



PROJECT FACTSHEET

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Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC

PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN TAJIKISTAN: SUPPORTING WOMEN AND RAISING AWARENESS



Women do not enjoy a strong position in Tajikistan’s society, and domestic violence is an everyday occurrence which is tolerated, sometimes even accepted as normal. There are few services to help women who are victims of domestic violence and in rural areas in particular women often have no one to turn for support. Tajikistan’s government adopted a law on domestic violence in April 2013, and a key element of this project is to support the effective implementation of the law across the country. In addition the project aims to reach and counsel victims and potential victims of domestic violence, and those inflicting it.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Tajikistan gained its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, but that new autonomy did little to enhance the lives of Tajikistan’s women. The ensuing civil war, which lasted until 1997, divided families and drove many from their homes. Tajikistan is still suffering the after effects of the conflict, and remains the poorest of the former Soviet Central Asian republics: an estimated 46 % of its people live below the poverty line. Many Tajik men have moved abroad to find work, leaving women to head households alone, a situation which can leave them and their children vulnerable to discrimination. Tajikistan’s mountainous terrain (93 % of the country is mountainous) means rural communities are especially thinly spread and isolated, making the provision of basic services such as health and education, and even drinking water and sanitation, a challenge.

Tajikistan’s main exports include aluminium, cotton, fruits and textiles. Around half of the working population is engaged in agriculture, just one fifth works in industry. Tajikistan’s economy is also heavily dependent on money sent by citizens working abroad, primarily in Russia and Kazakhstan. Remittances from the approximately 1.5 million labour migrants account for about 40 % of the country’s GDP.

SECTOR CONTEXT

Women in Tajikistan face many challenges. Their economic position has become weaker since independence, as unemployment has risen, and, in the competition for jobs, women face discrimination. Furthermore, domestic violence is a factor in the lives of many, and, regrettably, such violence appears to be widely accepted, even by women themselves. Al-

though the government of Tajikistan has now passed a law against domestic violence, there is little in the way of knowledge, infrastructure, or outreach to support the implementation of the law, or to help the victims. Quite simply, women who suffer violence in the home often have no one to turn to, and little redress. There are nearly no legal institutions, where women could gain access to knowledge about their rights.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

The overriding objective of this project is to reduce the level of domestic violence in Tajikistan. However, given the entrenched and widespread nature of the problem, this goal must realistically be recognised as a long term one. In the shorter term, the project has identified three key objectives:

- To reduce the level of acceptability of domestic violence
- To support the implementation of the respective law
- To support better access to psychosocial and legal services for victims



Reducing the acceptability of domestic violence means raising awareness about it, and increasing understanding that such violence is a human rights violation. Therefore the project is supporting a wide variety of awareness raising activities, including public debates, national campaigns, education videos, and consultation and training with police, health professionals, counsellors and religious leaders. The aim must be to reach not only potential perpetrators, but the professionals who may deal with them and with the victims themselves.

In order to ensure the new law against domestic violence moves from paper to practice, the project is working with Tajikistan's Committee of Women and Family Affairs, as well as with three key government ministries: Internal Affairs, Health, and Education. The aim is to produce an action plan on implementation, a plan which will ensure that state and local government work together with civil society to ensure an effective application of the law.

At the same time, services for victims of domestic violence will be extended, through financial support to non-governmental organisations providing help to victims. Existing 'crisis centres' (at hospitals, police stations etc.) will also be encouraged to integrate support for victims of domestic violence into the intervention strategies they already provide. And the project will support the development of additional skills for social workers, police, psychologists and health professionals, in order to help them provide more appropriate guidance and counselling to both victims and perpetrators.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Switzerland's project on preventing domestic violence in Tajikistan has shown significant achievements in raising awareness of domestic violence, and in spreading the understanding that it is unacceptable. Public information campaigns from radio messages, to cartoons, to journalism competitions on the subject have all helped to reach as wide a section of the population as possible. Initial assessments show for example that among rural populations in the project area the awareness of domestic violence has risen from 36.9 % in 2009 to 56.3 % in 2011.

In addition considerable progress has been made in boosting the capacities of crisis centres and non-governmental organisations which provide support to victims of domestic violence. Statistics clearly show the work of these centres is having an effect on identification and assistance of victims. In 2010, a total of 1499 cases of domestic violence were recorded, the majority inflicted by a husband against his wife, while around one in five cases were inflicted by a mother in law. In the same year, psychologists counselled over 900 victims of domestic violence, 758 were supported by social workers, and 888 received legal advice. By 2012, the number of recorded cases of domestic violence had increased to 1712, probably because of the increased awareness among victims that there were people they could turn to. In that year, over 1500 women received psychological support, over 1000 were able to talk to social workers, and almost 1400 received legal advice. Most impressive of all, the resolution rate for these cases is now over 90 % – that means 9 out of 10 of women who turned to the Swiss supported centres have been able to find a way out of domestic violence, and start new lives.

Challenges remain however. In some rural areas where

awareness of domestic violence (and the fact that it is against the law) has been increased, it has served to make village leaders reluctant to involve law enforcement agencies. The rising popularity of religion, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, is also at times an obstacle. Some village Imams counsel against seeking official support (from medical practitioners, social workers, or the police) in what is perceived as a private family problem. Clearly here the project must try to work more closely with religious leaders, to ensure that women who are victims of domestic violence are not cut off from the support they need.

LIFE STORIES – ESCAPING FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Kholida

Kholida was married to her cousin when she was just 15 in an arranged marriage. From the start she suffered abuse in her husband's household: her husband was violent towards her and her mother-in-law demanded she does hard physical labour in the fields, even while she was pregnant. The first pregnancy ended in a miscarriage, an event which led to even more abuse by Kholida's husband and mother-in-law.

Two more pregnancies and miscarriages followed, and then Kholida's husband threw her out of the house and divorced her. She returned to her family home, and after a few years was married again, to a much older man who was also violent towards her. By then Kholida was so desperately unhappy with her situation that she made several attempts to commit suicide.

When the organisation Dialfruz came to her village to hold an awareness meeting about domestic violence, Kholida decided to attend. Dialfruz, a local partner in Switzerland's Prevention of Domestic Violence project in Tajikistan, regularly holds community meetings, with the aim of offering victims a place to talk, and of providing them with psychological, social, and legal support.

Kholida was among several women in her village who attended that first meeting. There they realised they were not alone. They shared experiences in confidence, and supported one another. It was also the first step towards escaping from domestic violence, and starting a new life. Kholida consulted a lawyer who told her what her rights were. She also had sessions with a psychologist during which she could talk about her years of suffering. A Dialfruz social worker supported her in her application for a course in computing and accounting. Kholida completed the course, and she is now an administrative worker in a local building company.

Sa'bagul

Sa'bagul married a man from Danghara district when she was 18 years old. From the day she moved in with her husband and mother in law, she was the victim of abuse. When she became pregnant, she hoped her husband would be kinder to her, especially if she gave birth to a son. Instead the physical abuse continued: her husband would beat her for the smallest of excuses, for example if the baby cried, he became angry and violent. Sa'bagul's second child was born with disabilities, as a result of the abuse she had suffered while pregnant. Her husband threw her out after the birth, and she was forced to return to her parents' house. Here she was neither cared for nor welcomed, and was abused by her brother.

Finally a neighbour, herself a survivor of domestic violence, approached Sa'bagul and suggested she visit the 'Ghamkhori' crisis centre. The centre is based in Kurgan-Tyube city, and is supported by Switzerland's prevention of domestic violence programme in Tajikistan. It provides medical, psychological and legal services for victims of domestic violence, and also does awareness raising work in local schools, with the local authorities, and with community and religious leaders.

Sa'bagul spoke first with a social worker at the centre, who then referred her to a psychologist and a lawyer as well. With their help she regained her confidence, and applied through the courts for child support. The local authorities in her district also became involved in her case, they helped her to get a little plot of land, and to build a house. Today she lives there with her children, she receives alimony payments from her former husband, and a disability allowance for her second child.



DID YOU KNOW?

Women in Tajikistan do not enjoy the legal right to divorce.

Judiciary, police, and medical staff are not trained to deal with cases of domestic violence. Abusive husbands are rarely arrested or prosecuted.

Studies show that around half of Tajikistan's women view it as acceptable for a husband to physically punish his wife. The figure is higher still in rural areas.

Less than one in five members of Tajikistan's parliament are women.

PROJECT AT A GLANCE

Project title:

Prevention of Domestic Violence in Tajikistan

Duration of project:

September 2012 to August 2016

Geographical focus:

Districts of Bokhtar and Vakhsh in Khatlon oblast and cities of Qurghonteppa (Kurgan-Tyube) and Dushanbe. Through the mass media outlets the project gains a countrywide coverage.

Budget:

CHF 4 080 000

Implementing partner:

GOPA Consultants



COUNTRY FACTS

Population:

8 million
(CIA 2014)

Life Expectancy:

63.9 years (men)
70.3 years (women)
(CIA, 2014)

Gross Domestic Product per capita:

USD 953
(IMF, 2012)

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Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

Division of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

Freiburgstrasse 130, CH-3003 Berne

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/sdc>

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Pictures: Swiss Cooperation Office in Dushanbe