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FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

“Livelihood Improvement of Rural Population in 9 districts of the Republic of Tajikistan (LIRP Project)”

December 2017

Disclaimer: This final evaluation report has been commissioned by UNDP Tajikistan. The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of UNDP Tajikistan, the Government of Tajikistan, and the Government of the Russian Federation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AfT	Aid for Trade
CP	Communities Programme
CPA	Country Programme Action Plan 2016-2020
CPD	Country Programme Document 2016-2020
DDP	District Development Programme
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IFI	International Financial Institution
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LITACA	Project for Livelihood Improvement in Tajik-Afghan Cross Border Areas
LIRP	Livelihood Improvement of Rural Population in 9 districts of Tajikistan Project
MCF	Micro-Credit Fund
MLF	Micro-Loan Fund
MoEDT	Ministry of Economic Development and Trade
NDS	National Development Strategy
PPD	Public-Private Dialogue
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
PRC	People's Republic of China
TJS	Tajikistani Somoni
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USD	United States Dollar

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report presents the findings from the final evaluation of the “Livelihood Improvement of Rural Population in 9 districts of the Republic of Tajikistan” (further in the text – the LIRP project) conducted in October 2017.

The evaluation is a qualitative study based on interviews and group discussions with over 150 people¹, including local public authorities, the private sector, local civil society, project clients, beneficiaries, implementation partners, stakeholders and project staff. Overall the respondents found that the project was relevant, effective and managed to generate positive impact (although levels vary depending on the output, see section 3 “Evaluation Findings”). Impact and sustainability is not easily identifiable at this stage and will mainly depend on the commitment of stakeholders (both public and private) to pursue change and keep up the momentum.

At the global level, the evaluation concluded that the targets were achieved and in some cases exceeded. No major delays or bottlenecks have been reported. The analysis also revealed that some activities are likely to be more sustainable than others (e.g. the impact of investments in infrastructure and support to business ventures is more likely to continue after the project ends compared to soft actions such as support to local planning and monitoring or public-private platform dialogue meetings).

The following are among the project’s most notable achievements:

- UNDP has been contributing to participatory planning processes at the district level since 2009. The LIRP project built on previous results and continued work in the area of district development planning, monitoring, and evaluation. The project contributed to creating the understanding among local authorities that funding should be based on development priorities that are part of a coherent strategy rather than requests made on an ad hoc basis.
- The project has also contributed to the PPP knowledge base and capacity among government and the private sector. The understanding, planning, and institutional capabilities will take time to develop, but by providing specific training and showing successful examples of PPPs in Russia the project succeeded in reinforcing the message that PPPs can be a game-changer in public service delivery and public finance.
- LIRP brought its contribution to the development of the technical and vocational education and training system (TVET) in Tajikistan. In the target districts, most course structure and contents were outdated, resulting in a mismatch between graduate skills and labour market demand. The TVET institutions participating in the project benefited from modern and adequate equipment and refurbished training facilities. In doing so, the project has contributed to improving the generally low social image of TVET and contribute to the system’s ability to attract students (both young women and men) by improving the condition of physical facilities.
- Evidence from the field visits shows that the grant scheme and micro crediting have delivered excellent results that are likely to be highly sustainable. It proved to be one of the most appreciated and helpful outputs of the project.
- Overall the LIRP project’s main added value is showcasing and promoting innovative development solutions and business ideas that have never been considered, realised or utilised due to low capacities in the target districts. For example, modern fruit drying

¹ Roughly half of those were women; age for all respondents ranged from 20 to 70 years old.

and vegetable processing techniques, drip irrigation, and setting up of production and demonstration greenhouses were among the initiatives promoted by the project that built on the local potential and showed how it could be turned into a profit-making business venture.

- Women's participation in project activities picked up during implementation. In particular, females were most numerous in activities under output 3. Part of the reason is the traditional societal structure and distribution of roles among female and male members of the community. For example, the number of women working in local government structures in decision – making position is close to zero. However, among the people working in the fields or doing house work (mostly manual labour), women would represent the majority. Nevertheless, the evaluators noted the efforts deployed by the project team to attract and empower more women (see section on Output 3).
- Youth participation was another important aspect for LIRP. As discussed in the Context section, many young people (mostly men) have left the country in search of work opportunities. Those who stayed have either limited skills, are unemployed or in search of income generating activities. The project attempted to attract representatives from all these categories. In urban areas, young people participated mostly in activities on how to start and manage a business venture. In rural areas, young people could learn new skills through the TVET institutions or set up / reinforce a business venture with financial support and consulting from the project (see section 3, in particular under Output 2 and 3).

Building on the lessons learnt during the implementation, the report makes recommendations for similar interventions and provides suggestions for future project ideas (see section 4).

Key recommendations include a more flexible and demand-driven approach based on the specific needs and capacities of the regions. For example, it recommends taking a cluster / sector approach and financing the whole production chain (e.g. from growing to production/processing to selling). Some districts are more advanced than others (in particular in the North of the country), therefore they require support at a different level (e.g. scaling up and exports rather than capacity building on how to start up a business).

Another important recommendation is focusing on youth and women. Special attention should be given to rural youth, in particular women. Women in general remain the most vulnerable among the other vulnerable categories in Tajikistan. Their education and overall socio-economic empowerment should be featured in any future intervention.

INTRODUCTION

The report contains five sections.

The first section lays out the methodology and the framework used for analysis. LIRP final evaluation is a qualitative study building on observations, interviews and focus group discussions in all nine target districts of the project.

The second section sets the context. We look at the economic and social aspects in Tajikistan in the areas relevant to the project intervention: private sector, business environment, and public-private partnerships. These elements are important also because they reflect the external risks beyond the project control.

The third section presents the evaluation findings. First, we look at the project performance globally. We present findings with regard to the project design and management structure, stakeholder participation, communication and knowledge sharing strategy, as well as LIRP's linkages and complementarity with other UNDP or external projects. We list the project's achievements, as well as remaining challenges. Second, we analyse individual project outcomes including specific results on stated targets.

The fourth section draws lessons learnt and makes recommendations for future interventions.

The fifth and final section contains selected stories from the field. The intention is to show the impact on real people, the rural population in Tajikistan – the focus of this project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

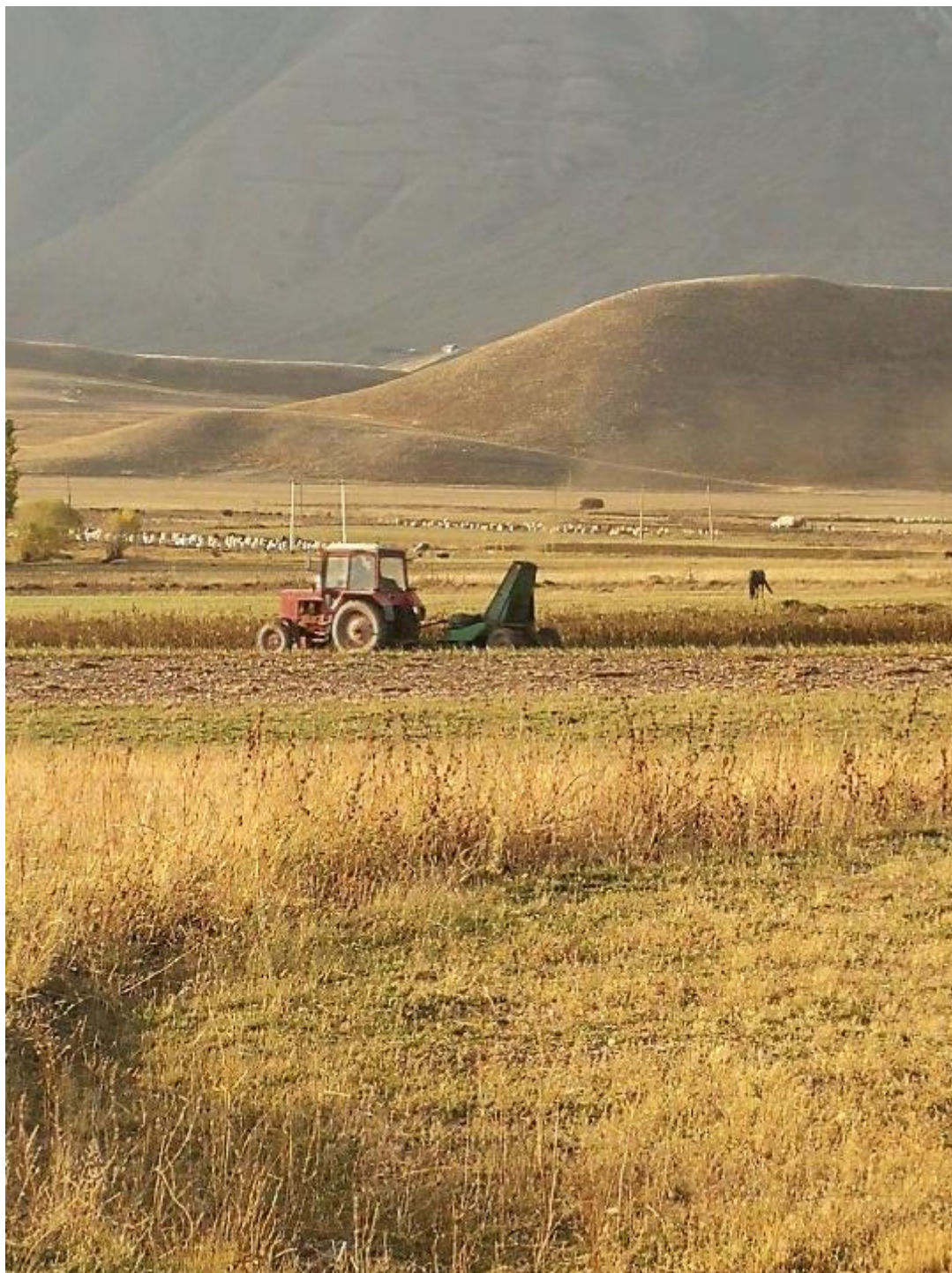
The evaluation team would like to express gratitude to the UNDP Tajikistan staff who participated in this evaluation for the assistance they provided throughout the process. Their perspective on the successes and challenges encountered during the project implementation was indispensable as was their support gathering necessary documentation and feedback from stakeholders at all levels. The evaluation team would like to especially thank the Communities Programme team for their assistance, valuable insights, and providing documentation. The evaluators also offer their sincere thanks to representatives of all UNDP Tajikistan Area Offices in Gharm, Kulob, Khujand, and Ayni for their time and effort.

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Dushanbe, November 2017

1. METHODOLOGY²



² All photos in this report were taken during the field visits to the districts. Credit goes to UNDP Area Offices. All photos were taken with the consent of the people concerned.

The Assignment

The purpose of this assignment was to conduct the final evaluation of the LIRP Project (November 2014 – December 2017). The evaluation team worked in close consultation with UNDP Tajikistan, in particular, the CP Programme Manager and the Senior Economic Development Officer.

The final evaluation assessed the progress of the LIRP Project against stated outputs and highlighted issues and challenges affecting effective and efficient implementation of outputs and their contribution to project outcomes and impact. The evaluation team also identified lessons learned and made recommendations for similar interventions in the future.

Methodology

The evaluation process involved three stages: desk assessment, field work, and report drafting and peer review.³ A debriefing session was held on October the 27th with project and UNDP staff to share preliminary conclusions and collect initial feedback.

The evaluation team held meetings and site visits in all nine districts where the project operated from the 15th to the 27th of October 2017. The field work focused on gathering on-site information and data. The evaluation team conducted site visits with samples of beneficiaries, grantees, and clients as a verification method for initial findings gathered from the desk assessment. The consultants held key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) to get a first-hand exposure to the results of the project interventions (including micro credits and grants awarded by the project). The respondents included local public authorities, the private sector, local civil society, project clients, beneficiaries, implementation partners, stakeholders and project staff.⁴

Limitations

Overall the consultants conducted the assignment without any incidents. Nevertheless, the evaluators encountered the following limitations in the process.

The evaluation findings are based largely on the views of respondents with a vested interest in the project, and, therefore, their responses may have been potentially biased regarding impact and outcomes.

During interviews or focus group discussions, participants were, on occasion, uncomfortable or unwilling to share information that would not reflect well on them and their social environment. For example, the consultants found that some participants hesitated to sound critical or too open about shortcomings during the group discussions on governance (e.g. private-public partnerships, relationships with district authorities).

In order to reduce the effect of these biases, the consultants ensured that respondents understood the confidentiality of responses, incorporated responses from non-beneficiaries, and requested that respondents provide a rationale for their answers, including examples of specific activities and actions that contributed to reported outcomes.

³ Please refer to Appendix 1 “The Evaluation Matrix” for more details on the methods and tools used.

⁴ Please refer to Appendix 2 “Schedule of Meetings” for the full list of persons and organizations met during field work.

Evaluation Criteria

The following OECD – DAC criteria⁵ were used during the evaluation: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability. Table 1 below provides the assessment elements that guided the evaluation process.

Table 1. Evaluation Criteria and Assessment

Criterion	Assessment
Relevance	was assessed both in terms of alignment of project objectives with country and UNDP policies for rural development and the needs of the rural poor, as well as project design features geared to the achievement of project objectives.
Effectiveness	measured the extent to which the project's objectives were achieved taking into account their relative importance.
Efficiency	indicates how economically resources/inputs were converted into results.
Impact	refers to the changes that occurred or are expected to occur in the lives of the rural people (whether positive or negative, direct or indirect, intended or unintended) as a results of project interventions.
Sustainability	indicates the likely continuation of project benefits beyond the phase of funding support. It also includes an assessment of the likelihood that actual and anticipated results will be resilient to risks beyond the project's life.

In addition to the criteria listed above, the consultants also analysed the level of involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of the project as well as the project's knowledge management, outreach and communication strategy.

Grading System

The colour grading system provides a quick overview of progress under each criterion. It is helpful in identifying well performing and problematic areas. A three-colour scale was used with the following categories: (i) Green – good or very good; (ii) Orange - with problems; (iii) Red – off track or with serious deficiencies.

Table 2. The Colour Grading System

Colour	What it means
Good/very good	The situation is considered satisfactory overall and if some issues were mentioned, they did not call into question the project and were solved by project team / stakeholders.
Medium	There were issues which needed to be addressed. Necessary improvements did not however require a major revision of the activities and/or implementation arrangements.
Deficiencies	There were serious deficiencies which required major adjustments, revisions or cancellation of activities, components, or implementation arrangements of the project.

⁵ <https://goo.gl/ZH8XtB>

2. THE PROJECT



Context



Source: UN Maps⁶

Tajikistan is a largely rural, land-locked country with a population of approximately 8.48 million⁷. Over nine tenth of Tajikistan's territory is covered by mountains. Following the end of the civil war in 1997, the country has made considerable improvements with the support of the international community. Existing infrastructure and trade connections in Tajikistan reflect the historic connections to the Russian Federation and the former Soviet Union countries. However, important future relationships appear to lie toward the south and east to large markets such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and PRC.

Tajikistan is poorer than its neighbours, the country's 2016 GDP stood at USD 6.8 billion, and economic growth has stalled.⁸ Trade in commodities such as aluminium, cotton and agricultural products has been providing the largest share of the country's foreign currency resources. Remittances from Tajiks working especially in the construction sector in the Russian Federation represent almost half of the country's GDP⁹. Links with Russia remain strong owing to robust political, economic, and military ties. However, changing economic conditions in Russia due to falling oil prices and recession resulted to a decline in these remittances to around 29%¹⁰ of GDP in 2015.

⁶ UN Map of Tajikistan, Commons Wikimedia, goo.gl/g0XicB

⁷ IMF, end-2015.

⁸ Economist Intelligence Unit estimates for 2016, down from USD 9.2 billion in 2014 and USD 8.9 billion in 2015.

⁹ Remittances peaked in 2013 at 49.6% of GDP. Source: <http://data.worldbank.org>; Personal remittances, received (% of GDP), 2016.

¹⁰ <http://data.worldbank.org>; Personal remittances, received (% of GDP), 2016.

This high dependency on remittances underlines the strategic importance for Tajikistan of further developing its domestic economy and domestic employment creation. The Tajik Government faces an urgent necessity to create jobs for several hundred thousand returning migrants in a very short period of time¹¹. With more people in Tajikistan competing for limited jobs, wages are weakening, further undermining domestic demand growth, and thus reducing sales opportunities for domestic producers. The authorities remain keen to develop energy resources and infrastructure, although progress in these areas is limited.

Private Sector and Investment Climate

Tajikistan's transition from a centrally planned to a market economy has been slow and the civil war significantly delayed economic progress. The government has retained control over many production activities and directly influences prices in several markets. State enterprises are mainly concentrated in power generation and distribution, aluminium production, construction, and construction materials.

Over 9,600 small enterprises and 1,300 medium and large enterprises have been privatized since independence.¹² Since 2005, the private sector's contribution to GDP has remained stable at about 55%.¹³ The majority of these entrepreneurs are engaged in the agricultural sector, small traders and service providers. The private sector employs over 1.5 million of Tajikistan's 2.3 million workforce, including those in the informal sector.¹⁴ The private sector as a whole remains weak and has made limited progress in expanding its productive capabilities to create more wealth. Many of the shortcomings in Tajikistan's economy—low competitiveness of products in particular—reflect the private sector's poor performance.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) remains sluggish and is yet to become the driver the government hoped would increase the private sector's contribution to the GDP. FDI inflows dropped from 9% of GDP during 2004–2008 to around 1% of GDP during 2009–2013.¹⁵ FDI is concentrated in a few sectors—mainly financial intermediation, communications, mining, and construction.

Despite efforts to increase Tajikistan's Doing Business ranking, long-term private investment continues to be constrained by an unfavourable business environment that imposes high uncertainty. Strong perceptions of corruption and expropriation risks discourage businesses and individuals from investing in Tajikistan¹⁶.

Financing is expensive and short-term, limiting private investors' capacity to expand and compete internationally. Domestic credit to the private sector was only 18% of GDP in 2013, still an improvement from 13% of GDP during 2009–2012. Energy and water supply is unreliable, and large parts of the country do not receive stable electricity supply during the 6-month winter period. Businesses have very limited knowledge of modern production techniques. Only 17% of the firms report having an internationally recognized quality

¹¹ Mullojonov, Parviz (2016) "Civil Society Landscape in Contemporary Tajikistan", CEELI Institute "Central Asia Project".

¹² State Committee on Investment and State Property Management. <http://amcu.gki.tj/eng/>.

¹³ EBRD. Structural and Institutional Change Indicators. <http://www.ebrd.com/pages/research/economics/data/macro.shtml>. The private sector's share in GDP represents EBRD estimates based on available statistics.

¹⁴ National Statistics Committee. <http://www.stat.tj/english/home.htm>.

¹⁵ World Bank. World Development Indicators. <http://data.worldbank.org/products/wdi>.

¹⁶ Transparency International ranked the country 151 out of 176 Transparency International 2016 goo.gl/la09fV.

certification. Tajikistan ranks 106th out of 144 countries in cluster development.¹⁷ The number of graduates qualifying from Tajikistan's education system is low and educational skills and qualifications do not fully meet labour market requirements¹⁸. Businesses have limited access to external markets due to a lack of knowledge about consumer preferences and price sensitivities, and poor transport and logistics infrastructure.

Public – Private Partnerships

The government has expressed its intention to use public–private partnership (PPP) to deliver public infrastructure and services. In 2012 Tajikistan enacted a PPP Law, formalizing the country's ambitions to accelerate public infrastructure and service delivery through private participation. Prior to this, no specific policy, legislation, institutional arrangements or other mechanisms were in place, and the understanding of PPPs and related capacity was absent, or at best minimal. Over the course of 2013 to 2014, the Government made considerable progress to establish institutional arrangements, PPP procedures, and generally build PPP capacity. By 2015 and 2016 the Government was especially focused on trying to achieve PPP project delivery within the framework.

However, Tajikistan remains at an early stage of development of its PPP framework and market. Other key elements of a PPP enabling environment—institutional and financial—are still being developed. The business environment is not adequate for PPP. To date Tajikistan's PPP experience remains very limited, and only a few projects with PPP characteristics have been implemented.¹⁹ The underlying weak economic conditions remain a challenge for PPP project implementation, and for achieving commercial-viability in projects.

Women's Role

Due to male labour migration, women have been taking business management roles. Women work in the market, have small production units, and some travel as shuttle traders to neighbouring countries. However, their entrepreneurial progress is limited, especially in rural communities, by rigid notions of appropriate societal roles for men and women. Men and women have equal legal rights to land (and property other than land), bank loans without a need for prior authorization, and contracts in their own names. Nonetheless, women represent a small percentage of registered land use owners and few women apply for loans, primarily because they are not aware of their rights and do not understand the underlying procedures. Women typically do not control household assets.

Design and Implementation Arrangements

It is in this context that in November 2014 the UNDP Tajikistan CP started the implementation of the three-year LIRP project funded by the Government of the Russian Federation. The project aims to promote socio-economic development and address issues in view of improving the livelihood of population in nine of the most vulnerable districts of Tajikistan: Isfara, Istaravshan, Ayni, Penjikent districts of Sughd Region, Vose and Temurmali districts of Khatlon Region, Rasht, Tajikabad and Lakhsh districts of Republican Subordination. Indirectly, the project sought to reduce the flow of unskilled labour migrants from Tajikistan to other CIS countries, including the Russian Federation.

¹⁷ World Economic Forum. 2014. Global Competitiveness Report, 2014–2015. Geneva.

¹⁸ https://www.unicef.org/tajikistan/overview_27465.html

¹⁹ For example, the PPP pilot projects supported by ADB <https://www.adb.org/countries/tajikistan/results>

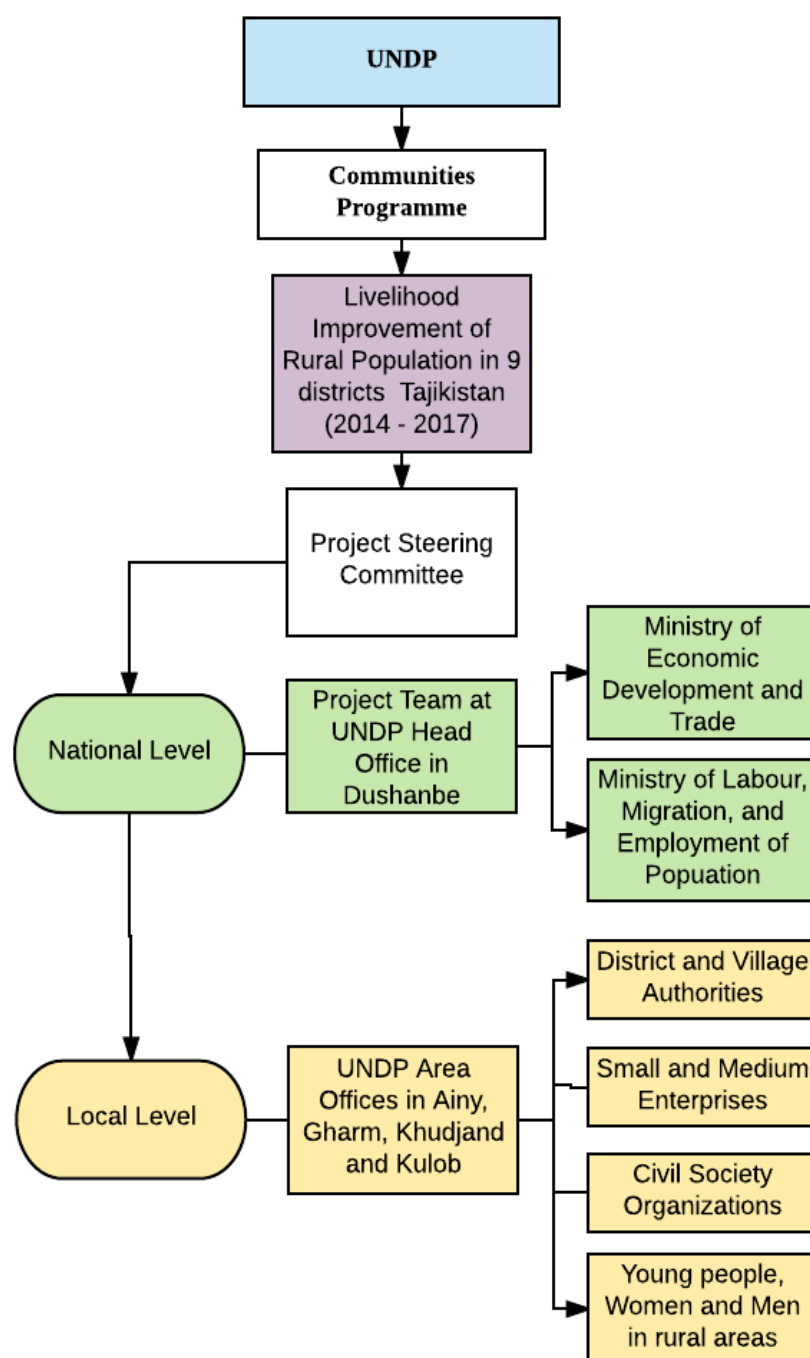
To achieve this, the project set the following outputs under three components:

1. ***District authorities are capable to efficiently plan and monitor local socio-economic development.*** Under this component, the project promoted participatory approach in planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluating of social and economic development of the districts. The aim was to support local authorities in delivering services that are more responsive to people's needs in a transparent manner, thus increasing trust between population and local government.
2. ***Support development of favourable investment climate, entrepreneurship and employment at the local level.*** Under this component, the project created advisory councils for local economic development comprising representatives of different public sectors (e.g. health, social affairs, education, economic development, agriculture, water management, etc.) and the private sector, and conducted analysis of the investment capacity in each target area. In parallel, the project provided vocational training for unemployed youth, women and people with disability in the most demanded areas, such as agribusiness, entrepreneurship, sustainable economic management, etc.
3. ***Support rural initiatives aimed to address the priorities of local population, creation of new jobs and development of entrepreneurship.*** Under this component, the project awarded grants to at least fifty small-scale economic projects, such as the rehabilitation of irrigation facilities and land reclamation, purchase of agricultural machinery, establishment of processing workshops, etc., which had the potential to significantly improve productivity, provide long-term benefit and create jobs and income opportunities for rural people. The project also provided microcredits aimed at creating jobs and additional income for the unemployed and at developing micro-entrepreneurship initiatives.

At the national level, the project worked directly with these main stakeholders:

- The **State Committee on Investment and State Property Management** responsible for improving the investment climate and supporting entrepreneurship in Tajikistan. It also oversees the official **Investment Promotion Agency** responsible for catalysing investments in Tajikistan— and the **PPP Centre** responsible for coordinating the development of a pipeline of PPP projects and the necessary legal and regulatory framework.
- The **Ministry of Development and Trade**, whose responsibilities include setting policies for socioeconomic and regional development, free economic zones, foreign trade, and the coordination of public investment.
- The **Ministry of Labour, Migration, and Employment of Population** responsible for employment and vocational education.
- The **Consultative Council on Improving the Investment Climate under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan** responsible for improving investment climate through providing PPD platforms to discuss and resolve existing issues on doing business.

Figure 1. Overview of LIRP Workflow, Main Stakeholders and Implementing Partners



3. EVALUATION FINDINGS



This section contains two parts.

The first part looks at the project's performance globally. We present findings with regard to the project design and management structure, stakeholder participation, communication and knowledge sharing strategy. We also look at LIRP's linkages and complementarity with other UNDP and external projects. We list the project's achievements, as well as remaining challenges.

Individual project outcomes including specific results on stated targets are analysed in the second part.

Overall Findings

Project Design, Management and Stakeholder Participation

The overall objective was ambitious and stated that the project would improve the livelihood of one million people. The specific project objectives addressed a wide range of complex issues within an implementation period that was too short to see effective change, in particular when change refers to attitudes and practices. Activities within each output involved an array of implementing partners and stakeholders ranging from the district and local authorities to civil society organizations including community support groups and farmers' associations, and the private sector. At the national level, the project interacted directly with two ministries and three government bodies.

In the course of implementation, the reference to one million people was dropped from the title and the project reports. Although it is impossible to estimate the precise number of people whose livelihood has been improved by LIRP, to the credit of the project team, we note that implementation across all components was generally commendable and no major delays or bottlenecks were reported.

The governance of the project was ensured through a Steering Committee (SC), which was the project's key decision-making body. The SC ensured oversight and monitoring of progress and had a positive effect on the project management²⁰. Decisions were taken based on consensus and each member was entitled to one vote. The main tasks of the SC were to:

- Review and approve annual and semi-annual work plans and budgets of the project;
- Review annual and semi-annual narrative and financial reports in accordance with the approved work plan;
- Assess project progress against states targets and take decisions on any operational challenges (e.g. approve changes in the work plan);
- Assist in ensuring active participation of local authorities in project implementation;
- Make recommendations on the necessary measures and steps, interventions and reforms at national and local levels for more effective implementation of the project objectives;
- Ensure coordination and communication among similar projects and initiatives of other development partners, as well as effective interaction with public authorities.

²⁰ According to Mr. Firuz Saidkhadzhaev, Senior Economic Development Officer, Communities Programme, UNDP Office Dushanbe.

The Ministry of Economic Development and Trade chaired the SC meetings. The members with voting rights were:

- From the beneficiaries: Minister of Economic Development and Trade or its designated representative;
- From the donor: Government of the Russian Federation represented by the Russian Ambassador or a designated representative;
- From the implementing agency: UNDP Resident Representative or a designated person.

The minutes of the SC meetings²¹ revealed that representatives of district authorities and project staff, as well as representatives of relevant government agencies and non-government organizations also attended the meetings. SC meetings were held regularly, usually twice a year.

At the sub-national level, LIRP managed to secure strong community participation in particular with regard to economic development sub-projects and the grant sub-projects. The *jamoats* helped with approval of documents for design and construction of infrastructure, allocation of land, mobilization of community members to help with manual labour and encouragement of unemployed women to get involved in view of learning skills that would help them find work. Community members contributed with manual labour (e.g. construction works, cleaning of terrains and irrigation pipes) and in kind (e.g. purchase of seeds and fertilizers for greenhouses, purchase and installation of water pipes, connection to electricity grids). Public authorities and community members participated and brought their contribution to each of the total of 90 economic development and grant sub-projects in all target districts. These aspects are discussed in more detail under the findings for Output 3.

Visibility, Communication and Knowledge Sharing

In an environment of limited economic activity and investment, the project was highly visible, in some districts LIRP was the only project supporting such actions. All project interventions, in particular, those involving construction works and purchase of equipment and furniture were properly labeled acknowledging the financial support from the Russian Federation and stating the name of the project. All the respondents interviewed in the course of this evaluation were aware of who the donor and implementing agency were.

Although the project has no official communication strategy, the team used various communication tools, including one page information sheets for sub-projects, success stories, presentations, video and audio materials to disseminate information. LIRP communication activities included publication of articles in local newspapers and magazines, national and local TV and radio. The project document and a project brochure containing an overview of activities and expected outputs are available on the project website²². LIRP has also launched social media initiatives. For example, LIRP documentaries presenting beneficiaries' stories from the field and messages from LIRP Project Steering Committee members, as well as media reports from the opening of LIRP

²¹ The consultants reviewed SC minutes for the period 2015 – 2017.

²² http://www.tj.undp.org/content/tajikistan/en/home/operations/projects/poverty_reduction/nds_prs.html see http://www.tj.undp.org/content/dam/tajikistan/docs/projects/PEI/Women%20Empowerment%20in%20Tajikistan_0.pdf

infrastructure projects are available on the UNDP Communities Programme Facebook page. However, such media typically target younger people and are less likely to be used by older people or people from rural areas.

The project appears to lack a clear knowledge sharing strategy. For example, the project website does not include updates on project activities and progress, as well as other documents (or links to external websites) produced with project support, such as District Development Plans, District Investment Guides, training material or other types of publications or project deliverables. Some of the documents produced with UNDP support within LIRP can be found on some of the districts' websites, though often information is incomplete or missing. Since the project website is the main entry point and platform for information and knowledge sharing, it is recommended that for future interventions the website be updated regularly so that it can serve its purpose as “knowledge portal” and “best practice” sharing tool even after project completion.

Linkages, Networks, and Complementarity

In 2016, the Government of Tajikistan adopted the National Development Strategy 2016-2030 (NDS) and the mid-term development programme 2016-2020. NDS 2030 is focused on economic diversification and competitiveness, sustainable jobs, improving energy supply and transport connectivity, ensuring food security, enhancing public administration and developing human resources. These development priorities find reflection in the new UNDAF 2016-2020²³ and the UNDP Country Programme 2016-2020.²⁴ Investment climate improvement, together with private sector development and entrepreneurship, was a pillar of the LIRP project. LIRP activities have thus contributed to the following priority areas: improved governance, rule of law and access to justice; and sustainable and equitable economic growth.

Although the project has started after the adoption of SDGs in September 2015, LIRP has contributed to several of the goals of Agenda 2030. On a global level, LIRP activities are relevant to Goal 4 “Quality Education”, Goal 5 “Gender Equality”, and Goal 10 “Reduced Inequalities”. On a specific level, the project is relevant to Goal 1 “No Poverty” and Goal 8 “Decent Work and Economic Growth”.

The CP team at UNDP Tajikistan has implemented several projects in the area of poverty reduction and economic development, as well as local governance and social development during the period 2014-2017. LIRP project team has ensured complementarity of activities and coordination whenever feasible. In particular, the following joint activities were undertaken with the following UNDP projects:

Poverty and Environment Initiative (PEI):

- Produced a documentary and educational film on “Introduction to planning, monitoring and budgeting of sustainable local development” that will be used for training of civil servants, civil society and the private sector, academia and other relevant parties (joint initiative of PEI, LIRP and LITACA projects);
- Developed communication material, e.g. “Empowering women in Tajikistan: Success Stories”;

²³ http://www.untj.org/files/Publications/UNDAF_2016-2020_eng_final_web.pdf

²⁴ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=DP/DCP/TAJ/2

- Revised and piloted the draft Law “On water users’ association” at the irrigation water pump stations rehabilitated by LIRP project.

Project for Livelihood Improvement in Tajik-Afghan Cross Border Areas (LITACA):

- Conducted a 4-day training on "Strengthening the institutional development of public-private dialogue at the local level" gathering 32 representatives of Consultative Councils, including the public sector;
- Conducted a study tour for the representatives of regional PPD platforms to the Consultative Council on Improvement of Investment Climate under the President of Tajikistan;
- Hold a round table on "The role of Local Councils in improvement of investment and business climate and in the economic development" gathering 60 representatives of Consultative Councils from Sughd, Khatlon and the Rasht Valley, including representatives of the public sector and international organizations. During the round table, the effective results of the most successful PPD Consultative Councils, operating at national, regional and local levels were presented, as well as further cooperation between the Consultative Councils was discussed.
- Technical support provided to PPDs: 3 PPDs under LITACA in Shaartuz, Dusti and Farkhor districts and 9 PPDs under the LIRP Consultative Councils in Sughd, Khatlon, Rasht Valley, Isfara, Istaravshan, Penjikent, Ayni, Vose and Temurmalik.

Aid for Trade (AfT):

- Supported “*Startup Chohihona*” events in Khudjand and Kurgantube cities allowing 55 pitchers / young entrepreneurs to present their business ideas to investors and other interested parties. At least 18 of them were supported by partner organizations with opportunities of further acceleration, capacity building and/or investment;
- AfT built the capacity of the public organization “Quality Management Center” (QMC)²⁵ on introducing HACCP and Global GAP certificates to companies and dekhkan farms. QMC employees then organized information sessions for LIRP beneficiaries, a session on GlobalGAP for 135 dekhkan farmers and a session on HACCP and ISO for 15 entrepreneurs. As a result, 4 companies²⁶ introduced HACCP and 2 dekhkan farms²⁷ introduced Global GAP quality standards into their production process;
- Supported the organization of trade fairs and forums in Sughd (July 2015 and June 2016);
- Supported the organization of the Contractual Forums in (February 2016 and February 2017);
- Conducted the B2B meeting of entrepreneurs from Jon Alay district in Kyrgyzstan and Lakhsh district in Tajikistan (July 2017 in Lakhsh district).
- Co-organized a regional conference on the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Agribusiness gathering 60 farmers and entrepreneurs²⁸.

²⁵ jointly with GIZ, Hilfswerk Austria International in Central Asia and National Association of Small and Medium Businesses of the Republic of Tajikistan.

²⁶ «Isfarafood », « Isfaragroup », « Fozilov », « Makhsuloi Oftobi ».

²⁷ « Bogparvar » farm and the focal point of the Michurin Institute in Isfara.

²⁸ in co-operation with the local partner, the Agricultural Advisory Organization “Neksigol Mushovir”.

- Supported the participation of 7 Tajik SMEs at the International Exhibition “World Food Moscow 2017”. The main purpose of this action was to promote Tajik SMEs²⁹ and their goods on international markets and provide an opportunity to increase exports. The participation resulted in signing contracts with a total value of over 3 million USD.
- The International Association of Exporters and Importers of Tajikistan, whose capacities have been improved by AfT, provided consultative support to LIRP beneficiaries, particularly with regard to building innovative fruit drying facilities in Penjikent, Vose and Temurmali. Members of the Association also purchased products (mostly apricot) produced by LIRP projects beneficiaries, particularly those who benefited from the rehabilitated irrigation pumping stations in Isfara.

Co-ordination with other donors was equally important as it increased opportunities for synergy, reduced overlapping and allowed for sharing of positive results and/or models that can be replicated. In some cases, it also provided additional sources of funding for project beneficiaries. The following recently completed or on-going initiatives addressed similar constraints as the LIRP Project:

- The World Bank’s Private Sector Competitiveness Project (2012-2018) simplified business registration and construction permit processes, improving regulations and infrastructure underlying access to financial services, and encouraging the development of the mining industry.
- The World Bank’s Tax Administration Reform Project (2012-2019), is building on previous support from ADB, the United States Agency for International Development, and the International Finance Corporation to improve tax administration.
- The *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ) Framework and Finance for Private Sector Development programme (2011-2020) have been strengthening value chains by providing business and consulting services; improving access to finance; encouraging cross-border trade; and promoting dialogue between policymakers, the private sector, and civil society.
- The Swiss Cooperation Office financed the IFC Investment Climate Advisory Services Programme (2007-2012), which supported regulatory reform in the areas of permits, licensing, inspections, simplification of tax administration, and investment policy.
- The EU and the International Trade Centre have supported trade facilitation and policy since 2013, particularly in relation to Tajikistan’s accession to the World Trade Organization.

Overall Project Achievements

Overall LIRP achieved the stated outcome-level results under all components. The following are among the project’s most notable achievements:

- UNDP has been contributing to participatory planning processes at the district level since 2009. The LIRP project built on previous results and continued work in the area of district development planning, monitoring, and evaluation. The project

²⁹ The following enterprises from Sugd district participated: «Vodii Mevakho», «ORO Isfara», «EvroAzia 2005», «Mevai Tilloi», «Abrikos and Co», «Visol Isfara», and «Eco Frukt».

contributed to creating the understanding among local authorities that funding should be based on development priorities that are part of a coherent strategy rather than requests made on an ad hoc basis.

- The project has also contributed to the PPP knowledge base and capacity among government and the private sector. The understanding, planning, and institutional capabilities will take time to develop, but by providing specific training and showing successful examples of PPPs in Russia the project succeeded in reinforcing the message that PPPs can be a game-changer in public service delivery and public finance.
- LIRP brought its contribution to the development of the technical and vocational education and training system (TVET) in Tajikistan. In the target districts, most course structure and contents were outdated, resulting in a mismatch between graduate skills and labour market demand. The TVET institutions participating in the project benefited from modern and adequate equipment and refurbished training facilities. In doing so, the project has contributed to improving the generally low social image of TVET and contribute to the system's ability to attract students (both young women and men) by improving the condition of physical facilities.
- Evidence from the field visits shows that the grant scheme and micro crediting have delivered excellent results that are likely to be highly sustainable. It proved to be one of the most appreciated and helpful outputs of the project.
- Overall the LIRP project's main added value is showcasing and promoting innovative development solutions and business ideas that have never been considered, realised or utilised due to low capacities in the target districts. For example, modern fruit drying and vegetable processing techniques, drip irrigation, and setting up of production and demonstration greenhouses were among the initiatives promoted by the project that built on the local potential and showed how it could be turned into a profit-making business venture.
- Women's participation in project activities picked up during implementation. In particular, females were most numerous in activities under output 3. Part of the reason is the traditional societal structure and distribution of roles among female and male members of the community. For example, the number of women working in local government structures in decision – making position is close to zero. However, among the people working in the fields or doing house work (mostly manual labour), women would represent the majority. Nevertheless, the evaluators noted the efforts deployed by the project team to attract and empower more women (see section on Output 3).
- Youth participation was another important aspect for LIRP. As discussed in the Context section, many young people (mostly men) have left the country in search of work opportunities. Those who stayed have either limited skills, are unemployed or in search of income generating activities. The project attempted to attract representatives from all these categories. In urban areas, young people participated mostly in activities on how to start and manage a business venture. In rural areas, young people could learn new skills through the TVET institutions or set up / reinforce a business venture with financial support and consulting from the project (see section 3, in particular under Output 2 and 3).

Remaining Challenges

One of the objectives of the evaluation was to formulate recommendations as part of the learning process UNDP is committed to. We present the lessons learnt and suggest recommendations in the fifth section of the report, the aspects listed below concern overall project design and work processes.

The overall project objective and the three components appear to be interconnected. However, the evaluation has shown that in practice the project lacked a clear transcending line. Connecting the dots between various levels of interventions (national and sub-national) and various types of activities (ranging from technical advice to study tours to micro-financing) has been difficult as a result.

The lack of a project baseline especially at sub-national level and the subsequent choice of indicators (e.g. the number of participants in trainings/tours, the number of produced documents). While this may provide useful information on the process and speak to the level of involvement of stakeholders, it does not allow gauging the bigger picture and measuring the change and impact that occurred as a result of project activities.

The lack of project mid-term evaluation. While this is not mandatory, such evaluations help to trace progress and take corrective measures before the project ends. The table below shows the overall project grading according to evaluation criteria.

Criterion	Status	Comments
Relevance	Good	The project is relevant to the needs of the country and is in line with national development strategies and the SDGs ³⁰ . On the sub-national level, the project addressed the most pressing issues such as job creation and improving the livelihood of people by offering access to finance in view of setting up income-generating activities and prevent labour migration. The project also undertook considerable efforts in building the knowledge base of public authorities and private sector with regard to planning and monitoring, and private-public partnerships and dialogue. Financing rural initiatives stemming from DDPs and offering micro credits reinforced the ‘soft’ components of the project. Specific relevance aspects related to individual project outputs are discussed below, overall the evaluators estimate that the project’s relevance is rated as “good”.
Effectiveness	Very Good	All targets were achieved and some targets were exceeded. Overall no major bottlenecks were reported. Respondents were satisfied with the quality of support provided (whether it was expertise / soft or equipment & works / hard). In particular, the respondents noted the high level of commitment and availability of the UNDP area teams. Numerous activities were implemented in a relative short period of time; therefore, effectiveness is rated as “very good”.
Efficiency	Medium	It is difficult to gauge whether the project was good

³⁰ For details on the specific strategies and priorities please refer to the section on *Linkages, Networks, and Complementarity* above.

		<p>value for money. According to the latest financial data (December 2016)³¹, the project spent 83,31% of the available funds. In order to be able to measure the added value of the money spent, an evaluation would have to be carried out a few years from now and an analysis of growth (in terms of profit, staff employed, other parameters) would have to be conducted among project beneficiaries and clients.</p> <p>Some respondents noted lengthy procurement procedures, but this may also be due to external factors such as unavailability of specialized equipment or difficulties in identifying suppliers that can provide the best quality-price ratio. Overall, efficiency is rated as “medium”.</p>
Impact	Medium	<p>Although it is too early to determine whether the received knowledge will be applied at the local level in the long terms, some short-term impact of the project is visible. Respondents were enthusiastic about the local development plans and monitoring systems they developed or the public-private initiatives they saw during exchanges; entrepreneurs proudly showed their new equipment and talked about potential increased productivity and the number of new jobs they created³². Nevertheless, it has been difficult to gauge impact in terms of employment numbers, poverty rates, and other development indicators. This is in part due to lack of baseline indicators, but also because statistical data, notably at the sub-national level, lack or are not publicly available (and/or not objectively verifiable). Long term impact in terms of shift in attitudes among public authorities, the private sector and the population at large is also difficult to estimate, but due to limited human capacity and financial resources it is likely to be low. Overall project impact is rated as “medium”.</p>
Sustainability	Medium	<p>Sustainability is rated as “medium” because the evaluation team found that some activities are unlikely to continue or may lose momentum after project completion. This remark refers in particular to the soft measures such as planning & monitoring, PPD platform and dialogue, the DDP Working Group meetings, and staff turnover (beyond project control). The outlook for sustainability of the business start-ups supported through grants and micro-credits is better, but whether or not this assumption holds true remains to be seen in two-three years’ time. It was too early for the evaluation team to establish this aspect in October 2017.</p>

³¹ As shown in the latest project progress report available at the time of writing this report, which covered the period from January to June 2017.

³² For more details, please see the section under Output 1.

Output Findings

Output 1. District authorities are capable to efficiently plan and monitor local socio-economic development

Target	Key Achievements
1.1 Training and retraining of 180 civil servants (20 persons per target district)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 412 civil servants were trained in local economic development planning, statistics, and analysis. • District development programmes and monitoring systems were introduced in 8 districts. • 170 staff among local authorities, civil society, and the private sector were trained on issues related to local economic development and promotion of local development (e.g. improvement of business environment and investment; Public Private Partnership).
1.2 Draft/review of DDPs in 9 target districts aligning with national development strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized and conducted trainings on reviewing DDPs in 9 target districts in which 90 local experts (including 15 women) participated. • Assisted in drafting and adopting two new DDPs in Vose and Temurmaliq and updating 7 existing DDPs in Istaravshan, Ayni, Penjikent, Tojikobod, Lakhsh, Isfara, and Rasht. • Produced a documentary and educational film “Introduction to planning, monitoring, and budgeting of sustainable local development” to be used for further training and capacity building of civil servants, civil society, private sector, as well as academia and other relevant stakeholders.
1.3 Introduction and efficient use of monitoring system for local socio-economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed monitoring matrices in 7 target districts (Ayni, Penjikent, Tojikobod, Lakhsh, Vose and Temurmaliq) that are used at national, regional and local levels. • Conducted a series of trainings for local government officials on strategic planning, resource mobilization, monitoring and evaluation.
1.4 Exchanges and study tours for local authorities, entrepreneurs, and farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36 representatives from the private sector and local authorities took part in knowledge exchanges between the southern and northern parts of the country. • 3 farmers participated in trainings on increasing productivity and profitability of agribusiness through use of innovative water and energy saving solutions and drip-irrigation technology in Astana, Kazakhstan. Participants set up demonstration plots in their home communities in Isfara, Lakhsh and Ayni districts to showcase and advocate for use of drip irrigation technologies in the mountainous districts of Tajikistan. • Conducted study tour to Altay region in Russia for representatives of Khatlon region, Rasht Valley districts and Isfara town (authorities, entrepreneurs, and farmers).

“For me personally the greatest added value of trainings organised by UNDP within the LIRP project was the understanding that my district’s DDP is not cast in stone, but work in progress. It is my job and the job of my colleagues from other departments to revisit the document regularly and make sure that it reflects the needs of our people, especially those from villages.” Head of District, Gharm

Tajikistan is divided into four administrative divisions, which are the provinces of Sughdand, Khatlon, the autonomous province of Gorno-Badakhshan, and the regions of Republican Subordination. The regions consist of districts and *jamoats* (communes), led by local government officials. There are three tiers of local government: the community level, the district level, and the regional level. Within LIRP project, UNDP intervened at all these levels, with a particular focus on district and community levels in the target areas.

Overall, respondents from all target districts found the methodology for developing DDPs useful and relevant. In particular, interviewed district authorities appreciated the unified guidance and methodology provided by the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. Unified reporting and monitoring templates facilitated the task of sub-national authorities and made data across districts easier to compare.

In comparison with previous planning exercises, respondents noted that DDPs updated or drafted with the help of the project became “clearer” and “more realistic”. Bringing together different sectors, civil society and business in the Working Group format improved the quality of the DDP. Many districts expressed their feelings of ownership over the DDP preparation and monitoring process. This may also be due to the fact that the DDP is an officially approved document recognized at all levels and it does not change when the head of district is replaced for example. Co-operation and co-ordination with development partners are now linked to the DDP as donors have accepted it as a development tool that helps streamline the funding process.

“At first, I was rather sceptical... here we go again, I said to myself, another meeting where I have to sit, listen and nod along. Who cares about a small village like mine, I thought... But it turned out to be the opposite! The atmosphere was a working one where everyone could speak and I can truly say that the decisions we reached satisfied everyone who participated” representative of civil society in Temurmalik district, anonymous

Respondents, in particular representatives of civil society and those coming from villages, noted that the bottom-up approach remains the most appropriate for local planning. Many respondents shared their satisfaction with the fact that even ‘small problems’ that were of great importance to rural communities (e.g. the refurbishment of the village school, medical facilities, etc.) were taken into account and reflected in the DDP. Reaching decisions based on consensus also provided to be a good practice (as opposed to voting or unilateral decision making by the hierarchy). Whether or not such practice will continue after the project ends remains to be seen.

The official endorsement of DDPs is a good practice worth replicating nation-wide. Some districts went beyond the formal approval by local councils and sought the endorsement from the President in an attempt to confer greater weight to the document and be able to negotiate better with the sector ministries and the Ministry of Finance in view of getting more funds for the realization of the district development programme. Some Heads of

districts are closely involved in regular monitoring of progress and organise large format meetings to give feedback on achievements and remaining priorities. This is a management approach that should be encouraged in all districts, however, it relies greatly on individual people ('champions') usually heads of economic & planning departments. The implementation of DDPs, therefore, mainly depends on the good will and commitment of the Head of the district.

The exchanges and study tours within the country and to the Russian Federation were highly appreciated. This is an initiative that yielded good results as it allowed local officials, entrepreneurs, and farmers to see examples of 'success stories' first hand. Many of the people who participated in the exchanges, do not have the opportunity to travel within their own country let alone abroad. The Russian Federation is regarded by many as a 'source of inspiration' and an economic powerhouse. The visit to the Altay region was highly appreciated as each group of participants depending on their occupation could interact directly with their homologues thus contributing to better and lasting professional connections.

Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that local authorities do not have real capacity to adequately address the needs and concerns of citizens, as they are heavily dependent on the central government in all policy issues, be it taxation, service delivery, local development, or business development. Local authorities face contextual, structural, institutional and human resource conditions that are beyond the project's control. However, these risks affect the effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of the project results. While the trainings and technical assistance offered by the project were estimated to be useful and of good quality, evidence from the field also suggests that a potential long-term shift in attitude and management approaches from local government in these districts is not simply a matter of introducing new governance techniques or tools.

The biggest challenge for district authorities is insufficient public financing. The relationship between central and local budgets is determined annually. After taxes and expenditures funded from local budgets are forecast, the Parliament establishes the local share of national tax revenues and fees as well as the amount of targeted transfers to cover local budget deficits. At the moment, Tajikistan lacks sector strategies with clearly defined and costed objectives reflected in multi-annual budget estimates and supported by medium-term sector expenditure plans. District authorities are left to 'negotiate' funding individually with the Ministry of Finance which often results in the fact that local development needs do not match available budgets. The continuation of the planning and monitoring process without project support remains therefore questionable. Given the high turn-over of staff, it is doubtful that the skills acquired during trainings and exchange visits will remain in house in the long term.

The table below summarises the evaluation findings for this output per evaluation criterion.

Criterion	Status	Comments
Relevance	Medium	Building capacity of regional and local authorities remains relevant. However, it appears that the cycles of training and planning are repeated from project to project (i.e. since 2009). This could be due to the low capacity among local government, but it could also indicate that there is limited impact and sustainability of this particular approach.
Effectiveness	Good	All targets were achieved, and some targets were exceeded. Overall no major bottlenecks were reported apart from the challenges discussed above. Respondents were overall satisfied with the quality of support provided.
Efficiency	Medium	In terms of project budget, the activities were implemented in an efficient manner. However, linked to impact and sustainability, it is unclear whether this component has been ‘good value for money’ in the medium and long term. As of December 2016, the execution of the budget allocated to this component was at 50.60%.
Impact	Medium to Low	The immediate impact in terms of skills acquired as a result of trainings is still visible since the project has just completed the activities. Nevertheless, it is unclear how long the effects are going to last. Long-term impact in terms of shift in attitude among public authorities is difficult to estimate and due to limited human capacity and financial resources it is likely to be low.
Sustainability	Medium to Low	Sustainability is ranked medium-to-low for this output because the evaluation team estimates that activities and practice supported by the project are unlikely to continue after its end.

Output 2. Support the development of favourable investment climate, entrepreneurship, and employment at the local level

Target	Key Activities
2.1 Creating an advisory council for local economic development comprising local authorities and private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved the capacity of 10 public-private dialogue platforms (PPD) by providing consultations on business and investment matters. 4 new platforms established in addition to 6 existing. In co-operation with the Consultative Council on Improving the Investment Climate under the President of Tajikistan (CCIICP), assessed 6 existing Consultative Councils (CC) and assisted in the creation of new CCs in n Ayni, Lakhsh, Rasht and Tojikobod districts. Representatives of district PPDs undertook a study tour to CCIICP in Dushanbe. Conducted a 4-day training on "Strengthening the institutional development of public-private dialogue at the local level" for 32 representatives of CCs, including the public sector. Conducted an experience exchange study tour for PPD representatives from Khatlon district and Rasht Valley to the PPDs in Isfara and Istaravshan. Held a round table on the "Role of local Councils in improvement of investment climate and business and economic development" gathering 60 representatives of CCs from Sughd, Khatlon and the Rasht Valley. Provided technical assistance (including office furniture and equipment) to the Secretariats of CCs. Conducted training on technical and information management of PPD websites with participation from CCIICP to ensure coherence and linkages between national and local PPD platforms http://investmentcouncil.tj/ru/regional/
2.2 Analysis of the investment capacity of each target area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed investment guides for all target districts and assisted in distributing them to interested parties (including local, regional and international fairs and fora). Supported the Regional Contract Forum and International Trade Fair "Sughd 2016" in Khujand city. Over 200 local and foreign entrepreneurs and processors attended. Supported the International Entrepreneurship Forum on "Development of national industry - new investment opportunities" (Dushanbe, 2016). The Forum gathered senior national and foreign government officials, company managers, representatives of international financial institutions, global and regional enterprises and explored new investment opportunities in Tajikistan in view of recent legal reforms www.forumtajikistan.tj Supported the International Women's Business Forum attended by the representatives of government agencies, associations of women entrepreneurs from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, local and foreign investors, representatives of government agencies, diplomatic corps and the international community. The Forum hosted an exhibition of goods produced by women in Tajikistan. Organized a workshop on "Measures of support and development of youth entrepreneurship in Tajikistan". Organized an open lecture by Russian experts on start-ups for students and youth entrepreneurs gathering 75 participants (including

	<p>31 women).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organized study tour for 6 representatives of business incubators and consulting organizations from Tajikistan (including 2 women) to incubators in Russia. 4 representatives of business incubators from Tajikistan participated in the Summer School of Business Incubators at the Higher School of Economy in Moscow. Supported “Start-up Chohihona” events in Khujand and Kurgantube cities where 55 pitchers/young entrepreneurs presented their business ideas to investors and other interested parties. As a result, 18 of them were supported by partner organizations with opportunities for further acceleration, capacity building and/or investment. Supported the International Tourism Conference and the meeting of the President with entrepreneurs (in 2017). Established an automated electronic document management system in Isfara, Istaravshan, Panjakent, and Ayni districts and created a link between these districts and the regional administration in Suhgd for improving vertical and horizontal co-operation. Single Window e-services portal for entrepreneurs set up in Isfara.
2.3. Rehabilitation of the vocational training system in each district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rehabilitated and equipment 9 vocational training institutions, one in each target district. As a result, 438 students have better conditions to study and practice their skills. So far, over 120 students have been employed.
2.4. Training on agribusiness, entrepreneurship, arable farming, sustainable economic management, efficient nature management for no less than 500 local farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed education modules on dehkan farm management and car repair and held short-term courses for 75 people in the districts of Rasht Valley (jointly with the Dushanbe Modular Training Centre). In addition, more than 1,000 dehkan farms and SMEs received consultations under support services to producers and processors of agricultural products (see also activity 3.3). Conducted a series of trainings on HACCP and Global GAP certificates for 15 companies and 135 representatives of dehkan farms (jointly with AfT, GIZ, Hilfswerk Austria International in Central Asia and the National Association of Small and Medium Businesses). Organized several capacity building activities to support farmers and agribusinesses in Vose and Temurmalik in growing and packaging apricots.
2.5 Contribute to business and trade development, and regional cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supported the Trade Fair and Forum in Sughd (July 2015 and June 2016). Supported the Contract Forum in Khujand (February 2016 and 2017). Organized B2B meeting of entrepreneurs from Jon Alay district in Kyrgyzstan and Lakhsh district in Tajikistan (July 2017, in Lakhsh district). Organized the regional conference on the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Agribusiness (jointly with the local partner “Neksigol Mushovir”) Supported the participation of 7 Tajik SMEs at the International Exhibition “World Food Moscow 2017”, which resulted in signing contracts worth 3,5 million USD³³.

³³ As stated by Mr. Firuz Saidkhadzhaev, Senior Economic Development Officer, Communities Programme, UNDP Office in Dushanbe.

The project supported the creation of Consultative Councils (CC) for local economic development that included representatives from local authorities and the private sector. This advisory body's mandate was to identify and resolve problems that hinder business development (particularly with regard to regulation, taxation, access to national government programmes). LIRP also helped to establish a public – private dialogue platform (PPD) aimed at facilitating the interaction between the sectors, to discuss and resolve issues in view of improving the business and investment climate and the local economy as a whole.

In general, in many target districts (in particular, in the South of the country), the PPD was one of the few (if not the only) platforms that allowed public, private, and civil society actors to conduct dialogue in a structured and regular manner over a longer period of time. As a result, private sector and civil society representatives felt somewhat empowered to have a say in the local planning and development process. Local authorities found it useful to have other views on issues pertaining to local socio-economic challenges. The meetings of CCs and PPDs also rendered exchanges between public and private sectors more transparent due to record keeping (e.g. meeting minutes). At the same time, the organisation of “meetings without ties” also proved to be beneficial. Such informal exchanges facilitated reaching of agreements in a less formal atmosphere.

With regard to the analysis of investment capacities in each target district, respondents (mainly local authorities, but also some private sector representatives) noted that the existence of an up-to-date Investment Plan made it easier to showcase their district, especially during regional or international trade fairs or business events. A professionally prepared document helped them to highlight the potential of their district, whether it was for fruit and vegetable exports, or other business opportunities. The Investment Plans followed the same template in all districts, which rendered the data more coherent and comparable.

In connection with this, “South-South” knowledge sharing proved very useful. In particular, the trip to Russia (Altay Region) was ranked ‘extremely helpful’ and was highly appreciated by all participants. Examples of working PPPs in Russia motivated Tajik authorities to reconsider their approach to their relationship with and expectations from the local private sector. Interviewed business representatives particularly appreciated the result oriented meetings (e.g. B2B contacts that lead to signing of contracts).

During the course of implementation, LIRP went beyond the initial focus on farmers and incorporated youth and women as one of its target groups in order to increase their participation in economic activities and entrepreneurship. One of the activities that specifically targeted the young population and women empowerment was the support to the technical and vocational education and training system (TVET).

Support included rehabilitation and equipment of nine vocational schools, elaboration of training modules based on the needs of the local, regional and international labour markets (including the Russian Federation). The activities focused on training and retraining the unemployed, including potential and existing labour migrants, in professional areas in high demand such as mechanics, welders, masons, and electricians. Training for women involved traditional occupations such as sewing and weaving. These skills are in high demand locally and they also allow women to work from home (a factor that is very important for female students when choosing to pursue their studies).

LIRP support to TVET institutions substantially increased the quality of training and the practical skills obtained by the students. In the target districts, most course structure and content were outdated, resulting in a mismatch between graduate skills and labour market demand. In doing so, the project has contributed to improving the generally low social image of TVET and contribute to the system's ability to attract student by improving the condition of physical facilities.

Other initiatives that included young entrepreneurs (both women and men) were study tours to business incubators in Russia and the opportunity to study at the renowned summer school held by the Higher School of Economy in Moscow. LIRP also supported start up events in Khudjand and Kurgantube cities where 55 young entrepreneurs pitched their business ideas to investors and other interested parties. As a result, 18 of them were supported by partner organizations with opportunities for further acceleration, capacity building and/or investment.

***“NO!** Just like that, in bold and underlined, was my first reaction when they invited me to participate in a meeting with our district authorities <laughs>. To be honest, I had a very high level of distrust. My strategy until that point was to stay low, do my thing and try not to catch their attention...But after some persuading, I decided to go and I was surprised at how many similar challenges we all face on a daily basis....” Anonymous entrepreneur, Khatlon*

Despite efforts, the project activities could not eliminate the strong command-and-control and top-down approaches at play when it comes to co-operation between public and private sectors. The public sector remains insufficiently prepared for the dialogue and the private sector is not very trustful. Officials are generally insufficiently aware of private sector development needs, particularly of the evolving needs of businesses in a changing market. There is a knowledge gap, which often translates into lack of communication, lack of trust, and thus interruption of dialogue based policy-making processes. The project managed to break some of these communication barriers, but it is unclear to what extent the momentum gained during implementation will be preserved after the project ends.

While such tools as CCs and PPDs contributed to creating somewhat more trust between sectors of society and increased the possibility of sharing opinions and experiences, they did not provide vertical exchange of information and had no tangible impact on improving policies. Exchanges with central authorities did take place (e.g. during the study tour to CCIICP in Dushanbe or during joint training seminars), but the evaluators estimate that there was no effective promotion or advocacy for implementation of reforms and there was no real impact on reforming existing policies.

The evaluation also concluded that the concept of PPP remains still largely misunderstood by many local authorities and private sector alike. Authorities see this as an opportunity to present a “laundry list” to the private sector. The latter sees their contribution as a way to establish a good relationship with authorities and avoid trouble in their daily business. This may be due to the fact that dire economic prospects make commercially viable PPPs rare to identify. Another reason may be the weak enforcement of agreements and decisions, in practice, there are limited ways of ensuring that either party respects their promises.

Ineffective engagement of private sector partners in TVET, both employers and private trainers, is another key challenge. What the schools can offer as training courses and what

the market demands can be quite different in some districts. Another challenge refers to the ‘brain drain’. Some of the teachers and students interviewed during field visits were open about the fact that with an official educational certificate and Russian language skills the young graduates had better chances of getting employed and earning more in Russia. On the other hand, some students also said that the newly acquired skills (in particular the practical lessons that were unavailable before the project intervention due to lack of equipment and facilities), made them confident that they would have enough work locally and would be able to earn enough to support themselves and their dependents.

“If I look back some 15 years I can really see that we <Tajikistan> came a long way if one considers the starting point...But to say that everything is working well would not be true. Sometimes I laugh through tears, as they say, when I see reports on how ‘good’ things are. Let’s be honest, it is still common practice unfortunately that tax authorities come knocking on your door to demand more taxes. I am not against paying my dues, but businesses are under a lot of pressure, and sometimes people really don’t know who they can complain or go to, and more importantly whether this is going to make any difference...” Local entrepreneur, anonymous.

The table below summarises the evaluation findings for this output per evaluation criterion.

Criterion	Status	Comments
Relevance	Medium	Public-Private dialogue and PPPs are fairly new concepts in Tajikistan. They have been used in many countries and therefore Tajikistan should benefit from the opportunity to learn from success stories and build capacity in this area. The project support in this sense is therefore relevant. However, the tools employed by LIRP did not contribute to vertical exchange of information and had no tangible impact on improving policies. Therefore, overall relevance is ranked medium.
Effectiveness	Good	All targets were achieved, and some targets were exceeded. Overall no major bottlenecks were reported apart from the challenges discussed above. Respondents were overall satisfied with the quality of the support provided.
Efficiency	Good	In terms of project budget, the activities were implemented in an efficient manner. According to data from December 2016, overall 74,21% of the budget allocated to this component was spent. This indicates that progress was on track. In terms of value for money, it is difficult to gauge the efficiency of this project component, as a lot of activities concerned participation in study tours, exchange visits, and other soft measures. Investments in infrastructure and equipment have a better chance of standing the test of time. Therefore, overall efficiency is marked “good”.
Impact	Medium	The short-term impact in terms of skills acquired as a result of the project activities is visible because activities are very recent. Nevertheless, it is unclear how long the learning effects are going to last. Long-term impact in terms of shift in attitudes and management approaches among public authorities and the relationship between private and private (in particular in terms of reforms and improvement of current policies) is difficult to estimate at this stage.
Sustainability	Medium	Sustainability is ranked “medium” for this output because the evaluation team estimates that some activities and practice supported by the project are unlikely to continue after its end.

Output 3. Support rural initiatives aimed to address the local population priorities, creation of new jobs and entrepreneurship development

Target	Key Activities
3.1 Grant support to at least 50 small-scale projects with a total coverage of more than 200,000 people (the amount of funding per project is up to US\$40,000 with the coverage of more than 5,000 people)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed 70 projects aimed at local economic development and 20 grants involving 517,586 people (including 252,679 women). The project areas of intervention included irrigation, creation of intensive gardens and vineyards, setting up of demonstration greenhouses, fruit drying and processing facilities, purchase of agricultural equipment and heavy machinery, showcasing, advocating and training on new agricultural solutions based on demonstration plots (e.g. modern fruit drying and vegetable processing techniques, drip irrigation), refurbishment and equipment of TVET facilities, including revision of training manuals.
3.2 Provision of at least 2,000 microcredits aimed at creating jobs and additional income for the unemployed and developing of micro-entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The microcredit funds (MCF) contracted by UNDP provided 2,519 microcredits (including 1,035 microcredits to women) totalling 1.67 million USD, which resulted in 451 jobs, including 210 for women. Developed the website templates of the partner MCFs and assisted with improving their capacity as needed.
3.3. Organization of support services to producers and processors of agricultural products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 public organizations received grants for capacity development of local agricultural producers and processors, creating of value chains and income generation opportunities. As a result of this initiative (implemented through October 2017), more than 1,000 dehkan farms and SMEs received consultations. Development of methodical and informational materials and demonstration plots were also part of this activity. Organized a regional conference on the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Agribusiness gathering more than 60 farmers, entrepreneurs, etc. (jointly with the UNDP AfT project and in collaboration with the local partner “Neksigol Mushovir”, an agriculture advisory organization).

Overall this component, consisting of grant support and microcredits, was arguably the most appreciated by clients and beneficiaries.

LIRP supported two types of grant projects, the economic development projects identified and selected through the Working Groups and grants to non-governmental organizations awarded through calls for proposals.

The identification and selection of economic development projects was done through the Working Groups (WG) established with LIRP support and comprising representatives from local authorities, civil society and business. As a result, the selected rural initiatives were relevant as they stemmed from the priorities included in the local DDPs. The Working Group is not exclusive to UNDP and collaborates with other organizations and stakeholders. The WG's purpose, albeit implicitly, is to serve as a tool to ensure implementation of the DDPs. In that sense, the continuation of their work would be in the best interest of the local governments. However, it is premature to estimate whether or not this structure will hold in the future, especially without external support.

The water and irrigation activities stand out as one of the significant achievements under the project. The districts where LIRP intervened have very limited access to water (both for irrigation and drinking). This is a major impediment to agriculture and production (in addition to posing health and safety issues among the local populations). During the interviews with local authorities and farmers alike, this was one of the main recurring challenges raised in all districts. The rehabilitation and construction of water infrastructure in villages in several districts has had a notable impact on the population. As a result, a total of nearly 3000 ha of agricultural land in these localities have gained access to irrigation water. The participation of the local population in digging, laying and repairing of the pipes and canals has provided a feeling of reassurance not only on the ability of the de facto authorities to be a partner in development but also on the population's level of commitment and capacities to complement the contribution of others and ensure maintenance in the long term.

The support services and equipment provided to producers and processors of agricultural crops are also commendable. The support activities benefited individual entrepreneurs but also farmer groups and included collective group service for larger machinery and access to farmer knowledge exchanges within Tajikistan. This was accompanied by the establishment of green houses, bee keeping, and small-scale demonstration plots. The selection of innovative projects (i.e. initiatives that have never been considered in the target districts before either because they were deemed impossible or unsuitable) sets a good example and creates a model for replication (for example the green houses, the fruit drying facilities). While it is too early to estimate whether these activities contributed to improving value chains and creating additional income opportunities (activities only ended in October 2017), it should be noted that an impressive number of 1,000 dehkan farms and SMEs received trainings on how to improve production, marketing and trade skills for agricultural producers and processors (Sughd region) and on how to establish quality chains for apricot supply from orchards in Vose and Temurmali districts to processors in Isfara.

The microcredits had a very high success rate and the scheme was efficient, effective and relevant. In total, the microcredit funds (MCF) contracted by UNDP provided 2,519 microcredits (including 1,035 microcredits to women) totalling 1.67 million USD, which resulted in 451 jobs, including 210 for women. The credits reached the most vulnerable (e.g. women, people with disabilities, the unemployed) in some of the most remote areas of the country where no access to funding was available. The low debt rate proves that the chosen model was right for the selected target group. Many clients referred to the low interest rate as « *a breath of fresh air* ». The evaluation team interviewed both clients and MCFs and noted that the amount of up to 5000 TJS for a duration between 2 and 12 months was optimal. The repayment schedule was synchronized with the agricultural

season (e.g. farmers would only have to start paying interest rate back once the harvest has been collected and sold).

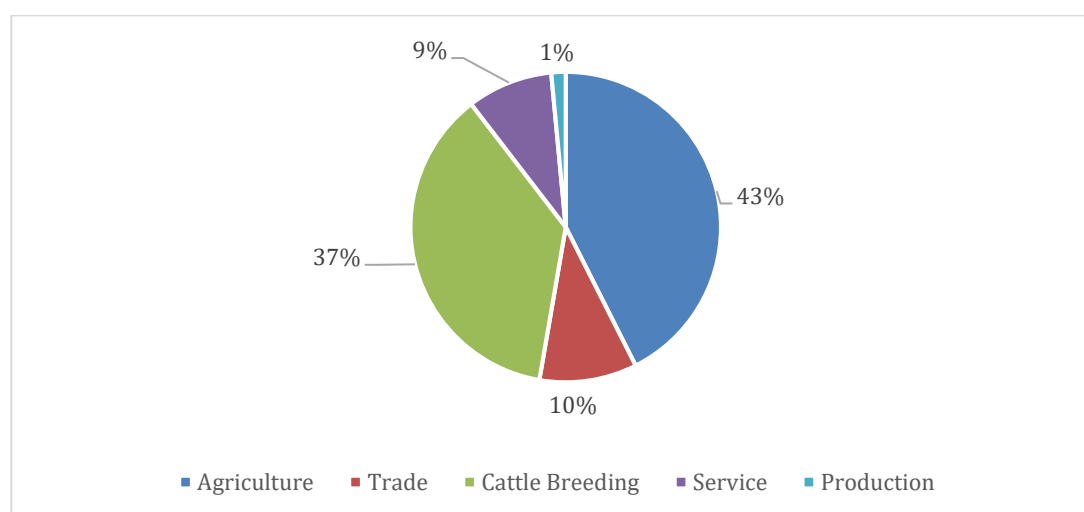
The table below breaks down the distribution of microcredit per district:

District	MCF	Women	Men	Total
Vose and Temurmali	“Sarvati Vakhsh”	74	100	174
Sughd	“Rushdi Sugd”	106	185	291
Ayni and Panjakent	“Rushdi Vodii Zarafshon”	231	357	588
Rasht, Tojikobod, and Lakhsh	“Faizi Surkhob”	69	41	110
Lakhsh, Tojikobod and Rasht	“Borshud”	12	66	78
Sughd	“Jovid”	35	41	76
Panjakent and Ayni	«Hamkori»	100	89	189

“We call it the one percent bank! <laughs> When I first heard about it from my neighbour I thought it was some sort of scam. I have never in my life seen credits with such low interest rate! I immediately went there and took a loan for 5000 TJS. I opened a bridal salon and enlarged the sewing atelier I already had. Now I employ 4 women and myself. We have a lot of clients, everybody needs clothes and now we are entering the wedding season <laughs>”, woman entrepreneur, Panjakent

The focus group discussions confirmed that both men and women used the money to purchase assets or materials for the purpose of income generation and some used these small loans for other purposes (see Figure 2 below). Most of the investments made by both women and men can be better described as income generation rather than investment in an enterprise. While some employment will have been created by these activities, it is likely to be seasonal rather than full-time employment (linked to the agricultural cycle) and it is more likely to employ household members rather than outsiders. An exception to this are the business ventures that are not linked to agriculture and have been set up by several members pooling resources together (e.g. setting up shops, bakeries or furniture producing ateliers, for example).

Figure 2. Distribution of microcredits per sector in the 9 target districts



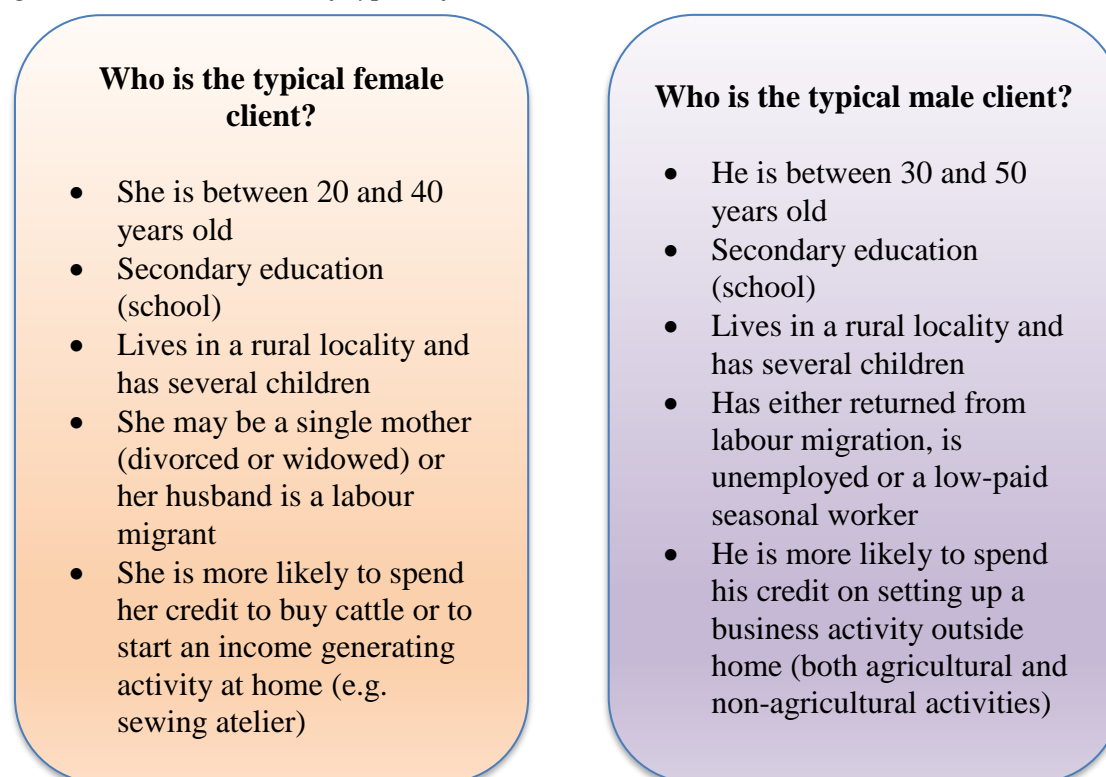
Source: Project Report, October 2017

Accompanying measures, such as consulting and support to clients (many of whom got a credit for the first time) was highly appreciated and deemed useful. The MCF staff guided applicants through the process and advised them on the amount of credit best suited for their needs. The staff also accompanied existing clients and regularly monitored progress in view of anticipating potential problems. This reproached client service was highly appreciated by all interviewed clients. This resulted from LIRP's choice of MCFs that have an established network of branch office and a wide presence in the villages of the target districts. Beneficiaries did not have to travel long to reach MCF and MCF staff could conduct risk assessment easier as they knew most of their potential and existing clients directly.

Demand for accessible financing remains very high in Tajikistan. There are no other similar financial products in this niche (i.e. small loans), and commercial credits normally start at 22% annually on average going as high as 34% annually³⁴. The microcredit scheme created expectations among the rural population in the participating districts. In order to address this, one of the clauses of the agreements signed between UNDP and the MCFs stipulated that the institutions would continue offering credits at the same preferential rate and under the same conditions for at least three years after LIRP completion. This is a good practice as it creates multiplier effect by increasing the timeframe and thus the number of beneficiaries and the scope of impact. This speaks to the sustainability and the exit strategy of the project under this component.

The evaluation also revealed that there was an increasing demand for middle sized credits, i.e. credits bigger than 5000 TJS for established business ventures that consider scaling up and / or oriented towards export (in the region, including Russia). This is an opportunity worth exploring for future UNDP interventions in Tajikistan.

Figure 3. Characteristics of typical female and male clients



³⁴ Rates as quoted by the heads of the 3 MCFs involved in LIRP.

Source: Interviews with MFC staff in target districts

“I think that over the past three years we have constantly shown that giving credits with low interest rates to rural people, including people who are unemployed or people who are particularly vulnerable, do not necessarily equal high risk or low return rates. With a bit of support and guidance from us, our clients proved that they are resourceful people who can turn the money they get into income – generating activities. The credit is taken by one person, but it reaches many more, their family and children in the first place. It’s a financial product that has a high social impact and multiplier effect. It is definitely something I would recommend including in future interventions.” Head of MCF
“Hamyori, Ayni district

The table below summarises the findings per evaluation criterion:

Criterion	Status	Comments
Relevance	Very Good	This is arguably the most relevant component in the project. This is partly due to the fact that it is demand driven, but also to the fact that it leads to tangible outputs that have an immediate positive impact on the quality of livelihoods of rural populations.
Effectiveness	Very Good	All targets were achieved and some targets were exceeded. Overall no major bottlenecks were reported apart from the challenges discussed above. Respondents were overall satisfied with the quality of support provided.
Efficiency	Very Good	In terms of project budget, the activities were implemented in an efficient manner. This output has arguably the best quality for money ration in the project. As of December 2016, the execution of the budget allocated to this component was at 87,07%. The evaluators estimate that by December 2017 all funds earmarked for this output would have been utilized.
Impact	Very Good	The impact in terms of improved livelihood is immediate. The effects are likely to last in the long term.
Sustainability	Very Good	Sustainability is ranked very good because the evaluation team estimates that the equipment, furniture and buildings acquired as a result of this output are likely to last long after its end because of the participation (both financial and in-kind) and commitment of local population.

4. LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section builds on the lessons learnt during the implementation of the project and makes recommendations for future similar interventions. We also include suggestions for potential project ideas in the future.

Overall recommendations:

Efforts should be made to ensure more vertical and horizontal coherence between the project components, the national and sub-national levels, and between districts. Several months up to a year may pass between project design and the start of implementation. It is natural that some underlying assumptions may shift in the meantime.

Therefore, it is recommended that projects take a flexible approach so that they can remain demand driven and take into account specific needs in the target areas. One option is to avoid setting ambitious objectives that are hard to measure and quantify (e.g. setting the target at one million people). Another option is to have fewer types of pre-defined activities and leave room for selection of interventions at the inception of project operations. As LIRP evaluation has shown, depending on regions and districts, needs may vary greatly (e.g. Northern districts tend to be more advanced in terms of capacities, infrastructure and experience in entrepreneurial activities and cross-border trade). Future projects should not be afraid to differentiate between districts from the on start if greater and more sustainable impact is to be achieved.

The quality of selected indicators could be improved by focusing on results rather than process of activities (e.g. number of seminars organized, number of participants or number of reports produced). For example, one indicator could be the number of new jobs created as a result of project activities (could be further disaggregated into seasonal and full-time). Another indicator could be the volume of products sold and / or produced thanks to project funding (could be further disaggregated into local and external markets). Such indicators would be more useful in assessing impact and value for money.

Evaluation has shown that some targets have been exceeded. It is not necessarily a bad thing as more clients could be involved and served without additional funding. However, it also indicates that estimations could be adjusted mid-term in view of taking stock of field realities and other developments (e.g. other similar projects implemented in the same area by other agencies). It is recommended that future interventions foresee a mid-term evaluation. It would also be useful to include budget for an impact evaluation three – four years after the project ends. In view of increasing cost efficiency and maximizing the effect of such an evaluation, it could be carried out jointly with other UNDP projects working in complementarity.

Output related recommendations:

Local Development: Planning and Monitoring

Support to planning and monitoring for sustainable local economic and social development involves a lot of soft measures that are difficult to quantify and gauge in terms of results and impact. In that sense, the relevance of such components is increasingly

difficult to justify as the cycle of training and retraining of authorities and other stakeholders seems to be repeated from project to project without real knowledge of how much of the learning will be actually applied in real life especially after the project ends. Part of the reason lies in the high turn-over of staff (an aspect that is beyond any project's control), another reason is that changes that require adaptation of attitudes and behaviour take time to happen, something that cannot be achieved during three years of project implementation.

One option for rendering such activities more result-oriented could be working with the sub-national level (district and village authorities) to help them identify ways to bridge the gap in financing. For example, one option would be involving the local private sector and/or diaspora around specific projects (e.g. refurbishment of school or local infrastructure such as roads, centres for youth offering trainings for marketable skills such as computer literacy, English & Russian, accountancy, etc.). At the moment, such attempts remain sporadic; a future project could render such efforts more strategic while keeping them rooted in local development plans.

Additionally, future projects involving local and district authorities should also include some policy work and advocacy at the national level. Such interventions are not easy to steer and would require a co-ordinated effort among multiple UN agencies and other development partners. However, local planning and monitoring should feed into the national level if change is to happen and if the level of outreach and quality of public services is to be increased across country. Short – term localized interventions are not going to provide enough incentives for the local population to stay.

Public – Private Co-operation

At the moment, trust between the private and the public sectors in the country (and from foreign investors) remains low. Tajikistan's economic progress is stymied by corruption which exacerbates income inequality, dissuades local businesses from expanding and international investors from doing business in the country. The World Bank's Ease of Doing Business ranking place Tajikistan at 128 out of 190 in 2016³⁵. It is at the bottom of the Europe and Central Asia region³⁶. Despite declarations made by central authorities both domestically and internationally, it will take time and concrete examples of improvement to shift these perceptions.

Future UNDP projects could continue building trust between public and private sectors. One way of achieving it would be to assist public authorities in taking initiatives to determine what specific conditions can be improved locally in their district so that private sector wishes to work there (e.g. exploring the possibility of using abandoned factory buildings for setting up business clusters, facilitating access to land and related permits, etc.). In that sense, the creation of a single e-window with support from LIRP is a good initiative worth building upon. Future interventions could focus on ensuring that the window continues on being fit for purpose and deliver quality services promptly as it was intended.

Another important opportunity is working with young people, both women and men, in particular offering them the opportunity to acquire professional skills that would render them employable beyond manual labour or seasonal agricultural labour. One option would

³⁵ World Bank, Ease of Doing Business, goo.gl/JPTuex

³⁶ Turkmenistan was not included in the ranking.

be streamlining specialized courses on entrepreneurship into university or TVET curricula. Depending on the target group, courses could range from short-term to full university degree and could also comprise teaching useful language skills (Russian and English) that are currently very low in the country (especially in rural areas). Special attention should be given to rural youth, in particular women. Women remain the most vulnerable among the other vulnerable categories in Tajikistan. They often abandon school, have low literacy rates and few skills allowing them to find employment or launch their own business. They are highly dependable on their husbands and / or extended families and often find themselves in precarious conditions especially after their husbands die or leave to work abroad. In that sense, it is also recommended that projects and initiatives focusing on women be implemented with support from female staff in view of establishing trust and open channels of communication³⁷.

Future interventions should continue promoting “South-South” exchanges and exchanges between districts in Tajikistan. One option would be following-up on the Investment Plans drafted or updated with support from LIRP by organizing B2B visits in the neighbouring countries, including the Russian Federation. In doing so, it is important to continue selecting relevant participants (both among public and private sectors) so that visits could result in actual contracts and business opportunities. In that sense, LIRP has already been taking this approach for the events organised during the project lifetime, this good practice should be continued in future initiatives. Another lesson learnt is that visits to the Russian Federation are more likely to result in business deals, as both public and private sectors in Tajikistan are familiar with the country and speak the language. These trips also show how much progress has been made since Soviet times. This is a good motivational point and incentive for Tajikistan, since both countries share similar historical and cultural premises.

Access to Finance

The LIRP project has shown that the demand for accessible credits remains very high in the country. Data from the MCF show that risks are low even when working with first time clients in rural areas. Microcredit schemes provide the much-needed access to finance while remaining demand driven (i.e. clients are free to choose what to invest in depending on their experience and know-how). As a result, clients are highly committed to making their ventures work.

Future UNDP interventions could explore the possibility of diversifying credit products: middle sized more experienced businesses require bigger credits. First timers that are successful in repaying their credits, are able to apply for a larger second credit. Regardless of the path chosen, a microcredit component in future projects would definitely remain highly relevant and continue bringing added value.

Future projects should consider taking a cluster / sector approach and finance the whole production chain (e.g. from growing to production/processing to selling). Some districts are more advanced than others (in particular in the North of the country), therefore they require support at a different level (e.g. scaling up and exports). Such activities could lead to concrete results in terms of new enterprises created or existing enterprises expanded and the creation of additional jobs.

³⁷ For example, the area office in Ayni has exclusively male staff. Ironically, the office is currently implementing a project focusing on women empowerment.

5. STORIES FROM THE FIELD



During field work, the evaluation team visited 34 project sites that benefited from grant awards in all 9 districts. We also met with 11 clients who qualified for microcredits. The economic development and grant projects that we visited were diverse and ranged from farming (fruit and vegetable processing, provision of tools and equipment, demonstration projects including greenhouse and irrigation) to services (bakeries, beauty salon) to TVET (welding, furniture and sewing ateliers) to community support projects (support to women's association, association of the blind and Afghan soldiers to increase self-sufficiency and income revenue).

Here we present only a few selected stories to show the women and men, both young and old, who are the direct beneficiaries of the project.³⁸

Visit to the confectionery workshop for unemployed women, Rasht Valley



The project helped set up this workshop by supplying the equipment and furniture. The workshop has hired an experienced pastry cook who teaches local women. There are five to seven women permanently employed, and more young girls come to follow the training and then leave to pursue professional activity in their home villages. All women working at the workshop were unemployed before. In the photo, the man in the back of the classroom is the leader of the NGO managing the grant, he said: *“the workshop gave many women not just the opportunity to earn some money and contribute to their family budget, but also to acquire useful skills that they can use here or anywhere else.”* The women working at the workshop also noted that they loved what they were doing and they were grateful to have a job also because *“it gives us a professional purpose”*.

³⁸ Please refer to Appendix 2 "Mission Schedule" for the full list of projects and organisations visited.

Rehabilitation of adras-weaving classroom, Temurmalik district



This photo was taken in the weaving classroom at the TVET school in Temurmalik district. The project bought all the necessary equipment and raw material for producing *adras*, the traditional weaved fabric that is very popular in Tajikistan but also in the neighbouring countries. The workshop is primarily a training ground for young women studying to become professional seamstresses. The workshop is part of the local TVET school and is very popular in the district. The headmaster noted that their students come from different villages, sometimes 100 km away. Upon completion of their training (2-3 months) they return to their home villages and continue working from home. This profession is very popular among young women as they can exercise it from their own homes while looking after the family. *Adras* is a labour-intensive fabric, but it also sells at a higher price thus generating additional revenue for the women.

Construction of production and demonstration greenhouse, Sovet jamoat, Temurmalik region



The project funded the construction of the greenhouse from scratch. The greenhouse employs eight women and two men. The jamoat provided its own contribution to the project by ensuring electricity and water supply. The greenhouse grows cucumbers and the daily harvest can reach 150-200 kg. This is the first greenhouse in the jamoat. Farmers from the district are welcome to pass by, see how it works and ask questions. The purpose is to show that such greenhouses are very economical (the costs for setting it up and warming it during the cold season are minimal compared to the profit it can bring). The return on investment is also good, the jamoat is planning on opening a third greenhouse entirely from the profit it made.

Building a demonstration grape drying facility in Vahdat



This room made entirely of bricks following an ancient Iranian technique has the capacity to dry about 20 tons of grapes in one take based on the so-called "shadow drying" (no exposure to sun, the grapes dry because of the constant currents of air made possible by the special construction technique). This new production method results in high quality dry grapes (so-called "*kishmish*") and farmers receive additional income by reducing losses and by selling the final product at a higher price. Currently some 150 farmers including 35 exporters of dry fruit use the services of this drying room. This activity helped to create 6 new permanent jobs and 10 seasonal ones. It also serves as demonstration plot and aims at reproducing this type of drying rooms in other villages in the district and nation-wide.

TVET School # 39 in Tajikabad district, Rasht Valley



This photo was taken in Rasht valley, where starting from 2016 young people have the opportunity to learn woodwork in a classroom that was recently refurbished and equipped (furniture, carpenter tools, other material). The photo shows second year students with their teacher taking a break from their practical lesson to talk to the evaluators. Students expressed their gratitude to UNDP and the Russian Federation for enabling them to practically learn skills that are in high demand on the local market. Before the project intervention, students could only learn the theoretical part, as the workshop degraded over time and was unfit for purpose.