

Innovative Practice in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Feb. 2005)

Case No.: 2

Social Mobilization and Micro Credit

Social Mobilization and Micro Credit project was implemented in "Shirabad", a very poor suburban area near Zahedan in Sistan and Baluchestan Province between 2000-2004.

The Social Mobilization and Micro Credit Project is an anti-poverty effort, which stresses the role of women and environmental protection.

To implement the project, UNDP joined with the Iranian Government's Management and Planning Organization and an NGO, The Family and Sustainable Development Fund (FSDF). During the 3 years implementation of the project, some other Government Organizations, such as Department of the Environment and Governor's office, also helped the FSDF facilitators.

The community was a poverty-ridden society grappling with the devastating consequences of illicit drug transit from neighboring Afghanistan and widespread addiction.

The main objective of the project was to mobilize women in Shirabad to organize in community-based organizations (CBO) and through participatory development methods, to empower themselves. More than 400 women created and joined 10 community organizations, taking part in training and educational programs. Beside management, literacy and skills classes, there have been lessons on writing letters to officials and putting together sound business proposals.

Many of the women have received loans for their small enterprises.

Before implementation of the project, Shirabad's women did not think they could do anything about their personal and social problems, such as all the garbage in front of their houses, or the fact that they did not have running water or electricity. Now they have gone to the municipality so often that the mayor of Shirabad has even come to their house to consult them on the services they have pursued. Women have been able to receive official agreement for their neighborhood's street to be lined with asphalt, sewage and trash have been reduced and they have received 500 tree seedlings and have started planting trees in their streets and backyards.

New jobs have been created. Women have become a vocal and effective voice in bringing about change in the local community.

The project intended to show how community-based techniques can bring about long-term sustainable poverty alleviation and therefore it has been fairly successful, especially in term of empowering poor women, not only economically, but also socially.

According to Ferederick Lyons, UNDP Resident Representative in Iran, "The Shirabad project has managed to initiate a targeted gender approach in a patriarchal community and has, within a short time, changed perceptions of group action. As a small-scale model it has provided the possibility for national authorities to learn and adopt the better practices for replication in other areas. And all of this with a program cost of \$ only 150,000."

This experience shows how environmental issues are closely interrelated with social and economic status and how important it is to address these issues collectively and in an integrated manner.