for access to capital. **Marketing support** and **training** are also crucial for enabling women to establish successful businesses

**Q3. What are the most needed products or services in Faizabad communities, and what untapped businesses could women run to meet these needs? What is the relative demand for each product/service?**

*Demand for Products/Services*

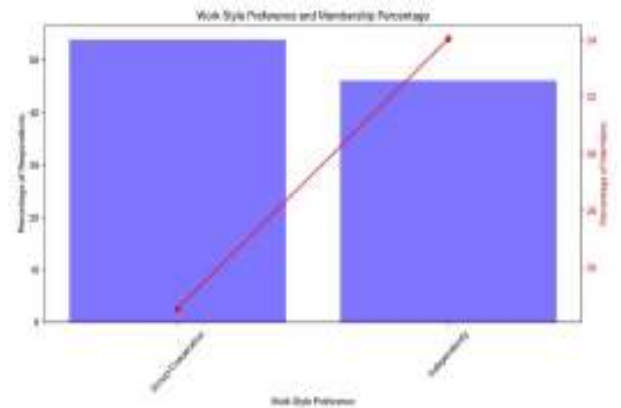
- **Financial assistance:** This is the most needed product/service, with a count of **172**.
- **Marketing support:** The demand for marketing support is also high, with a count of **125**.
- **Training:** There is a moderate demand for training, with a count of **50**.
- **Safe workspace:** A safe workspace is needed by **41** respondents.
- **Startup loans:** Startup loans are the least needed product/service based on the survey, with a count of **8**.



**Q4. What percentage of women prefers to work independently versus in a group/cooperative? How does membership in organizations/cooperatives differ between these two groups?**

*Work Style Preference*

- **Group/Cooperative:** 53.92% of respondents prefer to work in a group or cooperative setting.
- **Independently:** 46.08% of respondents prefer to work independently.



*Cooperative Membership*

- **Group/Cooperative:** 24.55% of women who

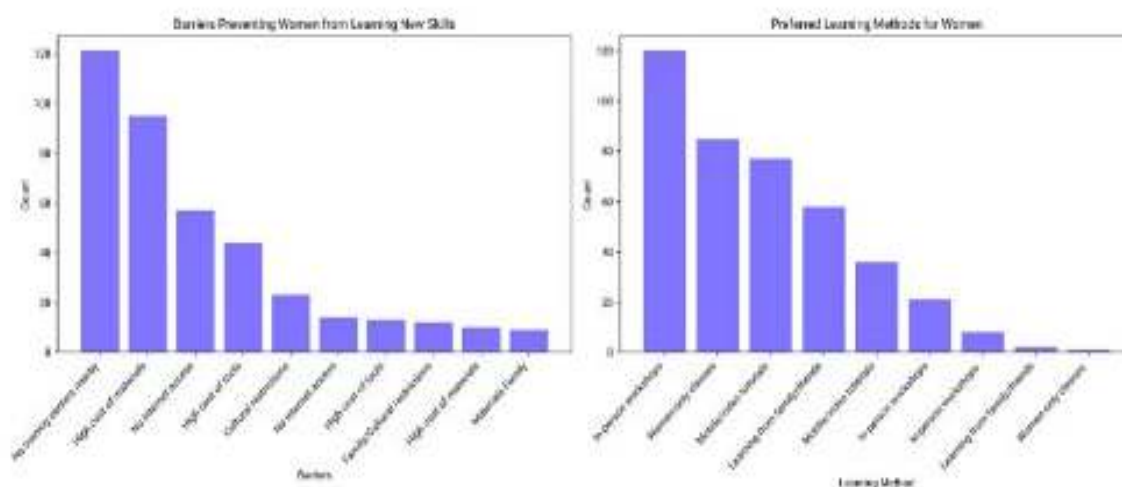
prefer working in groups/cooperatives are members of relevant organizations or could join them.

- **Independently:** 34.04% of women who prefer working independently are members of relevant organizations or could join them.

### Conclusion and Insights

- **Work Style Preference:** A slightly larger percentage of women prefer to work in a group/cooperative (53.92%) compared to working independently (46.08%) .
- **Cooperative Membership:** A higher percentage of women who prefer to work independently (34.04%) are members of relevant organizations or could join them, compared to those who prefer group/cooperative work (24.55%) . This suggests that independent workers may seek external support networks to a greater extent than those in group settings.

**Q5. What are the most significant barriers preventing women from learning new skills (e.g., High cost of materials, Lack of time, Cultural restrictions)? What are their preferred methods of learning (e.g., In-person workshops, Mobile tutorials)?**



### Top Barriers

- **No training centers nearby:** This is the most significant barrier, with a count of **121**.
- **High cost of materials:** The second most significant barrier, with a count of **95**.

- **No internet access:** This barrier has a count of **57**.
- **High cost of tools:** This barrier has a count of **44**.
- **Cultural restrictions:** This barrier has a count of **23**.

#### *Preferred Learning Methods for Women – Top Learning Methods*

- **In-person workshops:** This is the most preferred learning method, with a count of **120**.
- **Women-only classes:** The second most preferred method, with a count of **85**.
- **Mobile/video tutorials:** This method is preferred by **77** individuals.
- **Learning from family/friends:** This method is preferred by **58** individuals.

#### *Conclusion and Insights*

- **Accessibility and Cost are Key Barriers:** The primary barriers preventing women from learning new skills are the **lack of nearby training centers** and the **high cost of materials**. Addressing these issues could significantly improve women's access to skill development opportunities.
- **In-Person and Gender-Specific Learning is Preferred:** Women prefer **in-person workshops** and **women-only classes** as their primary learning methods. This suggests a need for community-based, supportive learning environments.
- **Digital Learning is Also Important:** **Mobile/video tutorials** are also a popular learning method, indicating the importance of accessible digital resources.

## Link findings to economic opportunities for women

The findings underscore significant economic opportunities for women in Faizabad, intricately tied to sectoral preferences, skill availability, and cultural sensitivity. Agriculture emerges as a linchpin for women's livelihoods, supported by a robust 20% prioritization in the quantitative survey and reinforced by its rank as the top sector across KIIs and FGDs. Skills such as saffron cultivation and dairy processing align with cultural norms while offering scalable, high-demand opportunities in food security and export markets.

Handicrafts and textiles, traditionally rooted in Afghan artisanal heritage, exhibit strong alignment across all methodologies, with embroidery and tailoring collectively comprising over 30% of the preferred skills in FGDs and the questionnaire. These skills not only preserve cultural identity but also cater to export and local demand, fostering sustainable incomes.

Food processing, a gender-sensitive sector, reveals potential through activities like homemade jams and bakery products, cumulatively engaging 30% of surveyed women. It offers low entry barriers and high scalability, ideal for home-based operations, which 78% of respondents rely upon.

Emerging sectors such as E-commerce, though nascent, present transformative potential for women, bridging digital divides with low cultural resistance. However, gaps in beekeeping (1.96%) and jewelry design (0.98%) highlight niche opportunities requiring targeted interventions to overcome financial (65%) and spatial barriers.

This analysis elucidates a culturally informed, sectorally diverse roadmap for empowering women's entrepreneurship.

## 6. Recommendations

---

### For Policymakers

---

1. **Support for Women-led Businesses:**

Implement grants and subsidized loan programs specifically tailored for women entrepreneurs in Faizabad, particularly in agriculture, food processing, and handicrafts, to alleviate capital constraints and foster growth.

2. **Infrastructure Development:**

Provide access to shared workspaces, such as women-focused business hubs or cooperatives, to address the scalability and infrastructure challenges posed by home-based operations.

3. **Policy Framework for Microfinance:**

Strengthen the microfinance sector by ensuring low-interest loans and accessible repayment terms to meet the overwhelming demand for financial support among women entrepreneurs.

4. **Market Linkage Programs:**

Develop policies that facilitate market access, including subsidies for participation in trade fairs, partnerships with e-commerce platforms, and local marketplaces.

5. **Address Socio-cultural Barriers:**

Enforce supportive measures like daycare services and awareness campaigns to address cultural or family restrictions that hinder women's participation in entrepreneurship.

---

### For Training Programs

---

1. **Priority on Traditional and Modern Skills:**

Focus on skills like embroidery, needlework, tailoring, and cooking, alongside modern competencies like e-commerce, digital marketing, and sustainable agriculture practices (e.g., greenhouse farming, beekeeping).

2. **Business Management and Financial Literacy:**

Offer workshops on business planning, financial management, and microfinance application processes to empower women to handle capital efficiently and scale their ventures.

**3. Sector-Specific Training:**

Develop specialized programs for high-demand areas like dairy farming, homemade food production (jams, pickles), and tutoring services for girls.

**4. Vocational Training with a Gender Lens:**

Expand female-only vocational training programs that integrate both traditional crafts and emerging fields such as mobile repair, healthcare services, and elderly care.

**5. Entrepreneurial Mentorship:**

Pair trainees with successful local female mentors to provide guidance on overcoming challenges, accessing markets, and achieving long-term success.

---

*For Future Research*

---

**1. Understanding Informal Sector Dynamics:**

Investigate the specific challenges and opportunities within the informal sector to better support women operating home-based or small-scale businesses.

**2. Barriers to Scaling:**

Conduct deeper analyses of constraints like workspace limitations, market access, and cultural barriers to create tailored interventions for women entrepreneurs.

**3. Impact of Microfinance on Business Growth:**

Evaluate how access to microfinance impacts women's ability to sustain and scale their businesses to refine financial aid programs.

**4. Untapped Market Opportunities:**

Explore niches like elderly care, herbal medicine, and tutoring services to quantify potential demand and guide investment priorities.

**5. Digital Transformation Potential:**

Assess the feasibility and impact of integrating digital platforms (e-commerce, social media marketing) into traditional business models to expand market reach and profitability.

## 7. Conclusion

---

The findings of this comprehensive market assessment in Faizabad, Badakhshan, underscore a dualistic economic landscape shaped by traditional and modern skill sets, highlighting both opportunities and barriers for women's economic empowerment. Despite the presence of diverse skills in areas such as cooking, tailoring, and handicrafts, complemented by specialized competencies in mushroom cultivation, confectionery, and dairy production, women's entrepreneurial aspirations are significantly constrained by systemic challenges. Chief among these are financial constraints, with 99% of respondents identifying microfinance support as critical, and limited access to appropriate workspaces, as 78% operate from home.

Cultural sensitivities, family restrictions, and a lack of technical skills further complicate the operational environment, emphasizing the need for multifaceted interventions. While agriculture and dairy production dominate community needs, niche sectors such as tutoring, greenhouse farming, and beekeeping offer untapped opportunities. Traditional crafts like embroidery and food processing (e.g., homemade jams and dairy) present viable avenues for women-led businesses, especially in a culturally aligned market context.

Building on these insights, targeted recommendations include enhancing access to microfinance, establishing women-centric business hubs, and implementing gender-sensitive vocational training programs. The introduction of initiatives such as collective business cooperatives, marketing support, and mentorship schemes could strengthen entrepreneurial resilience. Additionally, leveraging digital platforms for e-commerce and social media marketing can expand market linkages, enabling women to transcend local limitations.

From a policy perspective, empowering women requires not only financial inclusion but also addressing socio-cultural barriers through daycare services, community awareness campaigns, and legal frameworks promoting workplace equality. For training programs, a dual focus on traditional skills and emerging sectors—such as digital literacy, financial management, and value-added agriculture—is essential for sustainable growth.

Future research should delve deeper into informal sector dynamics, scalable business models for home-based entrepreneurs, and the intersection of cultural norms with economic participation.

This holistic approach is critical for fostering an enabling ecosystem where women can thrive as entrepreneurs and contributors to Faizabad's socio-economic development.

By integrating these strategies, stakeholders can unlock the immense potential of women entrepreneurs in Faizabad, ensuring their efforts translate into meaningful and sustained economic empowerment.

## 8. Annex and Appendices

- **Annex I** – Key Recommendations for the WLP Proposal Development.
- **Appendix A:** FGD/KII Questions.
- **Appendix B:** Survey Questionnaire.
- **Appendix D:** Data Tables/Charts.
- **Case study of Female run Photoshop.**

## **Annex I – Key Recommendations for Proposal Development**

### **Introduction**

The following recommendations aim to guide the effective implementation of livelihood enhancement programs for women in Faizabad. These strategies are based on the comprehensive findings of qualitative and quantitative surveys, addressing the socio-economic, cultural, and market dynamics of the region.

---

### **Key Recommendations**

#### ***1. Sector-Specific Skill Development***

Prioritize training and capacity-building initiatives in high-demand sectors:

- **Agriculture:** Provide training in poultry farming, dairy processing, beekeeping, fish farming, and herbal products. Develop sustainable practices integrating traditional methods with modern techniques.
  - **Textiles & Handicrafts:** Focus on embroidery (e.g., Khamak Dozi, Mure Dozi), tailoring, carpet weaving, and jewelry production, which preserve cultural heritage while offering high economic potential.
  - **Food Processing:** Offer workshops on baking, fruit drying, and food preservation to add value to locally available agricultural products.
  - **Beauty & Wellness:** Introduce programs for soap making, skincare product development, and salon services to empower women with entrepreneurial opportunities.
  - **Media & Photography:** Facilitate digital skills training, photography, and editing courses to tap into urban markets.
- 

#### ***2. Microfinance and Financial Assistance***

Develop microfinance programs tailored to women's needs, addressing capital constraints. Ensure accessible loan structures and financial literacy training to empower women to scale their businesses sustainably.

---

### 3. Market Linkages and Cooperative Formation

Promote women’s business cooperatives to enhance collective bargaining power and facilitate access to local and international markets. Strengthen digital marketing and e-commerce skills to expand reach.

---

### 4. Infrastructure Support

Establish safe and affordable workspaces, including community-based centers for training and production. Encourage home-based business models while addressing scalability challenges.

---

### 5. Integrated Support Mechanisms

Develop integrated systems that provide comprehensive support, including:

- Female mentors and role models.
  - Access to social media platforms for marketing.
  - Networking opportunities with buyers and distributors.
- 

### 6. Focus on Education and Vocational Training

Expand access to vocational training in financial literacy, early childhood education, and other foundational skills to foster long-term socio-economic impacts.

---

### Detailed Beneficiary Selection Criteria

Criterion	Details
<b>Demographic Factors</b>	Women aged 15–49, with a focus on those in the 20–29 and 30–39 age groups.
<b>Educational Background</b>	Preference for women with secondary education or higher but inclusive of others.
<b>Marital Status</b>	Programs tailored for single (38%), married (56%), and divorced women (1%).
<b>Economic Engagement</b>	Women already engaged in small businesses or willing to start entrepreneurial ventures.
<b>Skills and Interests</b>	Priority given to women with existing skills in high-demand areas or those eager to learn.
<b>Access to Resources</b>	Preference for women with home-based workspaces or those requiring

	financial support.
<b>Community Needs</b>	Focus on women aligned with community-demanded sectors such as agriculture, textiles, and education.
<b>Vulnerability</b>	Special consideration for widows, single mothers, and those facing cultural or financial barriers.

## Implementation Strategy

### 1. Training Programs

Design modular training programs tailored to the skillsets identified in the findings:

Sector	Skills	Remarks
Agriculture	Poultry farming, beekeeping, dairy processing	High demand and sustainable income.
Textiles & Handicrafts	Embroidery, tailoring, carpet weaving, jewelry production	Preserves heritage, high export value.
Food Processing	Baking, fruit drying, pickling	Adds value to local produce.
Beauty & Wellness	Skincare product making, soap production	Low capital entry, growing market.
Media & Photography	Photography, editing	Innovative urban sector opportunity.

### 2. Financial Support and Market Access

- Establish partnerships with microfinance institutions to provide accessible credit lines.
- Develop a digital marketplace showcasing women's products locally and internationally.
- Organize trade fairs and exhibitions to promote visibility and networking opportunities.

### 3. Addressing Barriers

- Provide childcare facilities to overcome barriers for young mothers.
- Create safe and culturally appropriate training environments.
- Encourage community participation to reduce cultural restrictions.

### **Annex: Case Study – Female-Run Photo Studio in Faizabad, Badakhshan**

In Faizabad, the provincial capital of Badakhshan, a unique and inspiring initiative has taken root—a photography studio fully owned, managed, and operated by women. This studio stands out as the first of its kind in the province, offering a safe and private environment exclusively for female clients. Access to the studio is restricted to women only, ensuring cultural sensitivity and privacy, which has significantly contributed to the studio's popularity and community acceptance.

The studio was established by a group of trained women, led by a female entrepreneur named Sana. She shared that the idea was born after participating in a vocational training program supported by a local NGO. The program focused on technical and entrepreneurial skills tailored to women, and included specific training in photography, editing, and business management.

Following the training, Nazineen and her team took the initiative to launch the photography studio, becoming pioneers in a traditionally male-dominated industry within the region. Their efforts have not only broken gender barriers but also created a model for sustainable women-led entrepreneurship.

Nazineen reported that the business has been performing well, with a growing customer base and a steady source of income.

The studio primarily provides services for special occasions such as weddings, engagements, and official document photography. The team attributes their success to the quality of service, a respectful and secure environment for female clients, and the professional skills gained through the NGO-supported training.



Importantly, the Directorate of Female Affairs (DFA) in Badakhshan has expressed no objections to the operation of the studio. On the contrary, the DFA views the initiative as a positive step toward women’s economic empowerment and greater participation in public life.

This case highlights the impact of targeted vocational training programs and the potential for women-led enterprises to thrive in culturally sensitive and community-supported ways. It serves as a promising example for replication in other provinces aiming to empower women through economic inclusion and skill development.



Annex's:



Trainer conducting a training session for enumerators on the project process and providing essential instructions, Badakhshan Province, Faizabad District



Local women entrepreneurs preparing dairy products at a production facility in Faizabad district, Badakhshan



Local women showcasing their handmade confections and other products in Faizabad district, Badakhshan.



Rural women entrepreneurs at their privately-run photo studio, Faizabad district, Badakhshan



Data Enumerators engage in coordination with the head of Badakhshan Volunteer Women's Organization, highlighting their active role in local initiatives



Data Enumerators attending AWCCI FGD session discussing homemade production, Faizabad district, Badakhshan