

# Final Report

## Final Evaluation of the Project

**“Strengthening Self Reliance of Rural Communities  
through Integrated Natural Resource Management in the  
Districts of Baljuvon, Temurmalik and Khovaling”**

**Khatlon Province, Tajikistan**

**TJK-1058-07**



Carried out on behalf of  
**Welthungerhilfe**

by

**Thomas Ranz, AGEG Consultants eG**

assisted by

**Clemens Laessing, AGEG Consultants eG**

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# I. Summary

## 1. Brief description of the project and framework conditions

The project TJK-1058 “Strengthening Self Reliance of Rural Communities through Integrated Natural Resource Management in the Districts of Baljuvon, Temurmalik and Khovaling” has been implemented within a socioeconomic context which is marked by large scale failures and deficiencies in the political and financial administrative system from national level to the provincial, district, and local levels. Corruption and professional incapacities are widespread and deeply embedded into Tajikistan’s structure. In turn, policymaking in Tajikistan can be characterized as constant crisis management with a heavy reliance on foreign aid in all sectors.

The country’s rural sector suffers from a deficient land code and tenure system combined with non-transparent decision making processes of power elites at district level. Previously, a tremendous brain drain in agricultural know-how was caused by leaving specialists after three generations of Soviet rule. And, to make things worse, five years of civil war have left the rural population behind with a declining or already destroyed rural infrastructure. Large-scale working migration of young male villagers to Russia completes the desperate situation of the population still living the country’s remote rural areas.

Against this background, the project TJK-1058 implemented by Welthungerhilfe aims at “strengthening the self reliance of rural livelihoods in the three districts of Baljuvon, Temurmalik, and Khovaling through improved natural resource management” (overall objective). The target group consists of 1.200 direct beneficiaries (the “rural poor”) in 41 villages. The four main project results are improved energy efficiency at household level through technical improvements, improved land use management through integrated natural resource management techniques, capacity building of local authorities, and community based initiatives on energy efficiency and integrated natural resource management.

The project proposal was successfully submitted to the EC for co-funding. Project activities started in January 2008 and were scheduled for 24 months. At the time of the final evaluation, an application for a no-cost extension of 7 months until July 2010 had been submitted to the EC for approval.

## 2. Outcomes and impacts

Beekeeping (and to a very small extent wool processing) is the only project activity with an economic impact that goes beyond the mere subsistence level. Some farmers raised honey production considerably and managed to create additional income resources of themselves and their families. Yet, at the time of the evaluation, not all economic aspects such as marketing had been developed to an advanced degree.

Environmental project outcomes and impacts must be regarded from three different perspectives:

- At household level, distinct project impacts are measurable in terms of soil erosion prevention, extremely less fuel consumption for heating and cooking as well

as in terms of increased and more diversified agricultural outputs in kitchen gardens. The availability of a wider variety of healthy fruits and vegetables might in the long run have further socio-cultural impacts in terms of dietary habits of the rural population.

- At village level, initiatives with a more demonstrative and model character are supported and implemented (e.g. gully-plugging, low cost green houses, naturally fertilised demonstration plots etc.). Long term impacts of these measures could not be fully assessed for the time being.
- At a higher level, project impacts remain extremely limited, due to the unclear land use situation.

Although the project has been paying attention to establishing and maintaining more or less close contacts and good relations with the relevant local authorities neither a direct nor an indirect significant impact could be achieved at these institutional and political levels.

It must be noted that both the expatriate project manager and the local specialists undertook great efforts to make the project's approach and innovative products visible at a higher level with brochures and films and through regular exchange visits presentations, presence at exhibitions and fairs etc. With the support of the Welthungerhilfe regional office and maybe even other donor agencies, the main products and activities promoted by the project might have a considerable future impact in other regions and development interventions.

### **3. Sustainability**

A high level of sustainability could be attained in food and nutrition security as well as with regard to environmental aspects. Simple and low-tech project interventions related to kitchen gardens, such as the use of organic fertilizers, mulching, contour ploughing, and rain water harvesting in reservoirs for intensified vegetable growing, as well as fruit tree planting enhance agricultural outputs and ultimately lead to a more diverse and healthy diet of the target population.

Likewise, activities to increase energy efficiency at household level, such as modified cook stoves, heat exchangers and pressure cookers, as well as school and house insulations strongly contribute to a sustainable decrease in fuel consumption for heating and cooking and foster a more sustainable use of scarce natural resources.

Socio-cultural sustainability is difficult to assess immediately at the end of the scheduled period of implementation. Still, particularly the two abovementioned components of agriculture and energy efficiency might well lead to long term changes in socio-cultural habits and behaviour patterns among the rural population.

### **4. Relevance**

TJK-1058 has attained a high level of relevance, both with regard to the needs of the target population and with regard to the objectives of Welthungerhilfe of reducing poverty and hunger and "helping people help themselves". In the project region, the concept has fully targeted the most relevant needs of its beneficiaries and has wisely avoided "investments" in insecure and/or unforeseeable domains such as field crop-

ping and cattle breeding. With its clear focus on village and household level, its low-tech and low-cost innovations and activities, and its scheme of obligatory own contributions, the project is highly relevant for the abovementioned objectives of Welthungerhilfe.

Naturally, with its “bottom-up” or “grassroots” philosophy, the project’s relevance at a higher institutional and political level has been very limited at best. However, this was neither foreseen during project planning nor during the implementation process.

## **5. Effectiveness**

The design and planning of the TJK-1058 project concept were coherent and realistic. Results and indicators were straightforward and with a clear focus on the most urgent needs of the target population. Lessons learned from previous Welthungerhilfe projects operating in partly overlapping or neighbouring areas were duly integrated. This way, the frequently made mistake of a too widespread and overambitious project concept could be avoided.

Also, project execution follows clear principles of involvement and activation of the target group towards an integrated self-help approach. The project has created a number of highly innovative outputs or “products” which have been readily and widely accepted by the target group, even under the precondition of rendering considerable own contributions for all activities. Project management and specialist staff are adequately qualified and highly motivated to follow and to convey the specific project approach to the target group. This high motivation and readiness to repeatedly insist on local contribution of village population as a pre-condition for any project support has certainly been one of the project’s success factors in a difficult environment, in which aid and support often are still given for free. Even two months before the scheduled end of the implementation period, nearly all quantitative indicators have already been met or even exceeded. This is a remarkable achievement and proof of the sound planning and execution.

## **6. Efficiency**

The cost/benefit ratio both for the overall project and the individual measures can be regarded as highly efficient. All major budget lines have been used appropriately. Indeed, efficiency in terms of spending attained such a high degree that an application for a no cost extension of the implementation period of seven months (until July 2010) could be submitted to the EC. Project implementation has also been carried out in a very cost-efficient way. Compared with similar projects TJK-1058 has been working with a very limited number of fully employed staff. Consequently, the project’s running costs have been comparatively low. An essential precondition for this high level of efficiency (besides strict budget discipline) certainly lies in the comparatively well developed and advanced internal M&E system of TJK-1058.

## **7. Annual cross-cutting theme**

Welthungerhilfe’s annual topic 2008/2009 follows the hypothesis and objective written down in the organization’s statutes that “helping people help themselves is an integral element of projects and programmes in all areas of support of Welthungerhilfe.” The project TJK-1058 is in full compliance with Welthungerhilfe’s endeavour

and approach for self-help support. Indeed, “helping people help themselves” can be considered one of the project’s core principles. Accordingly, this focus on self-help support had already been duly elaborated in all planning documents and been firmly entrenched in the project’s logical framework. Also during project execution, various self-help activities and structures were initiated and developed, which suggest a high level of coherence between project planning and implementation in this respect.

Three major principles have been consistently applied throughout the entire period of project implementation: first, strictly promoting voluntary participation and own contributions for any project activity; second, working with low-cost materials and low-tech solutions in energy efficiency and agricultural activities to facilitate replication by the target population; third, establishing Village Development Committees, VDCs as platforms and vehicles for self-help initiatives. Taken as a whole, these measures and principles underline the project’s very ambitious and convincing self-help approach.

## **8. Most important recommendations**

As a succeeding project of the same type and/or an additional funding of the project is excluded according to the EC funding criteria, recommendations for the remaining implementation of TJK-1058 do not seem to be wise at this stage, shortly before the end of the implementation period. Still, the evaluation has provided a few basic valuable insights, also for other Welthungerhilfe projects, which lead to the following main recommendations:

- The management staff setting consisting of a fully employed local project manager and a part-time expatriate project adviser is – from a cost-benefit ratio perspective – a good and efficient compromise and should be maintained in future co-funded Welthungerhilfe projects.
- The key staff is working in shifts of ten working days in the remote project region followed by a subsequent leave of four days. This working schedule is considered as highly appropriate with regard to the professional requirements in the field as well as to the family situation of many staff members and may serve as a good practice model for similar project implementation in remote areas.
- Resource efficient techniques (e.g. for stoves, heat exchangers, pressure cookers etc.), promoted by the project are not always replicated in the desirable extent. Regarding the dramatic shortage of natural resources, energy saving should become a major topic in Tajikistan. The project has already been raising these issues via publicity measures wherever possible (fairs, press releases, UN internet site, other (donor) organisations, etc.). After the project’s end it seems very desirable that this subject still be promoted with the support of the Welthungerhilfe regional office.
- Regarding the highly efficient cost-benefit ratio of technical innovations promoted by the project it is recommended integrating them as a cross-cutting aspect in all Welthungerhilfe projects in Tajikistan.

## **9. General conclusions**

As the final evaluation has shown, the project TJK-1058 created both a number of lessons learned and a few good practice examples.

### **Important lessons learned**

- Most Welthungerhilfe projects in Tajikistan (and not only in this country) are meanwhile working with co-funding, mainly by the EC. One EC key criterion for funding is among others the percentage of project funds that directly reach the beneficiaries. This percentage can be increased by reducing in particular staff costs which in turn may be achieved through filling the project manager position with a local specialist supported by a part-time expatriate adviser. However, especially in countries with more or less repressive political systems, the transfer of full project responsibility to a local project manager should be avoided.
- The lack of standardization regarding funding criteria and insufficient monitoring and control by donor agencies lead to an undesirable lack of synergies. This is neither in accord with the Paris Declaration nor with the EC development policy commitment to coordination, complementarity, and coherence (3C-criteria) and should be changed in the medium term.
- Own contributions by the target population induce positive effects at a monetary and sustainability level. Nevertheless, this practice leads to temporary monetary revenues of a project (before re-investment for ulterior activities); from an administrative perspective this is not foreseen and – without any doubt – includes certain risks. For Welthungerhilfe two questions arise hereof and should be discussed: Shall Welthungerhilfe projects work with monetary local contribution and if so, to what extent? Which procedures can be applied to integrate “project income” into financial administration?
- A real and fruitful partnership with governmental structures in the sense of a job sharing and/or synergy producing way does not seem to be feasible at this stage. Nevertheless, the eventual involvement of official structures in all relevant decision making processes is considered to be an essential trust building measure and should not be neglected.

### **Positive examples from the project (good practice)**

- The project offers self-help support on a purely voluntary base. Beneficiaries who are not willing to join project activities are not pressed into participation in any way. This proceeding is considered to be fair and may cause at a mid-term perspective a certain competition among the beneficiaries and should therefore be kept on.
- Village development committees, VDCs are composed of interested villagers only and are of informal character. The VDCs can be considered as dialogue partners for the different project inputs, and to a certain extent they work as well as multipliers of project activities and innovations. No long term development of VDCs into autonomous associations has been envisaged. This practice seems to be adequate and realistic for a 24 month project intervention.