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FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

YOUTH FOR BUSINESS AND INNOVATION PROJECT



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Final Evaluation Report

“Youth for business and innovation” Project

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Government of the Republic Tajikistan

Private Sector

Local Communities

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Every effort has been made to ensure that the information given here is correct, and any factual error that may appear is unintended and is the responsibility of the consultants. This report represents the views of the consultants only and does not necessarily represent the views of UNDP staff or other organizations or persons referred to in this report.

Project summary table

<i>Project/outcome information</i>		
Project/outcome title	<i>Youth for Business and Innovation</i>	
Atlas ID	<i>00114095</i>	
Corporate outcome and output	<i>00112266</i>	
Country	<i>Tajikistan</i>	
Region	<i>RBEC</i>	
Date project document signed	<i>14/05/2019</i>	
Project dates	Start	End
	<i>01/01/2019</i>	<i>31/12/2021</i>
Total committed budget	<i>\$1,00,000.00</i>	
Project expenditure at the time of evaluation	<i>\$ 998,346.62</i>	
Funding source	<i>TFD Youth Window</i>	
Implementing party	<i>UNDP Tajikistan</i>	

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List of abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CO	Country Office
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DDP	District Development Programme
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBAO	Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMS	General Management Support
GosKomInvest	State Committee on Investment and the State Property Management of the Republic of Tajikistan
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IT	Information Technology
LIIC	Local Implementation and Innovation Centers
ML	Machine Learning
MEDT	Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of the Republic of Tajikistan
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise
NDS-30	National Development Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan for the period to 2030
NEET	Not in Education, Employment and Training
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
OECD-DAC	Organisation for the Economic Development - Development Assistance Committee
PO	Public Organisation
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise
SI FDET	State Institution “Formation and Development of Entrepreneurship in Tajikistan”
ToR	Terms of Reference
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VTI	Vocational Training Institution
UNDAF	United National Development Assistance Framework
USD	United States Dollar
YBI	Youth for Business and Innovation

Executive summary

This report presents the results of the Final Evaluation of the “Youth for Business and Innovation” (YBI) initiative in Tajikistan. The study has been commissioned by UNDP Tajikistan and implemented in January – February, 2022 by a team of international and local experts.

YBI Overview

With a budget of USD 1.15 million, mostly received from the UNDP-Russian Trust Fund for Development (USD 1 million), YBI Action has been implemented from January 2019 to 31 December 2021.

In alignment with the national development priorities, YBI addressed the economic vulnerability and social exclusion of young people of age 15-29 in Tajikistan, with a special focus on youth living in the remote areas of the Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO), Rasht valley and Sughd region. The project has promoted youth’s employment through development of young people’s skills for innovations and business.

The project outcome, outputs and activities aimed at bringing innovations that would be leveraged by the parallel funding coming from other youth- and innovation-focused projects of UNDP. The Project envisaged development of modern employable business skills as well as skills for innovation for young men and women in order to increase the number of decent jobs for youth in agribusiness, sustainable tourism and green technologies for rural development.

Project objectives were addressed through a complex of interconnected activities including but not limited to vocational trainings, support to start-ups, trainings for innovations in business, knowledge and experience exchange at the national and international level, strengthening capacities of decision makers for youth-friendly policies, institutions and other tailor-made interventions emerged from other UNDP projects in Tajikistan.

Evaluation Objectives and Methodology

This Final Evaluation was conducted with a twofold purpose: a) to assess to what extent YBI has achieved its aims, assess the implementation approaches, the progress made, the challenges encountered, to identify and document the lessons learnt and good practices; and b) to inform new UNDP interventions (in particular the recently started project “Youth Empowerment through Skills Development and Promotion of Innovations in Tajikistan” which is also financed by the Russian Federation- UNDP Trust Fund for Development), and aid in the overall enhancement of UNDP programming.

The scope of the final evaluation has covered the whole implementation period of the Action – from January 2019 until December 2021.

The evaluators aimed to answer to two overall questions:

- (1) Have the skill and knowledge of youth engaged in the project on innovative entrepreneurship and business been enhanced and to what extent; and
- (2) To what extent youth engaged in the project has improved access to new vocational skills and local productive capacities that are sustainable, employment- and livelihood intensive.

The evaluation methodology is aligned to the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards. The performance of the Action has been assessed against the OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Attention has been put also in assessing the mainstreaming of gender equality, social inclusion aspects and of other cross-cutting issues.

The evaluation has covered all the areas where project activities have been implemented. A field mission with visits to Dushanbe, Sughd and Rasht Region has been conducted in mid-January- early February 2022. The study has applied non-experimental, descriptive design using mixed method approach for data collection. For sampling, the study applied non-probability, maximum variation sampling technique. The evaluation was informed and used four instruments – 1) Desk review of relevant documentation (UNDP Strategic and Project

documents, YBI Annual Reports, contracts and final reports of partner Public Organisations, audio-visual materials), 2) In-depth interviews with Key informants (the project team, key stakeholders, project partners, and other third-party informants); 3) interviews with end-beneficiaries; and 4) Direct observations at the partners/beneficiaries' premises.

Limitations encountered

The evaluation has been implemented relatively smoothly as the evaluation experts were prepared to deal with some of the anticipated risks that occurred.

Concerns related with the external validity of findings due to use of non-probability sampling techniques were addressed by applying triangulation principle. Findings are triangulated in term of source of information (secondary data, project stakeholders and direct observation) and methods of data collection (Focus Group Discussions - FGD, interview, desk research).

A resurgence of COVID in Tajikistan in the second half of January has resulted in several interviews to be conducted by telephone/zoom but, with the exclusion of the representative of Sughd region, all planned interlocutors have been interviewed.

The duration of the field phase was a bit short and consequently, the evaluators concentrated on a sample of activities chosen among the most important and larger ones.

The varying level of capacity/experience of the Public Organisations (POs) that have been partnering with UNDP Country Office (CO) reflected on the quality of their reporting and it has partially affected the possibility to thoroughly comment on actual results achieved.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1. The relevance of YBI is high. Its aims and activities are fully consistent with the government of Tajikistan's priorities and, at the same time, they represent a concrete response to youth's need for new opportunities of sustainable, innovative and inclusive employment, entrepreneurship, and enhanced professional qualifications for higher employability. UNDP support has been well structured so to address poverty and inequality leveraging on digitalisation, innovation and sourcing development financing.

Conclusion 2. YBI has been implemented with very good effectiveness, as confirmed by the results achieved and especially by the significant number of new jobs and new businesses created. Targets of achievement of project indicators have been achieved, and in many cases overachieved. Overall, the project has well contributed to the empowerment of youth as proactive development agents. In the implementation of the YBI Action, UNDP, through the mediation of several POs, and Business Support Organisations have assisted a number of beneficiaries, resulting in the creation of 256 new job places and the support of numerous new businesses. The InnoResponse Challenge – the new UNDP financing support scheme – has stimulated the generation of several perspective initiatives. UNDP has also addressed the creation of new jobs in a more structured way by supporting business support organisations such as State Institution “Formation and Development of Entrepreneurship in Tajikistan” (SI FDET).

Conclusion 3. The project's performed at a very good level of efficiency. It has well balanced its resources between supporting new and ambitious activities, and more traditional ones. Numerous initiatives and new approaches have been tested and enabled YBI to reach thousands of beneficiaries across Tajikistan. The Action proved to be highly adaptable to the challenging circumstances posed by COVID pandemic. However, resources available have been spread among a large number of interventions, including some that arguably have a low likelihood of leading to tangible effects.

Conclusion 4. The prospects of project impact and sustainability of the results achieved are moderately satisfactory. The preliminary signs of impact, mostly linked to effects generated by the small enterprises created with YBI mediation, are positive. In several supported businesses the first operational results achieved indicate that the employment of new staff will be needed or that the expansion of the premises

is under consideration. The trainings on IT and on other demanded in internal and external labour markets skills are likely to generate good impact as young Tajik graduates of these courses will have a competitive edge on those peers not qualified. Time, efforts, and planning will be needed for the business supporting entities to unfold their potential. Sustainability prospects show a similar situation than impact. Additional technical assistance and focused financial support are required to enhance, if not secure, the sustainability of most of the business support organisations assisted.

Conclusion 5. YBI has well fostered the participation of women and the inclusion of people with disabilities in the activities implemented. For all indicators, the ratio of women benefiting from YBI's effects is above the target value of 30%. Several interesting business opportunities have been launched by women and women have been employed in some 47% of the new jobs. Significant results have been achieved in terms of promoting inclusion of people with disabilities.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The evaluators advise UNDP to maintain in future Actions (similar to YBI) the combination of activities/budget allocated for «traditional activities» (i.e., support in agribusiness, service, small production) and «new activities» (IT trainings, digitalisation).

Based on data collected during the evaluation, the YBI's tools that should be kept are:

- a) The approach used in InnoResponse Challenge Round 3/4 should be maintained since it may help not only new businesses but also already functioning businesses that want to expand. (UNDP may consider the possibility of increasing the co-financing quota and prolonging the implementation period to 9 months and the sustainability period to 2 years).
- b) The approaches used by POs Unona and Nur, where skills development programme were followed by internship opportunity and small grants for equipment or short-term trainings and small grant assessed as an effective approach with the dual function of strengthening the capacity of participants to set up the business and conduct it, and providing resources to launch the businesses.
- c) IT training – preferably choosing specialisations that are tailored to meet wider needs of the IT sector more than niche ones (i.e., developing specialists in machine learning is not such a priority compared to Javascript developers).

Recommendation 2. UNDP is advised to maintain the assistance to business support organisations helped during YBI, and in particular SI FDET, to achieve full sustainability. UNDP should contribute to enhancing the capacity of its centres to attract and “service” their clientele as effectively as possible. UNDP could support Technoparks and other VET institutions helping them on how to formulate and deliver courses aligned to real market needs and standards.

Recommendation 3. UNDP should continue to provide policy advise assistance, consolidating its role as reputed partner of Tajik State Institutions. UNDP is advised to clearly define the framework/specific objective of its support. It should be oriented toward challenging themes that have been already addressed – IT/techno parks, big data, venture financing – but also on new themes that may prove simpler to tackle and/or topics that have not been addressed yet (e.g., measures to promote the employment of people with mental disabilities) but for which there will be no issues of attribution of the results achieved

Recommendation 4. UNDP is advised to consider increasing the budget allocated for financing grants/seed funding for startups of young people as access to finance is one of the main constraints faced by Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Access to finance is one of the main constraints faced by MSMEs in Tajikistan as interest rates are very high. To improve the likelihood of achieving high effectiveness in the initiatives supported, UNDP is advised to finance exclusively initiatives that are proposed by beneficiaries with the necessary credentials (experience, drive, etc.) have credible business plans, a good/high potential in terms of employment creation, replicability, innovation.

Recommendation 5. Future action similar to YBI should be implemented partnering with a limited of POs/Business support organisations, avoiding the spreading of resources. UNDP is advised not to spread the resources too thin by contracting too many POs since this causes excessive workload (and affects

efficiency) and may reduce the possibility of ensuring that all POs will deliver services of consistent quality and could result in overlapping between them.

Recommendation 6. The selection of beneficiaries of project initiatives should be done based on criteria likely to enhance the potential for effectiveness and with focus on equality. Participants in the age bracket 20-27 years or selected from migrants deported from Russia can be prioritised as they are likely to be more committed to completing a training and/or running a business but also because for participants in such age bracket will be easier to be employed or open a business (compared for example to the constraints in hiring a minor, registering a company, etc.). Further, the interventions can continue working with various stakeholders in remote and disadvantaged localities, such as Lakhsh and other disadvantaged regions. Specific attention can be paid to NEET with consideration of gender issues within this group.

Recommendation 7. The provision of activities focused on digitalisation should be accompanied by measures that enhance their inclusiveness, avoiding that a predominantly male audience is participating. Future activities should consider measures that promote inclusion (for example reimbursing fees plus a small extra to female trainees/trainees with disability, obtaining discounted internet connections from mobile companies for users from rural areas, providing computers at discounted leasing terms).

Recommendation 8. UNDP is advised to enhance the monitoring role played by its Local Offices in tracking Medium/Long term effects achieved by project's initiatives.

Recommendation 9. UNDP is advised to improve the potential effectiveness of communication and training material as instruments for enhancing replicability of the initiatives supported. As most of direct beneficiaries of YBI and of similar future actions are would-be micro/small entrepreneurs, the content of communication/training materials should be tailored to respond to the needs/challenges they face. Therefore, communication/training materials should be focused on presenting experiences to whom future beneficiaries can more easily relate and that may trigger the desire to start own businesses/follow the experiences depicted in the materials.

1. Introduction

In the second half of 2021, the UNDP Country Office (CO) Tajikistan has commissioned the Final Evaluation (henceforth the “Assignment” or the “Evaluation”) of the YBI initiative (the “Action”).

This Final Evaluation was conducted with a twofold purpose: a) to assess to what extent YBI has achieved its aims, assess the implementation approaches, the progress made, the challenges encountered, to identify and document the lessons learnt and good practices; and b) to inform new UNDP interventions (in particular the recently started project “Youth Empowerment through Skills Development and Promotion of Innovations in Tajikistan” which is also financed by the Russian Federation Trust Fund), and aid in the overall enhancement of UNDP programming.

Intended users of the evaluation are first and foremost UNDP CO staff and YBI Steering Committee members. The YBI Steering Committee members are: Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade (MEDT) of the Republic of Tajikistan; Deputy Chairwoman of the State Committee on Investment and State Property Management of the Republic of Tajikistan (GosKomInvest), Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Tajikistan and UNDP Tajikistan Resident Representative.

The report is organised as follows: an executive summary, brief introduction, project context, approach and methodology, limitation, and the findings (which are structured around key evaluation criteria: (a) relevance of the intervention, (b) effectiveness at the level of outputs and outcomes, (c) efficiency of the intervention – programmatic and financial management, efficiency at the level of outputs and an assessment of relationships. The final part of the report focuses on (d) assessment of impacts and prospects for sustainability of the project results, followed by (e) cross-cutting issues, (f) conclusions and recommendations, and (g) lessons learnt.

2. Project Context

As of January 1st, 2021, according to the official statistics, the population in Tajikistan reached 9.5 million, and it remains the fastest growing (and youngest) country in Central Asia and Eastern Europe region, with an average annual growth of 2.1%¹. Data indicates that despite economic gains in recent years (average 5.7% GDP growth between 2009 and 2016),² the country continues to remain one of the poorest in Central Asia³. According to official statistics, 29.7% continue to live below the official poverty line, and 14% live in extreme poverty. 53% of the workforce is in the agricultural sector, dominated by low-pay/low-productivity and informal employment. It is worth reiterating that, while extreme poverty is not directly linked to violent extremism, it increases risks of economic exclusion, and systematically addressing the exclusion is the best way to prevent violence, including violent extremism⁴.

Tajikistan’s potential workforce is growing fast — faster than many of its neighbours in Europe and Central Asia. However, there are some structural features that shape the job challenges in Tajikistan. Among others, Tajikistan is a mountainous and landlocked country, the country is an agrarian country where more than 70% of the population live in rural areas, the country has fast-growing and young population with around 200 000 people entering every year in the labour market, the legacy of transition and slow-paced structural reforms. Due to these factors, it is difficult today for the country’s economy to create a sufficient number of jobs. At the same time, the informal sector represents a large and growing source of jobs, several jobs are seasonal or temporary and there are major inequalities in terms of labour market outcomes.

¹ Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. Retrieved on January 20, 2022 from <https://www.stat.tj/>

² United Nations World Economic Situation and Prospects 2018 Report, https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/WESP2018_Full_Web-1.pdf. The Government of Tajikistan reports about an average 7% growth annually in recent years.

³ <https://data.worldbank.org/country/tajikistan> (retrieved on 7 June 2019).

⁴ Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/Progress_Study_on_Youth_Peace_Security_A-72-761_S-2018-86_ENGLISH.pdf

According to observations, social exclusion and inequality for young people, and especially young women, throughout the country are among the factors affecting youth development. Young people make up 66% of the population of Tajikistan, and every year around 200,000 young people enter the labour market, but labour underutilization among youth remains at 20.5%, while the official youth unemployment rate amounts to 10.6 % (twice higher than among those who were aged 30-75 years and more than 1.5 times exceeded the national average)⁵. Furthermore, 29.3% of young people of 15-24 years old are not in employment, education or training (NEET), and about 90% of these NEET youth consisted of young women. Moreover, the NEET rate for female youth is considerably higher than for male youth. Almost a third of employed young people are in unpaid (informal) jobs compared to 15% of adults. Youth are also significantly less likely to be self-employed (5% compared to 11% among adults).

Young people and adolescents, especially girls, have limited access to education, knowledge, and skills that could lead to their social and economic advancement and bring them financial and personal security. Girls aged 11-17 are approximately twice as likely as boys to be deprived of school attainment and attendance. The gap between what the education system is providing in terms of learning achievements and skills, and what children, young people, communities, and economies need is growing. In addition to immediate risks, the harsh economic situation creates long-term fragility risks for the country, especially with the considerable 'youth bulge', and contributes to the migration and "brain-drain" of the most skilful workforce (females make up approximately 18% of the migrants). It is important to note that economic conditions and societal norms exclude a large portion of women from the economy, especially those living outside major urban areas. Moreover, children and young people in Tajikistan have limited access to health services, including mental health and psychological services, that are tailored to their needs.

Parents play an important role in the life of young people and can sometimes be the ones creating obstacles for their active participation. FGDs conducted by UNICEF in 2018 showed that some parents believe that young people cannot take independent decisions on issues concerning their lives until they reach the age of 35. This widespread belief is an integral element of the limiting environment for youth participation in the life of society. Moreover, the most recent Demographic and Health Survey (2018) indicates that 67 percent of children of age up to 14 face violence. Adolescent Baseline Study 2018 showed that 47 percent of adolescents of age 10-19 face violence in schools. Hence, positive parenting interventions are necessary.

Beyond economic and social exclusion and inequalities, the collapse of Soviet Union and civil war have led to the quest for new identities and belonging. The relationship between secular and religious spheres in the country is still being shaped, and may impact the future of the national project and social contract. While the increasing presence of religion in society is not a concern, as the UN – World Bank study Pathways for Peace also suggests, young people's desire for a social community and belonging⁶ lead to their challenging of existing norms that facilitate social cohesion, leading to intergenerational clashes, in a society where religion is defining identities of younger generations more than the older. If combined with a socio-economic exclusion, more radical external ideologies might attract some young people to such an environment.

The annual "Global Report on the Gender Gap 2018" ranks Tajikistan 123th out of 149 countries assessed⁷ (worst from those ranked in Europe and CIS countries), and the country's position has been worsening over years. Women's and girls' political, economic, and social exclusion is widespread in Tajikistan, with a trend towards re-traditionalization, reinforcing traditional gender roles that are detrimental to women's empowerment and gender equality. This creates new economic dependencies, exacerbates existing gender stereotypes, increases violence against women, and excludes women from the political and socio-economic sphere.

Young women find it difficult to be included in the political life of Tajikistan. They make up only 19% of the Tajik Parliament members (12 out of 63 MPs). Women are unequally represented in civil service (22%), especially in managerial civil service positions (18.7%). Women make up only 7% of high-ranking government officials, and as little as 16% of lowest administrative tiers' representative bodies (in settlements and villages). Women face also structural exclusion in the economic sphere. Women earn less than men, women-headed SMEs account for less than 1% of all SMEs in the country (only around 2000 enterprises). There is limited investment in women's vocational education, and most women are employed in low-paid labour industries, such as agriculture, education, and healthcare. Many economic indicators of women's position in the economy are worsening over years, underlining the increasing gap between men and women in the country. For instance,

⁵ It should be noted that the registered unemployment in Tajikistan amounts to 0.5%.

⁶ UN – WB Pathways for Peace study

⁷ http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf. The report notes: "Tajikistan takes this year's bottom spot in the region, slipping 28 places due to a widening Economic Participation and Opportunity gender gap, driven by updated data availability regarding women's share of legislators, senior officials, and managers as well as labour force participation and estimated earned income" (page 22)

between 2003 and 2013, the disparity between male and female employment rates increased from 21% to 35%.

At the social level, social norms and traditions contribute to women's vulnerability. Although there is no official data, most experts⁸ agree about existing practices of early, unregistered, polygamous marriages in Tajikistan, which deprive women of legal protection of their rights, and contribute to the exclusion from education, and other life opportunities. Other social phenomena, like massive migration, give rise to the problem of abandoned women, who – without education, employment and capital – often found in poverty and hopelessness.

3. Description of the intervention

The YBI Action has been conceived to address the economic vulnerability and social exclusion of young people of age 15-29 in Tajikistan, with a special focus on youth living in the remote areas of GBAO, Rasht valley, and Sughd region. The project aimed to promote youth's engagement in sustainable entrepreneurship, innovative and inclusive local development through the development of young people's skills for innovations and business. The project also promoted youth-led local initiatives and overall empowerment of youth as proactive development agents in the context of Agenda 2030. The project envisaged to have all its proposed activities to be aligned with the national development priorities which are expected to push forward the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) localization in close partnership with the Government of Tajikistan (both national and sub-national levels), private sector, as well as civil society organizations (CSOs) and development partners.

The YBI project had a budget of USD 1.15 million, mostly sourced from the UNDP-Russian Trust Fund for Development (USD 1 million). It has been implemented by UNDP from 1 January 2019 to 30 June 2021 and then, following a 6-month no-cost extension, until 31 December 2021.

The YBI project has been designed so to reinforce and complement the results of the past and ongoing projects of the UNDP Communities Programme in youth empowerment and inclusive economic development and built on the lessons learned of other similar initiatives implemented in various parts of the country by UNDP, including the "Promotion of Social and Economic Opportunities for Women and Youth in Zerafshan Valley of Tajikistan" project implemented in 2017-2019 by UNDP with the financial support of Russian Federation. The project outcome, outputs, and activities aimed at bringing innovations that would be leveraged by the parallel funding coming from other youth- and innovation-focused projects of UNDP. The Project envisaged the development of modern employable business skills as well as skills for innovation for young men and women to increase the number of decent jobs for youth in agribusiness, sustainable tourism and green technologies for rural development.

Project objectives were addressed through a complex of interconnected activities including but not limited to vocational trainings to meet the rising local demand for new skills, support to start-ups, trainings for innovations in business, knowledge and experience exchange at the national and international level, strengthening capacities of decision makers for youth-friendly policies, institutions, etc. The project activities were implemented in Dushanbe, GBAO, Khujand, Konibodom, Istaravshan, Lakhsh, Tojikobod, and Rasht districts.

The main Components/Outputs of the project were:

1. Enhanced skills and knowledge of youth on innovative entrepreneurship and business
2. Improved access of youth to new vocational skills and local productive capacities that are sustainable, employment- and livelihood intensive

⁸E.g. <https://www.bhr.tj/sites/default/files/articles/2018-01/ngo-report-iccpr-2013.pdf>; <http://www.notabene.tj/Doc/Kaz/compl/RU-Domestic-violence-in-Taj-March-2017.pdf>; recent press article: <https://news.tj/ru/node/269638>

4. Evaluation scope and objectives

The scope of the final evaluation has covered the whole implementation period of the Action – from January 2019 until December 2021.

As the Action is precisely targeting youth, the evaluators aimed to answer two overall questions: 1) Have the skill and knowledge of youth engaged in the project on innovative entrepreneurship and business been enhanced and to what extent; and 2) to what extent youth engaged in the project has improved access to new vocational skills and local productive capacities that are sustainable, employment, and livelihood intensive? The evaluation has covered all the areas where project activities have been implemented and in particular Dushanbe, Sughd Region, and Rasht valley. A field mission with visits to Dushanbe and Sughd has been conducted in mid-January 2022, whereas Rasht valley districts was visited in early February 2022. Regrettably, the evaluators could not visit the project activities implemented in GBAO region due to winter period and recent developments occurred there.

For more details of the assignment, please, refer to Annex 1. Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Final evaluation of the “Youth for Business and Innovation” Project.

5. Evaluation methodology and plan

The Evaluation followed the basic methodology set forth in the ToR and in the offer submitted to UNDP CO. The evaluation methodology is aligned to the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards. The performance of the Action has been assessed against the OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. Attention has been put also in assessing the mainstreaming of gender equality, social inclusion aspects, and other cross-cutting issues. In addition, the evaluation shall indicate if the produced results are in the right direction towards facilitating the efforts of the Government of Tajikistan in terms of the development of youth-friendly policies and initiatives in the project areas.

The evaluation has been conducted by a team of 2 experts – an international and a local evaluator – contracted separately by CO. This format combined the overall experience of the former, with the country experience of the latter. Considering the short duration of the envisaged mission of the International Evaluator in Tajikistan, this format has been optimal and it has permitted visiting not only Dushanbe and Sughd region but also Rasht valley (albeit only the local evaluator went there).

Overall, the study has applied non-experimental, descriptive design and used mixed method approach for data collection. The evaluation was informed and used four instruments – 1) *Desk review of relevant documentation (UNDP Strategic and Project documents, YBI Annual Reports, contracts and final reports of partner Public Organisations, audio-visual materials)*, 2) *In-depth interviews with Key informants (the project team, key stakeholders, project partners, and other third-party informants)*; 3) *interviews with end-beneficiaries*; and 4) *Direct observations at the partners/beneficiaries’ premises*.

Sampling of study participants based on non-probability, purposive-maximum variation sampling technique to collect data from the widest range of perspectives possible about the topics of concern.

In the course of the evaluation, more than 30 meetings took place. The evaluators met UNDP Staff including staff from Khujand and Rasht Local Implementation and Innovation Centres (LIICs), main stakeholders in State Institutions, representatives of implementing partner organisations. The evaluation team has spoken to a sample of some 60 direct beneficiaries chosen quasi randomly (i.e., chosen randomly from the beneficiaries that accepted to participate to meetings set by UNDP partners). Beneficiaries from both sexes have been interviewed, but regrettably, no equal representation of women and men could be secured (interviewees were 70% men and 30% women).

The evaluation plan has been thoroughly agreed with UNDP CO. The evaluation has been conducted in three phases: an Inception/Desk Review Phase, a Field Phase, and a Synthesis/Reporting Phase. The end of each

phase has been marked by the submission of specific deliverables (notes and reports) as detailed in the table below.

Ethical conciliations.

The basic principles of respect, confidentiality and non-discrimination were applied. The experts made every effort to assure that cultural norms and codes of conduct were respected throughout the process. The experts made sure that respondents understand the purpose of the assessment and its limitations. Respondents answered questions on a voluntary basis only and have not received any direct or indirect material benefit from their contribution.

Exhibit 1 – Phases of the Evaluation

Phase	Deliverable	Time-frame
Inception/Desk review	Inception Report (20/12/21)	3-20 December 2021
Field Phase (12-24 January - mission in Tajikistan of the International Expert, 3-4 February mission to Laksh and Rasht of the Local expert)	Presentation of preliminary findings at the end of the mission 21/01/22)	21 December 2021 – 4 February 2022
Synthesis/Reporting Phase	Draft Final Evaluation Report (10/01/2022), Final Project Evaluation Report Exit Presentation	4 February - January 2022 – 25 February 2022

6. Limitations

No severe limitations have been encountered during the evaluation. Some of the anticipated risks, especially the resurgence of Covid – occurred, but the evaluation team was prepared and dealt effectively with them.

It goes without saying that the duration of the field phase was a bit short for allowing both the international and local experts to have the possibility of getting a comprehensive understanding of what has been done and achieved. The evaluators have met or interviewed all main stakeholders, but only a relatively small sample of the business infrastructures entities, partners, and end-beneficiaries that collaborated with the YBI project. Moreover, considering that the initiative has (fully/partially) financed and implemented a large number of small and larger activities the evaluators could not always find comprehensive and accurate data/info on all the results achieved. Consequently, the evaluators concentrated on a sample chosen among the most important and larger activities implemented, especially in 2021. As the visit to Tajikistan took place in January, the possibility of visiting GBAO, where many interesting results have been achieved, had to be excluded because of winter conditions and other considerations. Nevertheless, a few interviews with beneficiaries and implementing partners were conducted to get a first-hand impression of the assistance provided in GBAO.

A resurgence of COVID in Tajikistan in the second half of January has partially affected the smooth execution of the field phase and it has resulted in several interviews to be conducted by telephone/zoom. Contrary to plan, the international expert has visited Sughd Region alone since the local expert was sick, but this has not overly affected the possibility of conducting one-on-one interviews with beneficiaries as interviews could be carried out in Russian. Eventually, stakeholders from all main national institutions and partner organisations but the representative of Sughd region have been interviewed.

The varying level of capacity/experience of the POs that have been partnering with UNDP CO reflected on the quality of their reporting, and it has partially affected the possibility for evaluators to retrieve all available and needed data. Moreover, it appears that no follow-up monitoring of the effects achieved is carried out or not feasible (e.g., it seems trainees who got a job two-three months after the training and thanks to it are not counted), and direct attribution to YBI is difficult in many cases. Considering the number of activities carried out, the consequence of this was a certain risk of under-reporting, not fully detailing on actual results achieved. The evaluation has noted, however, instances where it perceives that YBI laid a foundation that resulted in the advancement of the outcome, where the evidence supports a credible link between UNDP's activities and outcome level results.

Evaluative process could have been strengthened had UNDP CO agreed on a standardised template for POs where they could fill data on the outputs delivered and results achieved. Equally useful would be to have PO committed to conduct a follow up monitoring after the completion of main activities contracted.

Concerns related with the external validity of findings due to use of non-probability sampling techniques were addressed by applying triangulation principle. Findings are triangulated in term of source of information (secondary data, project stakeholders and direct observation) and methods of data collection (FGD, interview, desk research).

7. Main Findings

Relevance

The review of project documents and of other strategic documents of the Government of Tajikistan, and the observations made during the field mission give abundant evidences of the high relevance of the YBI Action. The intervention logic and the objectives pursued by the YBI Action are highly consistent with the country's development priorities, socio-economic context and the global development agenda.

Consistency with the National and subnational strategic document

The Project interventions have directly contributed to local development agenda as well. Its aims and activities reflect in many aspects those highlighted in the recent address of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan⁹. The National Development Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan for the period to 2030 (NDS-30) remains as a roadmap for all development initiatives by all actors in the country, linking to and aligning local priorities with global development agenda. The evaluation shows that the Project aims and activities were well-aligned and contributed to the overall goal of NDS-2030 - *Improving the living standards of population, based on sustainable economic development*, and its priorities designed to achieve the goals of the Strategy. More specifically, the Project interventions contributed to development objective (d) of NDS-30 on Expansion of Productive Employment. At the same time, the Project, through gender-sensitive programming and targeting disadvantaged regions of the country, contributed to equity prospects of the NDS-30 that promotes social and economic inclusion and stipulates gender equality through addressing structural gaps and providing greater opportunities for women and girls, in particular in rural areas.

The Project demonstrated a good example of how to effectively tackle social and economic inequalities. It has been found that the interventions dedicated to development of business skills, subsidized micro loans and grants were particularly important for empowerment of women and girls in target locations.

Productive employment, in particular among youth, is one of the key national priorities highlighted in section 5.2. of the NDS-30. The NDS -30 states that shift from predominant employment in agriculture should become an important part of the employment reform and labour productivity growth, and should be related to the restructuring of the real sector of economy. Based on the observations made and available data, it can be stated that the Project interventions, in particular the initiative supporting start-ups contributed to productive employment and created various employment opportunities, including self-employment for the beneficiaries.

The Project interventions are aligned with the Mid-Term Development Programme for the period from 2016 to 2020 priorities as well. The Project particularly inputs to priority 3.5.3 section 4.2. On Productive employment, in particular for youth and women.

The evaluation report has also assessed the consistency of Project priorities with District Development Programmes (DDPs). in targeted districts. Two DDPs, for Istaravshan and Rasht District were assessed over the course of the evaluation study. It has been found that overall, the Project interventions are consistent with the gaps in the area of entrepreneurship, unemployment and access to skills and knowledge on innovations. At the same time, it has been found that the DDPs have limited scope on youth development.

⁹ English version available at <http://prezident.tj/en/node/27419>

Consistency with UNDP Country Programme 2016-2020 and Sustainable Development Goals.

It can be stated that Project contributed to the realisation of the UNDP Country Programme 2016-2020, addressing the priority (b) sustainable and equitable economic growth, leveraging its on-the-ground presence and established partnerships various regions of the country. The project equally contributed to the realisation of the SDGs in Tajikistan. With the specific focus on youth and creation of decent job opportunities and innovations, the Project interventions were found instrumental in addressing SDG 1 (No poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (Gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 9 (industry innovations and infrastructure), SDG 10 (Reducing inequalities), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals).

It should be noted that there are 20 youth-specific targets spread over six key Goals - Goal 2, Goal 4, Goal 5, Goal 8, Goal 10 (inequality) and Goal 13 (climate change). In the frame of SDGs, young people's involvement is also key for participation, inclusion, accountability and revitalized global engagement embedded in Goals 16 (peaceful, just and inclusive societies) and 17 (partnerships and implementation).

The Project interventions also correspond with the United National Development Assistance Framework for Tajikistan (UNDAF) Outcome 2: People in Tajikistan benefit from equitable and sustainable economic growth through decent and productive employment; stable energy supply; improved access to specialised knowledge and innovation and more favourable business environment, especially for entrepreneurs and farmers. The Project interventions contributes to Outcomes of the Social Development, Inclusion and Empowerment area of UNDAF and specifically to Outcome 5: Women, youth, children, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups are protected from violence, and discrimination, have a voice that is heard and are respected as equal members of society. The interventions contribute to 5.1. Gender Inequality Index that comprises three dimensions: Reproductive Health, Empowerment and Labour Market Participation. Specific examples are given in Effectiveness Section of this report.

Consistency with the needs of target groups

Project priorities and their resonance to actual needs of target groups is not only reflecting the conclusions of various analysis conducted by international organisations but it was confirmed by various interview participants as well. All evaluation participants were positive about the project activities targeting young people, in particular in rural areas, where employment remains a key issue. It may be quoted the statement of one beneficiary interviewed in Tojikobod that summarise the position of many beneficiaries, - *"My daily sales are around 500 Tajik Somoni and it is continuously growing, I pay my taxes and have one employee..., I used to go to Russia, but now, no point to go, I have almost the same level of income here, while stay with my family"*

Appropriateness of the YBI's design

The design of YBI facilitated the achievement of the objective pursued, containing the right mix of activities, covering an appropriate set of sectors and geographical areas. The design of Action is deemed fully respondent to meet the objectives pursued by YBI. Thanks to the in-depth and comprehensive knowledge possessed by the UNDP responsible team, the Action entails a proper combination of sectors of intervention, appropriate geographical coverage, type of activities implemented, and inputs allocated. Additional analysis of the needs conducted at YBI's start enabled to further refine these aspects during implementation.

The content of the Action has been defined through a year-long process that saw the involvement of the stakeholders representing the Russian Federation as well as of those from the Tajikistan side. Notably, Tajik key stakeholders included the GosKomInvest, MEDT, Youth Committee. The process of content definition has been inclusive as additional stakeholders representing other relevant initiatives, CSOs, and the private sectors have been involved (e.g., Youth Entrepreneurship Clubs, Accelerate Prosperity, 55 Group, T-cell, Alif Bank to name a few).

In terms of sectors, YBI intervenes in "new" ones, such as IT/digitalisation and to a certain extent entrepreneurship, but it did not neglect "traditional" ones – agriculture, tourism, service/trade. On the one hand, intervening in IT/digitalisation, sustaining ambitious, high-potential, and innovative interventions, would allow UNDP to contribute to "leapfrog" development of this sector. On the other hand, sustaining beneficiaries in traditional sectors had clear benefits in terms of immediate response to needs and replicability potential.

In terms of geographical areas covered, the Action has been implemented in four main ones: Dushanbe, GBAO, Rasht and Sughd. These areas present significant socio-economic differences, including two relatively well-developed ones (Dushanbe and Sughd), and two that are severely underdeveloped (GBAO, Rasht).

To optimise Action's effects, a different sector's focus has been applied in each area. The matrix below clarifies the allocation sector/geographical area.

Exhibit 2 - Matrix Sectors/geographical areas

SECTOR	REGION			
	Dushanbe	GBAO	Rasht	Sughd
Digitalisation/IT	X			X
Entrepreneurship	X			X
Agriculture			X	X
Service/trade		X		
Tourism		X	X	

The set of Activities foreseen was quite wide vis-à-vis the available resources. The majority of the activities conducted were on skills development (various IT programming courses and on artificial intelligence, and standard Vocational Education Training - VET courses) and entrepreneurship (e.g., business constructor). Another important group of activities were those aimed at providing small grants in form of equipment to end beneficiaries interested in conducting some business activity. A third group included activities oriented to enhance public awareness about entrepreneurship and motivating would-be entrepreneurs (hackatons, start-up chaikhona), and promoting business contacts (e.g., Fair in Sughd, etc.). A fourth group included the support to entities like business incubators, Khujand technopark and Youth Centre in Lakhsh and few others. A last set included the policy advise support provided.

It should be underlined that the inputs available for the Action have been also properly allocated. Broadly, the budget has been allocated for 1/3 to Output 1 and 2/3 to Output 2, reflecting the relatively higher relevance of the latter. Another very important aspect to underline that a significant part of the overall budget has been given directly to end-beneficiaries that started their own business.

Effectiveness

Overall, YBI effectiveness can be assessed as very good. YBI has achieved, and in many cases overachieved, the targets set for all the indicators of implementation (see tables below and Annex 2). YBI has obtained important effects primarily at the micro level (i.e., direct support of end-beneficiaries in terms of employment/business creation and capacity enhancement), and to a lesser extent at the meso level (i.e., support to business infrastructure) and at the macro one (i.e., development of relevant policies and assistance to State Institutions).

At the micro level, the high degree of effectiveness is confirmed by the number of new of job places created, but also in terms of youth that started their own businesses and/or received valuable guidance to operate successfully. Many young Tajiks, are now, thanks to the new knowledge/skills received, better equipped in the competition for better/more sustainable jobs.

Exhibit 3 – Status of Achievement of Key Indicators vs Target values

Key Indicators	Target value	Achieved value
# of young people benefited from start-up trainings	200	523
# of young entrepreneurs and professionals developed business plans and prototyping models	10	38
# of young people, including women from remote villages passed vocational trainings	200	231
# of supported youth-led small economic initiatives in rural areas	12	51
# of grants for innovative ideas to youth-initiated start-ups	5	10
# of new full-time jobs for women and youth created	56	256

Exhibit 4 – Status of Achievement of Key Indicators vs Target values

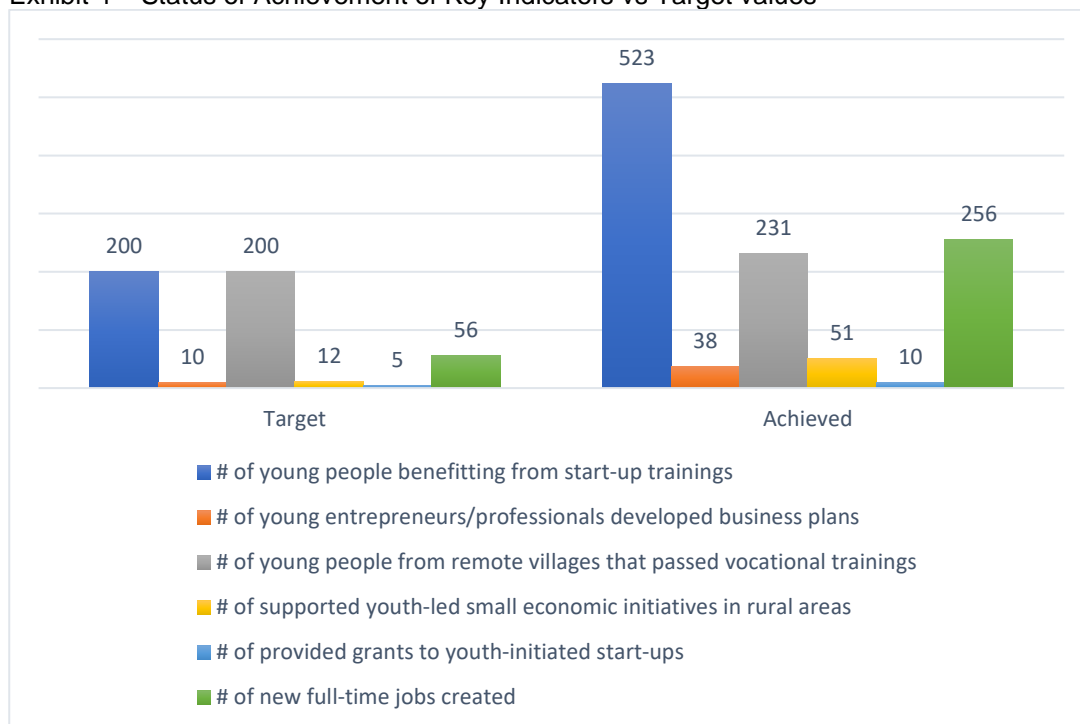
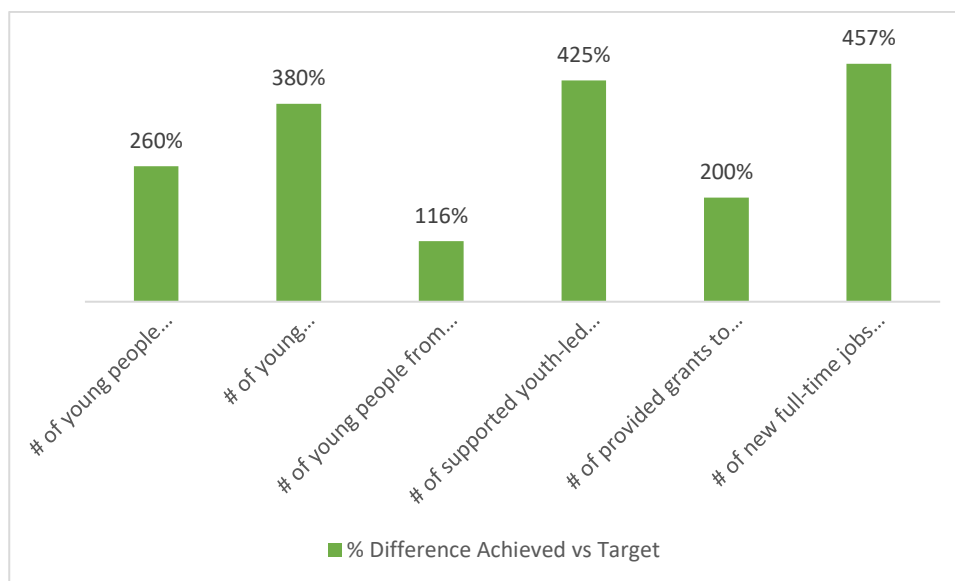


Exhibit 5 - % Difference between Achieved value vs Target values for Key Indicators



Data provided are confirming that at least 256 young Tajiks (of which 121 women), have been successfully assisted in getting jobs upon completion of the project activities they were engaged in, and 18 were recruited while participating to such activities. Some 231 young people (including 90 women) have attended VET classes, enhancing their qualifications. Moreover, 104 young Tajik (42 young women) were engaged as apprentices, which in many cases led to employment. It should also be reported that 175 business ideas have been developed and presented to the potential donors and investors through Startup Choikhona and other platforms, and that 574 SMEs and private entrepreneurs have been assisted.

As the Action has implemented a large number of activities, comprehensive and accurate data/info on all the results achieved were not always available. Consequently, the evaluators concentrated on a sample of the most important and larger activities that could reflect the overall results of YBI and for which the pieces of

evidence were available These evidences have been cross-checked during the evaluation and confirmed YBI's effectiveness.

Below we detail the effects achieved at Micro, Meso and Macro level.

Micro level

Initiatives combining training with mini grants

Some of the most successful and effective activities were those that combined capacity building/focused training together with the provision of mini grants (in the form of equipment). Such schemes have attracted much interest among participants, fostering their motivation and a strong positive competition among participants' business ideas. The business ideas, even those for which beneficiaries have received equipment worth few hundred of dollars, had good effects in terms of creation of new jobs.

These schemes have been used by YBI with the POs "Unona" and "Nur", which have been awarded relatively large service contracts (slightly less than 50000 USD each), as implementing partners.

Unona's intervention, which covered both Sughd region and GBAO, consisted in a) a one-day training on starting a business delivered to 244 young participants (of which 104 women, 43%), followed by a two-weeks period of apprenticeship for 94 participants. Afterwards, the programme selected the business plans of 20 participants, mostly interested in opening microbusinesses in the sphere of services (especially fast-food outlets, bakeries, confectioneries), and in the agro-sector, but also some more innovative ideas (e.g. Rus-Chin a translation service specialised in translation from/into Chinese using a network of free-lance translators).



Picture 1. A small workshop in Guliston, (Sughd Region) which has received a sewing machine from YBI

Each of the selected business idea has received equipment for some 1000 USD as contribution to launch/improve their businesses.

Unona's contract was implemented successfully and at its completion (October 2021) 25 new job places were created against the planned 20, (i.e., 25% more than originally foreseen), and additional 7 people got a job in state/private entities. Regretfully, there is no information on how many of the apprentices got a job. The visits conducted during the evaluation to some applicants confirmed that since receiving the equipment several of them have expanded their businesses and are now employing more people (albeit in most cases informally).

PO "Nur" has implemented a different programme, entirely in GBAO. The key differences were that a) the programme foresaw a 3-day introductory training, but no apprenticeships, and b) each business plan selected did not receive equipment for a predefined value (as in Yunona's programme), but variable amounts (that ranged from approx. USD 800 to USD 10000). The programme supported 11 initiatives which have cumulatively received USD 35000 of UNDP funding, and additional USD 35000 of funding from the entrepreneurs and/or Nur itself. These initiatives have generated some 37 job places, mostly permanent ones. That indicates an approximate investment of 1000 USD/job created. An example of project assisted is a Workshop for repairing and manufacturing furniture in Tajikabod. The project provided modern equipment and

they could expand their business and recruit new staff. Now the company has 10 staff, including a person with disability. According to Workshop's Director, thanks to local authorities they got their premises free of charge, but the company has already rented another facility to provide other services as well. The workshop has already signed contract with most of the schools in the district to repair or manufacture for them school furniture. Nur's approach seems to be particularly effective, and promotes a strong ownership by beneficiaries (as testified by the high quota of co-financing), but the success may be partially explained by the relatively underdeveloped business environment in GBAO.

It appears that Unona and Nur have been more effective in the selection of beneficiaries/initiatives with stronger business rationale/higher "return on investment" compared to other beneficiaries selected by another POs and visited by evaluators. For example, the evaluators have visited a farmer which has received a greenhouse. Thanks to the greenhouse, the farmer's family has been able to grow more produces for self-consumption and their living conditions improved. However, it appears they have not carefully considered what to grow, and they end up growing farm produces that cannot be sold to market as the market is too far away, and the produce grown are usual ones, with no premium prices that could justify the effort and expenses for selling them. In a nearby village, a woman has received a sewing machine and she is now sewing clothes for women from that village. She has already an apprentice, but it will be basically impossible for her to further grow her sewing shop because her village is hard to reach and because of the limited spending capacity of her neighbours. Although only two of such beneficiaries visited is too small a sample to reach a definite conclusion on how beneficiaries were selected, the evaluators want to strongly emphasise the importance of selecting beneficiaries not on the basis of their livelihood conditions, but first and foremost on the basis of the merits of their proposed businesses.



Picture 2. A small greenhouse in the hills outside Istaravshan

BizConstructor

Business Constructor is an initiative that has been tested by UNDP Tajikistan in 2019, and that has been repeated in 2020 under YBI and implemented by the PO Peshraft. It was organised on various modules, each one focused on different topics required for launching a successful enterprise. Modules have been presented by entrepreneurs, top managers and experts over 16 Sundays. In parallel with attending the training, the participants were divided into teams and had the opportunity to develop their own innovative startups. The program was concluded by the pitching session in front of successful entrepreneurs and potential investors. The initiative has indeed stimulated the entrepreneurial spirit of many young Tajik and several business ideas have been generated and then converted in functioning businesses. Where the initiative was falling short was that the initiative was not connected to dedicated funds for sustaining the initiatives. Moreover, the fact that several minors attended it had indirectly limited the effectiveness of the activity and of the business ideas put forward by them, since minors cannot register a company or get loans, and alike.

InnoResponse Challenge

Good results have been achieved also from the InnoResponse Challenge. The initiative was launched within the YBI project and scaled up by other UNDP projects. The InnoResponse Challenge initiative provides financial support to the project proposals that will promote and/or test innovative solutions, products and

services to strengthen resilience potential of affected people, households and private sector and to address and mitigate negative consequences of the global economic recession triggered by COVID-19 pandemic. Under the Challenge, UNDP has been able to support directly SMEs, POs and other applicants that have addressed different aspects instrumental to have an appropriate and sustainable ecosystem. The financing provided ranged from some USD 5000 to some USD 15000.

The enterprises proposed some innovative business models. For example, under the YBI's InnoResponse Challenge, FoodTech Tajikistan launched "Rason24" a food delivery service that is assisting clients in the purchases of food products from supermarket. This initiative has led to the creation and FoodTech plans to employ more than 30 young people as couriers. It is worth noticing that within another UNDP project the InnoResponse challenge has supported the enterprise Sahna, which has launched a food delivery services - "Dostavka" - focused on food delivery for restaurants/café.

With a grant of USD 15000 combined with some USD 54800 of its own resources, the small company Harif has been able to launch the production of strawberry seedlings. These new seedlings present major differences with those mostly used in the area. The main differences are that the strawberries obtained from the new seedlings a) are less subject to diseases, can be conserved better and suffer less when transported allowing to be processed for export; b) can be grown throughout the year; and c) guarantee higher yields. As a result, the profitability of the new strawberries is 5-6 times higher.



Picture 3. Harif's owner in his greenhouse

The owner of Harif has developed what is likely to be a very successful business model. Through pro-active selling methods for its seedlings and for the strawberries obtained, complemented with adequate agronomic assistance to farmers, Harif is going to have access to a sufficiently large volume of produce that can be frozen and then exported. The final aim of the initiative is to develop "Strawberry valley" an initiative that can be extended to some 1000 farmers.

Clearly, the potential impact on local communities of such innovative initiative is very high as it maximises the competitive factors of available and cheap labour force (especially women and youth) combined with the availability of land, and favourable climate for growing the strawberries

Other small InnoResponse grants were awarded to three initiatives implemented by PO IRODA, the Legal Firm Himoya, and the PO Alif Academy.

The PO IRODA has implemented the project "Wireless support". The project had a strong social dimension as it provided online support for children with autism and their families. However, it has also a "business/skill" dimension since eight young persons with mental disabilities have learned baking and other skills while running the "Dar Yak Zamin" café. The café and the catering services they developed was very successful, helping to generate much needed resources for IRODA. At the same time, two boys helped by IRODA got employed in

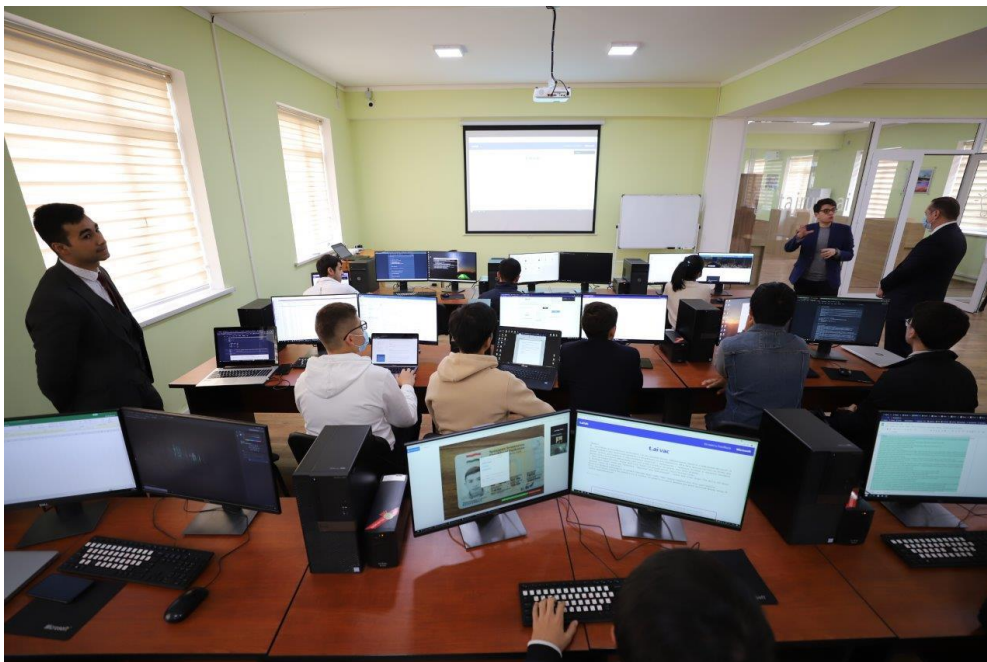
two private businesses. As indicated by IRODA, the chances of employing people with autism would be higher if the legal framework was revised to resemble what is prescribed for people with physical disabilities.

The project “Competent legal support for everyone” has been implemented by Himoya - a highly reputed legal firm in Dushanbe. The project answered questions posed by 380 entrepreneurs, companies, and startups. Some 61542 people have been reached by its FB posts. As confirmed by some of the direct beneficiaries of this initiative, the availability of such support was critical since, in many cases, it was difficult to get unequivocal feedback on such questions from state institutions. The availability of such assistance was particularly valued by solo entrepreneurs and startups, which had limited experience in addressing legal issues, and it was valuable not only to address practical constraints but also personal ones such as the fear of making mistakes, administrative irregularities.

Alif Academy with the project “Javascript Open School” offered free of charge JavaScript courses to help expand the number of available qualified specialists. The project received 505 applications (including 57 women) but only 289 were enrolled and only 93 among them graduated. Out of them 27 (29%) got a job. It is rather important to note that many trainees were already employed and have benefited from the knowledge received to strengthen their qualifications and improve their chances of getting better jobs. Various trainees met by the evaluators confirmed the quality, effectiveness and relevance of the training received.

Other initiatives

An initiative similar to that of the Alif Academy was implemented by PO Tajrupt with its Artificial Intelligence (AI) Academy. The training of the AI Academy was on machine learning (ML) courses and gained the participants got professional skills in Statistics, Python and advanced ML models. Some 139 people (including 18 young women, i.e., 13%) enrolled to this course, and 10 participants were recruited on the positions of paid interns in Arvand, Imon, Livo, T-cell and Babilon companies. In addition, Tajrupt.ai involved high schools' students in its projects t.pass, t.digit, t.vaccine and other projects. As underlined by some participants met by the evaluators, the content of the course is very advanced for Tajikistan and there is a certain risk that trainees are employed not as specialist in ML, but mainly as IT specialists.



Picture 4. Participants of the courses on Artificial Intelligence at PO TajRupt _1

MESO LEVEL

At Meso level, UNDP has supported several business infrastructure/educational entities. Among them it is important to mention the SI FDET. UNDP has collaborated with GosKomInvest and the Japan International Cooperation Agency to establish such Institution, which currently has a network of 5 business Incubators (in Dushanbe, Bohtar, Khujand, Khorog, and Kulyab). In particular, within YBI, UNDP has contributed with around 40,000 USD to help the government in institutionalizing the SI FDET services, drafting the charter

of the institute, rehabilitating and equipping office spaces, and supporting capacity building for staff members. The incubators have been officially opened between 2020 and 2021, with the main centres in Dushanbe opening in September 2020 and that in Khujand in April 2021. Evaluators' visits to incubator in Dushanbe confirmed that this centre is indeed offering a range of services to businesses. Besides providing office space for several businesses, the incubator is the venue for numerous and different events of interest for the businesses – hackatons, startup talks, trainings, etc. Incubator's premises and training facilities are not fully used yet. Khujand incubator is clearly lagging behind in terms of operativity, though the premises are fully prepared.

In spite of the activities currently carried out in the incubators, it is clear that additional support from UNDP and further work from the staff of the SI FDET is still needed for the incubators to reach the needed level of institutional capacity and financial viability. The interviews conducted with some of businesses currently resident in the Incubator and with staff of the incubator are pointing that there is space for making the services of the incubators more relevant. The feedback from some of the residents underline the good value for money offered by Dushanbe Incubator. The accessibility and quality of premises, the availability of fast internet, and the possibility of interacting with other similar companies/managers are appreciated by centre's residents. However, some residents underlined that among services that should be offered are legal/accounting consultancy. It is worth noticing than Dushanbe centre is considering offering such services.

Other entities assisted were provided with equipment for their VET courses. These institutions include the Khujand Technopark that received equipment for furniture production, the Technopark within the Technological College of Konibodom with its equipment for confectionary production, Istaravshan Crafts College with press of forges, the Lakhsh Educational-Informational IT Centre for Youth, and the Adults Education Centre of Shugnan district in GBAO (plumbing equipment). Furthermore, in Sughd, the Action has procured the equipment for a mini-laboratory under the Agriculture Department of the Sughd Region and the local Beekeepers' Association for the analysis of the characteristics of the soil and of honey.



Picture 5. Training workshop on production of furniture at Khujand Technological Park

The equipment provided has been defined on the basis of assessment of the needs at local level. These centres are servicing a number of trainees and have conducted courses using the new equipment. Upon courses' completion several of the trainees have been employed (in some cases few trainees have been employed by the centre where they attended courses) or have opened their own company (as in the case of three members of a family who attend a course on furniture production in Khujand). The Youth centre in Lakhsh is the only facility in the area that have modern IT equipment and provide free of charge services for adolescents and youth in the form of language and IT courses. The centre has also organized training for

youth (10 people) on hospitality and services for tourism and two of the graduates find job in the hotel in Lakhsh. The new equipment is also used to enhance the sustainability of the centre themselves (for example the Technopark in Khujand is producing desks for the University to which it belongs, while the Konibodom centre is selling confectionery to the population). In such sense, the support provided by YBI has been put into use and generated positive effects. Nevertheless, there are no detailed and comprehensive data/information confirming to what extent the centres have generated positive effects. From the limited data collected, the courses offered appears to be demanded, but their actual response to market's demand should be better checked. For example, in Khujand the Techno-park has received furniture equipment for laminating. The institutions have organised a first course with some 30 participants and several of them got a job. However, during the evaluators' visit, the management did not indicate that a future course was already scheduled, since only 3 applications were filed to date. In the case of Istaravshan College, it is too early to talk about effectiveness since they received the equipment recently and they have not yet used it.

MACRO LEVEL

Leveraging on its reputation and track of records, UNDP has been actively engaged national and regional institutional stakeholders in conducting advocacy and hands-on policy advise to support Government efforts to enhance the regulatory framework.

National stakeholders interviewed have confirmed their high appreciation for the support provided. Such support included the organization of various high-profile events that have been held with the participation of State Institutions. Furthermore, UNDP has been directly involved in supporting the development of key strategic documents and draft laws. From the latest Annual Report, it seems that assistance has also been given on some secondary aspects, e.g., drafting the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan on commercialization of scientific inventions. However, the information available is not adequate to provide an accurate assessment of the extent of the benefits generated by UNDP policy advise support only.

Back in 2020, UNDP has worked with the GosKomInvest to support 1) an analysis of the implementation of the State Entrepreneurship Support Programme 2012-2020, and 2) the development of the new Programme for Private Sector Support and Development of the Republic of Tajikistan 2022-2026.

In 2021, UNDP, together with IFC and the OSCE has been partnering with the Ministry of Industry and New Technologies, the Secretariat of the Consultative Council on Improvement of Investment Climate, and the Parliament on the topics of Industrial and Innovative Parks. The draft law "On Industrial and Innovative Parks" was developed and disseminated among interested parties, including governmental agencies and development partners. It is has now being finalised and it ready for adoption.

Efficiency

The wide range of activities envisaged in the YBI has been executed very efficiently. Planned activities have been implemented with good effects in terms of appropriate use of the resources, number of beneficiaries engaged in training/workshops and reached through awareness raising, quality/relevance of the knowledge transferred, timely implementation of the activities, etc.

Project activities have targeted 15-29 years old participants, however various initiatives events have seen the participation of few very young Tajiks (12-17 years old). Albeit some actors acknowledged the edge that UNDP has in engaging this group of beneficiaries, it is important to underline that this group is not really the priority one. Though some exceptions may be considered (for example for internships/VET courses), the content of YBI activities and the feedback from informants indicates that in general 20-27-year-old youth were those most suited to participate and benefit from YBI, in particular for the activities related to development of business ideas. Some of the reasons behind this consideration are linked to the fact that minors cannot register a company or get loans, and alike. It should be also considered that the problems of NEETs and returned migrants has become more urgent during pandemic.

The Action outreach has been very high and reportedly more than 41000 direct beneficiaries have been directly and indirectly involved with the project. Such high outreach has been achieved thanks to numerous initiatives conducted. Activities implemented included some which had mostly an awareness-raising function, promoting the implied message that entrepreneurship could be an opportunity for youth. In this category can be included

the various startup talks, business fairs, and similar event (e.g., the International Trade Fair “Sughd-2019” and other held in Dushanbe and Khujand). Another group of activities included those with a more specific content (internships, specific trainings, mini grants, etc.) and having a direct effect on the beneficiaries. By YBI's end, capacity-building educational/ consultative activities (trainings, courses, etc.) have been extended to 4602 young local people (35.7% of them women); 175 business ideas have been developed and presented to the potential donors and investors through Startup Choikhona and other platforms; 574 local SMEs and private entrepreneurs received consultative, financial and technical support as part of project implementation.

Part of the efficiency achieved can be ascribed to the fact that both the public and the private sector have been well engaged in the implementation of the YBI Action. Apart from the cooperation in policy aspects, UNDP worked with various national and regional institutions (such as GosKomInvest and its subordinate the SI DFET, MEDT, the Ministry of Industry, the Committee of Youth Affairs, Sports and Tourism, and regional authorities such as the Executive Body of State Power of Sughd region) that have been participating to various activities (Forums, Hackatons, selection panels of grants), contributing to their good results.

As for the private sector, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Sughd region, several large companies and banks like Bank Alif, Arvand Bank, Group 55, T-cell, and their managers have been participating in project initiatives. For example, in 2019, the School of Business and IT of Tajikistan initiative was launched jointly with T-cell, Sifat Innovation Tech and other business institutions. The YBI has cooperated with the business incubator “Accelerate Prosperity” launching the Women Cup 2020 for 33 would-be women-entrepreneurs from GBAO to identify potential business ideas that could be financed. Accelerate Prosperity and the SI DFET have held “Startup talks” in different parts of the country.

UNDP has ensured the demand-driven orientation of YBI in all phases of the action and for all activities. To ensure the correspondence between the activities and youth's needs addressed, UNDP and local partners, in particular district administrations, conducted various ex ante assessments (for example checking actual employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for youth and demand for new skills). To better respond to requests of beneficiaries and facilitate participation, the typology of activities offered was wide. As already mentioned, YBI activities spanned from standard training/capacity building activities and awareness raising events, to grants and more innovative initiatives but there has been also attention to conducting them as close to beneficiaries as possible (activities have been conducted in all geographical areas foreseen, including remote ones). For example, in 2020, in Rasht, as tourism development was considered one of the priority sectors, YBI has offered courses for would-be touristic guides and English-language courses. Generally, the number of applicants to YBI's initiatives was significantly higher than the actual number of beneficiaries that could participate. For example, for courses run by Alif Academy, there were 852 applicants, albeit only 289 have been selected (3:1 ratio). For the 3 rounds of the InnoResponse Challenge out of some 180 applicants, only 11 were selected (more than 17:1 ratio).

UNDP has demonstrated a good capacity to adapt the Action to changing circumstances, and in particular in response to COVID pandemic. The project team has been very proactive, introducing from one year to another those improvements derived from practical implementation of YBI activities or from objective constraints (see for example the changes in the InnoResponse Challenge or in the selection of partner POs, or the decision of limiting activities focused on tourism and reduce the engagement of Russian experts because of COVID-related limitations).

The combination of Individual Contractors and engagement of POs proved to be an efficient modality for the implementation of the Action. Clearly this approach allowed UNDP to implement the project with higher flexibility, enabling various activities to be conducted in parallel and the use of most qualified expert and/or organisation for certain tasks. On the one hand, the tendering of the contracts ensured that competitive offers were submitted and transaction costs have been incurred at a rather reasonable level. The evaluators looked more in detail the costs, performance and activities of several POs (in particular of the PO Unona, IRODA, Nur, Peshraft, Alif Academy) vs the number of beneficiaries involved and the positive assessment was confirmed. On the other hand, the decision to contract very specific tasks and/or for small amounts and the need to cover different regions of Tajikistan resulted in a high number of contracts to be stipulated, which increased administrative/management work and its burden on the project team. The expansion in the number of POs has brought some risks in terms of their potential efficiency, especially in conducting tasks focused on

business development. Based on indications collected, UNDP should consider limiting the use of POs which have not a good track of records in actual business development.

UNDP has demonstrated good efficiency in the use of financial resources and in attracting co-financing. As per Project Document, 81,1% (or 932,926 USD) of the total value of YBI budget has been allocated for activities directly oriented beneficiaries, leaving only 18.9% (or 217,074 USD) for staff, project management support and General Management Support (GMS). GMS has been capped at 6.4%, well below the 8% threshold. In the implementation of activities for beneficiaries (especially for mini-grants), the level of co-financing ensured has been quite high. By 2021, the co-financing by national and local partners, including communities, received amounted to approx. 125,000 USD, well above the quota of 100,000 USD initially envisaged. At project completion, UNDP has used 998346.62 USD out of the 1000000 budgeted (99.8%).

The existence of UNDP local offices has been one of elements that contributed to the good execution of the Action. The experience of the staff of these offices has helped in ensuring the proper selection of beneficiaries and the efficient use of the resources and their monitoring. However, the monitoring role local offices does not seem to include extensive checks on the effectiveness/first sign of impact achieved well after (e.g., 1 or 1.5 years after) the completion of some activities and assessment on long term effects achieved on employment of beneficiaries engaged.

YBI activities have been well coordinated with those of other relevant UNDP projects, especially with the projects which have been also funded by the UNDP-Russian Trust Fund for Development. Informal but effective coordination has been ensured with other relevant initiatives supported by Donors such as Accelerate Prosperity and with the EU Project IRDP and its component "TRIGGER" that is dedicated to support startups.

Impact

Given that the Action has just been completed, it is too early to present consolidated evidences of the positive impact of YBI and especially of achieved structural changes. Giving the range of activities implemented, the large number of beneficiaries assisted, and the limited availability of data on the effects achieved, it is not really possible to firmly estimate and comment on the expected impact. **Nevertheless, considering the preliminary effects mentioned, their number and characteristics, and the direct feedback of beneficiaries interviewed, the evaluators are assessing positively the likelihood that satisfactory impact would manifest.**

As detailed under other evaluation criteria, YBI has spread most of its resources among the numerous micro/small but concrete initiatives oriented to help direct beneficiaries and only a lesser part went to address more structural constraints or interventions at macro level. Consistently with this distribution of the resources and the first effects achieved, an important part of the likely impact is to be expected at local/community level and directly connected to the success achieved by the outputs delivered. As mentioned in previous sections, the success of the assistance to small/new businesses has resulted first and foremost in an increase of job opportunities in these communities, particularly for women. Verified information on the interventions financed as well as from direct observations of the interventions visited by evaluators during the field phase indicated that the number of people employed will be expanded. It is important to underline that beyond the creation of job places, the assistance received has practical and arguably lasting consequences in the empowerment of young Tajik, especially women, and also some social consequences by limiting the migration outside the country.

Through time, it can be also reasonably expected that additional impact will derive from new initiatives launched by youth not assisted by YBI that will replicate the initiatives financed, as many of them can be launched having a budget of few hundred of dollars, and/or by the unfolding of the effects of initiatives themselves, as in the case of the company Harif. For example, Harif and its Project "Strawberry Valley", the business model is formulated in such a way that, when fully operational, it will engage a large group of strawberry producers (estimated in 1000 farmers) capable of harvesting the needed quantities to make exporting frozen strawberries profitable. Similarly, once the touristic sector will start to function regularly,

initiatives like the project in GBAO implemented by the PO RuralAid that created a tourist village will lead to the development of a number of linked businesses.

Potentially, good impact can be derived also from the courses the Alif Academy and Tajrupt have implemented. Having a number of qualified specialists will be instrumental to sustain the process of digitalisation of the Tajik economy. Based on the feedback on the courses held and IT sector's trend, the market will certainly absorb those that have been trained and it will be capable of absorbing some more trainees.

Impact will derive from the medium/long term effects that can be generated by the numerous incubators, techno parks, vocational college, and other centres assisted by YBI. Potentially the impact of such players could and should be the main one due to the role these entities can exercise and the number of end beneficiaries they can reach. The number of such type of beneficiaries that have been assisted by YBI is very large and precise details on how they are faring is unclear. As previously mentioned, the evaluators have met only few of such beneficiaries, but it is fair to assume that the features of those met are representative of the whole group. Some of these centres have started to operate not long before project end and lack experience and expertise to contribute effectively to stimulate entrepreneurship, promote actual innovation and support businesses among the respective catchment areas. In most cases, these centres have required from YBI "hard" support – equipment, resource for refurbishment of premises, etc.. However, after visiting some of them, the evaluators tend to conclude that these centres need some additional "soft" support and guidance to function more proactively and foster innovation and entrepreneurship. If further supported and guided, all these centres have good chances of becoming valid tools for addressing youth unemployment by offering courses that enhance the qualifications of students/would-be entrepreneurs and closely correspond to the actual demands of the market.

A final aspect to underline is that YBI has conducted many activities in GBAO and in other seriously underdeveloped rural and mountainous areas. Considering the context in which the supported initiatives are implemented, a mere comparison between results in these areas and those in more developed ones cannot be done. For these reasons, the results achieved in the most difficult areas, though apparently less significant will have an important effect though primarily in qualitative terms, more than in quantitative ones.

Sustainability

Overall, the sustainability of YBI's outputs is assessed as moderately satisfactory, mainly thanks to the sustainability of the effects achieved at the micro-level (i.e., with direct beneficiaries as most of YBI's activities have been oriented for them), and to a lesser extent because of those achieved at meso level (i.e., with business infrastructure). However, the possibility of replicating further all/part of the YBI activities, without using UNDP/donor funds is not very likely.

As seen in previous sections, many beneficiaries have started their businesses or have been employed (with relatively secure jobs) by supported businesses. The info reported on the initiatives supported with microgrants are showing a positive likelihood that the economic effects achieved will be maintained over the medium term (i.e., 1-2 years). The demand for the products and services of these businesses is reported to be growing and consequently, most of them are indicating not only that the business will operate, but also that the number of their employees is expected to increase. For example, in GBAO, of the 11 initiatives assisted by the PO Nur, 6 reportedly foresaw an increase in the number of personnel employed and are oriented toward activities with good business perspectives. Three other initiatives, though not envisaging the future creation of new job places, have a good likelihood that their business will develop further. In Sughd, the 6 initiatives that have been provided with equipment and assisted by PO Unona are well functioning. Based on the small sample of businesses that the evaluators contacted/visited and for which got additional information, the likelihood that these businesses will continue to function over the next couple of years is good. In many cases, the business operates in a context where there are no similar competitors; in other cases, the personality and drive of the entrepreneurs and the innovation/improvement they introduced make their businesses more resilient.

The trainings offered by YBI which have higher sustainability prospects are the IT trainings offered by Alif Academy and to a lesser extent those of Tajrupt. The IT sector in Tajikistan and worldwide is growing fast, and

it is demanding more and more highly specialised experts. As Alif/Tajrupt are offering state-of-art courses, there should be no difficulties for graduated trainees to keep the trainings' main benefits (i.e., stable employment/good degree of employability). Moreover, the growth of the Tajik market is also implying a positive likelihood for trainees to be fruitfully employed in Tajikistan. As for the trainings' providers themselves, there should be no difficulties to have their organisations operate sustainably. Their level of capacity is going to be maintained and possibly expanded since they can count on a business model which is dynamic and following a positive trend. Both organisations are expected to run new courses/initiatives because of the growing demand from their client base, and finance them combining trainees' fees with their own resources and other external funds/partnership (e.g., the contacts of the Alif Academy with Alif Bank and other bank/companies, and those of Tajrupt with Microsoft as part of the global "AI for Health" program).

Given that the vast majority of young Tajik unemployed lack any professional qualification, it is likely that other YBI's trainees (i.e., those who participated to other trainings offered under YBI by various POs and entities at meso level) will maintain the positive benefits received, albeit to a lesser degree than the those trained in IT. Afterall, they are more likely to get and keep a job place compared to those untrained. As for the POs that implemented the training, they are dependent of external financing.

As for the entities operating at meso level, the prospects of their sustainability are only moderately satisfactory. Their management has demonstrated a good level of ownership and understanding of the challenges they have to face. It is expected that these entities are likely to continue functioning in the next couple of years, as most of them are receiving funding from the State budget, but their long-term capacity to be self-sustainable or grow should be enhanced.

These conclusions could be applied also to the SI FDET. From a financial perspective, currently the business incubators operate using the resources allocated from GosKomInvest, but the staff of the incubators indicated that such resources could be drastically reduced/cut (starting from 2023). Even though this budget cut is not going to happen, the evaluators believe the current approach to attract/service clients should be revised so to have incubators that operate more effectively and sustainably. SI FDET should define more precisely who their client base is, expand the range of services offered, apply different pricing for the services according to the type of clients, duration, etc..

The other type of entities assisted (i.e., VET institutions) are also in need of additional capacity assistance so to operate more proactively, establish stronger links with the market (where ultimately are employed their beneficiaries). The Khujand Technopark and the Istaravshan College of National crafts are clearly highly dependent on external financial sources to function. Since the former is connected to Khujand University, and the latter is the only college focus on national crafts, both entities can count on a stable, though limited, flow of financing to cover main costs from the University and the State budget respectively. Both are in need of additional capacity assistance so to operate more proactively and establish stronger links with the market (where ultimately are employed their beneficiaries). Based on the equipment received and competitive factors possessed, they can provide trainees with skills in demand, but they need hands-on guidance so to enhance their institutional sustainability (e.g., standing in their respective roles), as precondition for improved financial sustainability.

The youth centre in Lakhsh district appears to be in a good position in terms of institutional sustainability and has a great potential to turn to a sustainable institution providing educational services for various groups of adolescents and youth in Lakhsh district. It has very strong cooperation with local authorities and other educational institutions. The Centre cooperates with the Centre for Additional Education and its instructors to conduct courses at Youth Centre. It has been found that the local authority has also requested other educational institutions to cooperate with the Youth Centre and send students and their staff to attend IT and other courses that can be organized in the centre.

The sustainability of State Institutions stakeholders is still weak. Albeit the partner institutions have participated to project implementation throughout its course, there are no indications that stakeholders have the necessary financial and human resources to continue autonomously the work implemented by YBI at macro level, not to mention that at the meso and micro levels.

Cross-cutting Issues

The YBI Action has actively and successfully mainstreamed cross-cutting issues, especially on gender and inclusion. Overall, the Action has pushed the level of female participation in all the activities conducted and generally promoted the concept of “women entrepreneurship”, even though, from a strictly quantitative perspective, equal participation of men and women in the activities could not be ensured.

Good results can be confirmed on the engagement of women in capacity building, educational and consultative activities. Some 36% of the participants involved in this type of activities were young women (1644 women out of 4602 participants). Young women have successfully proved themselves in the Business Constructor, Chohona Hacks, etc. Many women have also graduated from courses on programming/artificial intelligence, including 16 young girls that in Rasht attended the 2-month dedicated course “Open JavaScript Girls” and 6 others that graduated from Alif Courses in Dushanbe. Albeit the overall number of women attending and completing the IT courses is still very low, the results obtained are contributing to defeating existing stereotypes.

Significant effects can be seen with the small grants financing micro enterprises, as many women applied. In the Sughd region, women received resources to start a small café, a pastry workshop, a small hairdresser, and a sewing atelier to name a few examples. In GBAO a small printing shop is run by 3 women. Moreover, many of the small grants’ beneficiaries are employing and will further employ women. For example, a small Khujand workshop processing dry fruits/nuts is not only using mostly women in its facilities but it is using a group of women (from the villages that supply the nuts) to ensure the proper sorting of the raw material and improve production outputs. In a small village near Istaravshan, an entrepreneur opened a sewing workshop and has engaged several women of his family in the production, but he intends to hire other women from the village to cope with the increasing demand. A greenhouse and a small guesthouse, which employ 4 women, have been supported in GBAO.

The Action and its activities have paid good attention to engaging people with disabilities. The participation of the PO IRODA deserves a special mention. With YBI support, the PO IRODA has worked on advocating the cause of youth with mental disabilities, and showed that they can be fruitfully employed, but it has also worked with parents of youth with disabilities. Apart from the experience in the IRODA’s café and catering services where 8 boys have been employed, two of the boys assisted by IRODA have been employed by external companies for cleaning services. Furthermore, several people with disabilities have been employed in the small initiative supported. Notably, in GBAO, a small repair shop for mobile phones is run by one person with disabilities. No work on policy advice and adaptation of the current legislation regarding employment of people with mental disabilities has been initiated.

More efforts should be put in guaranteeing a higher level of inclusiveness of the courses on digitalisation/AI. Apart from increasing the number of women in the courses, it is important to note that the participation of NEETs was not very high. For example, only 3 out of 76 participants to the JS2 Course at the Alif Academy were neither employed nor in education. It can be added that future initiatives on digitalisation should take into account and address some objective constraints that may limit the participation of disadvantaged groups in these courses. For example, the fact most of the Tajik adolescents (and likely young for that matter) do not have an adequate computer¹⁰, or that fast and reliable internet connection is quite expensive and mostly available in large centres and not in small villages.

As for mainstreaming of climate change and environmental aspects, these were issues that were addressed only indirectly. The project has partially contributed to environmental sustainability by promoting “green” innovations and environmentally-friendly practices. For example, the company Harif is promoting horticultural techniques that foresee limited irrigation and use of fertilizers. In GBAO, the company Khair is producing foaming blocks – a construction material that has higher thermal insulation characteristics, reducing the need for coal/fossil fuels for heating.

¹⁰ As evidenced by the UNICEF 2018 National Study on Adolescents and Youth, 53.6% of the adolescents do not use computer, mostly because they do not have one (68% of them)

8. Conclusions

Conclusion 1. The relevance of YBI is high, as its aims and activities are fully consistent with the government of Tajikistan's priorities and at the same time represent a concrete response to youth's need for new opportunities of sustainable, innovative, and inclusive employment, entrepreneurship, and enhanced professional qualifications for higher employability. UNDP support has been well structured so to address poverty and inequality leveraging on digitalisation, innovation, and sourcing development financing.

Conclusion 2. YBI has been implemented with high effectiveness, as confirmed by the results achieved and especially by the number of new jobs and new businesses created. The values of actual results achieved largely surpassing targets set at YBI's onset for almost all indicators.

Overall, the project has well contributed to the empowerment of youth as proactive development agents. In the implementation of the YBI Action, UNDP, through the mediation of several POs, has assisted a number of beneficiaries, enabling more than 250 of them to be employed and many other to start new businesses. With its InnoResponse Challenge, UNPD has formulated and directly delivered a financing support scheme for new business initiatives capable of stimulating the generation of several perspective business initiatives. UNDP has also addressed the creation of new jobs in a more structured way operating at the meso level by supporting business support organisations. Through capacity-building assistance and equipment YBI has helped establishing the 5 centres under SI FDET, several VET institutions, youth centres and technoparks. Thanks to the assistance received these partners have been helping many young Tajiks launching their business or getting new job qualifications.

Conclusion 3. The project's performed at a very good level of efficiency. It has well balanced its resources between supporting new and ambitious activities interventions, and more traditional ones. Numerous initiatives and new approaches have been tested – e.g., different types of trainings, different formats for supporting and stimulating entrepreneurship, awareness-raising/promotional events – which enabled YBI to reach thousands of beneficiaries across Tajikistan. The Action proved to be highly adaptable to the challenging circumstances posed by the COVID pandemic. However, resources available have been spread among a large number of interventions, including some (e.g., fairs, business connect) that arguably have a low likelihood of leading to tangible effects, attributable to the project itself.

Conclusion 4. At this stage the prospects of project impact and sustainability of the results achieved are moderately satisfactory.

The preliminary signs of impact, mostly linked to effects generated by the small enterprises created with YBI mediation, are positive, leading to conclude that satisfactory impact would manifest after a few months from now when the business will be fully operational. In several supported businesses the first operational results achieved indicate that the employment of new staff will be needed or expansion of the premises are considered. Most appropriate and best-tailored trainings carried out are also likely to generate good impact as young Tajik graduated from these courses will have a competitive edge on their peers not qualified. Time, efforts, and planning will be needed for the business supporting entities (business incubators, VET centres, technoparks) to unfold their potential.

Sustainability prospects show a similar situation. Most of the positive effects achieved at the micro-level (i.e., with direct beneficiaries) are likely to last well beyond YBI's completion. The flow of benefits from such effects is expected to continue without further support. Many of the effects achieved at meso level (i.e., with business infrastructure) are likely to last beyond YBI's completion, but limited financial resources are hampering their overall sustainability prospects. Additional technical assistance and focused financial support are required to enhance if not secure the sustainability of most of the business support organisations assisted.

Conclusion 5. YBI has well fostered the participation of women and the inclusion of people with disabilities in the activities implemented.

For all indicators, the ratio of women benefiting from YBI's effects is above the target value of 30%. Several interesting business opportunities have been launched by women and women have been employed in some 47% of the new jobs. Moreover, several initiatives financed foresee the employment of female workers. Significant results have been achieved in terms of promoting inclusion thanks to the engagement of the PO IRODA, which is working with young people with mental disabilities.

9. Recommendations

YBI laid the groundwork not only for the follow-on UNDP project with the Russian fund, but potentially also for UNDP projects with other donors and in particular with the EU, which, based on information collected by evaluators, is expected to launch several initiatives in 2023 covering many of the areas on which YBI intervened and specifically digitalisation, innovation, green economy. The evaluators are putting forward the following recommendations to be considered in the definition of the list of activities for the follow-up project as well as for future initiatives.

Recommendation 1. The evaluators advise UNDP to apply in future Actions (similar to YBI) the combination of activities/budget allocated between «traditional activities» (i.e., support in agribusiness, service, small production) and «new activities» (IT trainings, digitalisation), and to keep some of the tools used in YBI. Innovating without “revolutionising” should be the guiding slogan.

The results achieved in YBI with some of the training on IT topics and the trend of the Tajik IT sector underline the importance of offering “new activities”. However, the level of economic and infrastructure development in most parts of Tajikistan and potential risks that the capacity developed does not stay in the country advise some caution. The experience of some enterprises assisted under YBI (Harif, Khair, Rus-Chin), shows that a possible solution is introducing moderate innovations and that significant results can be achieved in the agribusiness sector, which is very important in Tajikistan.

Based on data collected during the evaluation, the tools that should be kept are:

- a) The approach used in InnoResponse Challenge Round 3/4 should be maintained since it may help not only new businesses but also already functioning businesses that want to expand. (UNDP may consider the possibility of increasing the co-financing quota and prolonging the implementation period to 9 months and the sustainability period to 2 years).
- b) The approaches used by Unona and Nur - training+internship+mini-grants (for equipment) and short training+ mini grant. Combining training/internships and grants is an effective scheme with the dual function of strengthening the capacity of participants to set up the business and conduct it, and providing resources to launch the businesses.
- c) IT training – preferably choosing specialisations that are tailored to meet wider needs of the IT sector more than niche ones (i.e., developing specialists in machine learning is not such a priority compared to Javascript developers).

Depending on the availability of resources, the budget for mentioned tools can be expanded, since there are sufficient opportunities on the market to absorb more resources.

Recommendation 2. UNDP is advised to continue helping the business support organisation assisted during YBI, and in particular SI FDET, to achieve full sustainability. UNDP should contribute to enhancing the capacity of such organisations to attract and “service” their clientele as effectively as possible - by developing proactive marketing (enrolment)/sales measures, establishing a range of services/products/trainings that are fully respondent to real needs and with flexible pricing policies to accommodate the specificities of the potential clients (i.e., taking into account the type and maturity of the businesses). UNDP could support Technoparks and other VET institutions helping them to develop and deliver courses aligned to real market needs and standards. For example, instead than explaining only how to produce old design furniture products (suitable for replacing school furniture for the University) imitating cheap imported products, the course should be focused on how to design/produce using software and computer furniture/wood details suiting buyers of furniture in Tajik traditional style for a premium price. Or for example how to transition the traditional Tajik wood carving or metal frames from 100% hand-made to something more affordable and

with larger productions maybe using a computer or some modern equipment. The support should include institutional and capacity assistance so that incubators can formulate and implement feasible development plans allowing them to reach financial sustainability.

Recommendation 3. UNDP should continue to provide policy advise assistance, consolidating its role as reputed partner of Tajik State Institutions. Policy advise work could lead to good effects, but as UNDP leverage may be insufficient to achieve desired results on specific issues, (especially if UNDP needs to balance possible antagonistic positions among different stakeholders), the efforts of UNDP may not lead to actual changes. Therefore, to ensure the effectiveness of the resources dedicated to policy advice support UNDP is advised to clearly define the framework/specific objective of its support. It should be oriented toward challenging themes that have been already addressed – IT/techno parks, big data, venture financing – but also on new themes that may prove simpler to tackle and/or topics that have not been addressed yet (e.g., measures to promote the employment of people with mental disabilities) but for which there will be no issues of attribution of the results achieved.

Recommendation 4. UNDP is advised to consider increasing the budget allocated for financing grants. Access to finance is one of the main constraints faced by MSMEs in Tajikistan as interest rates are very high. To improve the likelihood of achieving high effectiveness in the initiatives supported, UNDP is advised to finance exclusively initiatives that are proposed by beneficiaries with the necessary credentials (experience, drive, etc.) have credible business plans, a good/high potential in terms of employment creation, replicability, innovation. Having the possibility to provide small and relatively large grants (USD 15000) is a strong edge of UNDP.

Recommendation 5. Future action similar to YBI should be implemented partnering with a limited number of POs/Business support organisations, avoiding the spreading of resources. Spreading the resources too thin by contracting too many POs causes excessive workload (and affects efficiency) and it may result in not having POs that deliver services of consistent quality and overlapping between them. The selection of POs should favour those POs capable of supporting beneficiaries by providing market-tested knowledge/practices, and strictly applying business-like criteria in the selection of beneficiaries.

Recommendation 6. The selection of beneficiaries of project initiatives should be done based on criteria likely to enhance the potential for effectiveness. Participants in the age bracket 20-27 years or selected from migrants deported from Russia can be prioritised not only because they are likely to be more committed to completing a training and/or running a business but also because it will be easier for them to be employed or open a business (compared to the constraints in hiring a minor, registering a company, etc.). Engaging beneficiaries aged 15-16 is not advised.

Recommendation 7. The provision of activities focused on digitalisation should be accompanied by measures that enhance their inclusiveness. In YBI, for obvious reasons, most of such activities have been conducted in urban developed centres, and it seems that mostly a male audience of trainees having own computer has been engaged. Future activities should consider measures that promote inclusion (for example reimbursing fees plus a small extra to female trainees/trainees with disability, obtaining discounted internet connections from mobile companies for users from rural areas, providing computers at discounted leasing terms).

Recommendation 8. UNDP is advised to further enhance the monitoring role conducted by its Local Offices to track Medium/Long term effects achieved by project's initiatives. Many of the data available for this evaluation refer to results that occurred at the completion of an activity or soon after. More effects would be reported if the results were tracked 1 year or more after completion of an activity.

Recommendation 9. UNDP is advised to improve the potential effectiveness of communication and training material as instruments for enhancing replicability of the initiatives supported. As most of direct beneficiaries of YBI and of similar future actions are would-be micro/small entrepreneurs, the content of communication/training materials should be tailored to respond to the needs/challenges they face. Such materials should be present experiences to which future beneficiaries can more easily relate and that may trigger the desire to start own businesses/follow the experiences depicted in the materials.

The materials should not be oriented exclusively, as in YBI, to have successful entrepreneurs/CEO sharing their experiences, since in many cases would-be micro/small entrepreneurs although inspired cannot fully relate to the experiences presented. On the contrary, the experience of an owner of a sewing workshop or of a fast-food two-three years in operations is much more relatable. There is a positive likelihood that once informed of how some YBI beneficiaries started (and of the limited starting capital needed), other people may feel empowered to start a similar path using their own money.

10. Lessons learnt

The evaluators acknowledge the lessons learnt from YBI that have been presented in the YBI's Annual Report 2021 and fully subscribe them.

The experience of YBI has demonstrated that partnering with the private sector is an indispensable element for securing the quality, effectiveness and sustainability of the initiatives implemented in the sphere of entrepreneurship so to ultimately generate new job places. This partnering could take various forms –

- 1) Use of most business oriented/experienced POs or Profit Organisation in the implementation of specific project activities, and especially in the selection of beneficiaries for grants. In this case, Partner POs/Profit Organisations should be able to assess the potential “return on the investment” of the initiatives proposed by would be-beneficiaries. POs experienced exclusively in dealing with charity/community work most probably will not be able to select effectively beneficiaries for business endeavours.
- 2) Engagement of the private sector in helping defining training content and/or delivering trainings. The best training is the training that gives what entrepreneurs/specialists know is needed; the best trainer is an entrepreneur/specialist that has direct experienced of how to address the challenges that occur while running a business/developing a product.
- 3) Involvement of the private sector for apprenticeships and to facilitate employment of project beneficiaries. For an entrepreneur, the recruitment of a new employees is an investment with connected risks of losing time (for training the new employee), money (hiring the wrong employee) or both. To enhance the likelihood that job places are created some form of incentives for the entrepreneur should be conceived.

YBI's experience confirmed that the combination Training- Financing is a most effective approach for stimulate entrepreneurship. When thinking of launching a new business, access to finance is one of the main constraints faced by would-be entrepreneurs in the first place. This is especially true in in Tajikistan where interest rates on loans are very high and the fact that most beneficiaries do not have assets that can be used as collateral further complicate the borrowing process. The fear of not being able to pay back a loan is an obstacle for many potential entrepreneurs, and even more so for youth. As Training fostering entrepreneurship is acknowledged as one of the solutions to generate new business ideas and enterprises, it is necessary to complete the equation providing financing too. The provision of mini grants in the form of small pieces of equipment or grant, even if worth few hundred of dollars, is a highly effective and tested instrument to support entrepreneurship and business development, start working and ultimately generate jobs. At the same time, the experience of InnoResponse Challenge proves that having financing for larger initiatives enables the launch of projects that may have significantly larger dimension than a small business, with larger potential for scaling-up and impact.

As the experience of the small grant with Himoya and its project “Competent legal support for everyone“ demonstrates, an extra element that should be included in the equation is access to business advice/support in accompanying business creation. The availability of qualified business support organisations whose mandate is to support micro and small business is crucial to increase their survival rate. Therefore, bringing the SI FDET up to play such role, as facilitator for providing business consultations on legal/tax issues as well as on other topics, practical services (e.g., juridical addresses), is extremely important.

Annexes

Annex 1 - TORs of the Evaluation



ANNEX 3

TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR) UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Post title:	International Consultant for conduction of Final evaluation of the UNDP Project “Youth for Business and Innovation”.
Project name:	UNDP “Youth for Business and Innovation” project
Type of Contract:	Individual Consultant (IC)
Duty station:	Homebased with one mission (7 days) to Tajikistan (Dushanbe, Khujand, Konibodom, Istaravshan, Lakhsh, Tojikobod and Rasht districts)
Duration:	26 working days within December – February 2021

Background

The project “Youth for business and innovation” is addressing the economic vulnerability and social exclusion of young people of age 15-29 in Tajikistan, with a special focus on youth living in the remote areas of GBAO, Rasht and Sughd. The project promotes youth’s engagement in sustainable entrepreneurship, innovative and inclusive local development through development of young people’s skills for innovations and business. The project also promotes youth-led local initiatives and overall empowerment of youth as proactive development agents in the context of Agenda 2030. All interventions proposed within the project are aligned with the national development priorities which are expected to push forward the SDG localization in close partnership with the Government of Tajikistan (both national and sub-national levels), private sector, as well as civil society organizations (CSO’s) and development partners.

The project reinforces and complements the results of the past and on-going projects of the UNDP Communities Programme in youth empowerment and inclusive economic development. The project outcome, outputs and activities aimed at bringing innovations will be leveraged by the parallel funding coming from other youth- and innovation-focused projects of UNDP. The Project envisages development of modern employable business skills as well as skills for innovation for young men and women in order to increase the number of decent jobs for youth in agribusiness, sustainable tourism and green technologies for rural development. The project objectives will be achieved through interconnected complex of activities including but not limited to vocational trainings to meet the rising local demand for new skills, support to start-ups, trainings for innovations in business, knowledge and experience exchange at the national and international level, strengthening capacities of decision makers for youth-friendly policies, institutions, etc. The project is implemented in Dushanbe, GBAO, Khujand, Konibodom, Istaravshan, Lakhsh, Tojikobod and Rasht districts of Tajikistan.

The main Components/Outputs of the project are:

1. Enhanced skills and knowledge of youth on innovative entrepreneurship and business
2. Improved access of youth to new vocational skills and local productive capacities that are sustainable, employment- and livelihood intensive

UNDP within its “Youth for Business and Innovation” project plans to engage national consultant on youth empowerment in rural areas of Tajikistan, particularly conducting needs assessment, organization of master classes, trainings, introducing innovations in rural development. National consultant should ensure cooperation with partners, particularly local governments, universities, farmers, CSOs and private sector representatives.

Objectives of the evaluation:

The purpose of this final evaluation is to assess the results of the project in the two output areas. The final evaluation should assess the implementation approaches, progress made, and challenges encountered, identify and document the lessons learnt and good practices, and make specific recommendations for future course of actions.

The specific objectives are:

- To assess the usefulness of the socio-technical support provided by the project, the effectiveness of youth-focused initiatives and assistance provided to enable the young entrepreneurs and job seekers to strengthen their economic livelihoods opportunities through additional knowledge, skills and jobs created.
- To assess the capacity of the project partners on enhancement of young people’s skills and knowledge on doing business and promoting innovations.
- To assess the effectiveness of the livelihood enhancement support provided to the poorest and most vulnerable communities in remote and rural areas, to enhance their livelihoods and employment opportunities.
- To assess the effectiveness of the livelihood support provided to vulnerable people to respond to the impact of COVID-19 (in the framework of project-supported initiatives) .
- To assess engagement of the national government stakeholders and local authorities in the project, and their understanding, including financial and other commitment for sustainability of activities
- To assess effectiveness of cooperation with and engagement of private sector and civil society organizations in the project results and their role in sustainability of the project results
- To assess the effectiveness of the action taken for creating enabling policy environment for inclusive youth economic empowerment and social inclusion.
- To assess effectiveness of gender-sensitive approach applied by the project to reach out to most vulnerable groups of women and girls.
- Assess effectiveness of engagement of Russian experts, intuitions and partner organizations in implementation of the project.

Scope of Work:

The final evaluation should look into the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the support provided by the project. In addition, the evaluation should indicate if the produced results are in the right direction towards facilitating the efforts of the Government of Tajikistan in terms of development of youth-friendly policies and initiatives in the project areas. Particularly, the evaluation should cover at least the following areas.

- Relevance of the project: review the progress against its purpose, objectives, outputs and indicators, as per the project documents and its components, such as the Theory of Change, Results and Resources Framework, M&E framework, and ascertain whether assumptions and risks remain valid
- Effectiveness and efficiency of implementation approaches: review project’s technical as well as operational approaches and deliverables, quality of results and their impact, alignment with national

- Review the project’s approaches, in general and with regards to mainstreaming of gender equality and social inclusion, with particular focus on women and marginalized groups;
- Review and assess the risks and opportunities (in terms of resource mobilization, synergy and areas of interventions) related to future interventions;
- Review external factors beyond the control of the project that have affected it negatively or positively;
- Review planning, management and quality assurance mechanisms for the delivery of the project interventions;
- Review coordination and communication processes and mechanisms with the stakeholders.

Evaluation Criteria and guiding questions

The evaluation will follow the four OECD-DAC evaluation criteria - Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Sustainability. Human Rights and Gender Equality will be added as cross-cutting criteria. The guiding questions outlined below should be further refined by the consultant and agreed with UNDP.

Criteria	Evaluation Questions
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent was the project in line with national development priorities, country programme outputs and outcomes, UNDP Strategic Plan and the SDGs? • How relevant were the overall design and approaches of the project? • To what extent the project was able to address the needs of the target groups in the changed context? • To what extent are the objectives of the project design (inputs, activities, outputs and their indicators) and its theory of change logical and coherent? Does the project contribute to the outcome and output of the CPD? • Did the results contribute in facilitating the reconstruction efforts of the NRA in the project areas? • To what extent has the project been able to adapt to the needs of the different target groups (including tackling the gender equality and social inclusion aspects) in terms of creating enable environment for inclusive, affordable and people-centred reconstruction policies and actions?
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have been the key results and changes attained for men, women and vulnerable groups? • In which areas has the project had greatest achievements? Why and what have been the supporting factors? How can the project build on or expand these achievements? • To what extent the project activities were delivered effectively in terms of quality, quantity and timing? • What factors have contributed to achieving or not achieving the intended outputs? • What were the lessons and how were feedback/learning incorporated in the subsequent process of planning and implementation? • How effective has the project been in enhancing the capacity of the communities and local governments to create enabling environment for inclusive youth economic empowerment and promotion of innovative development?
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How efficiently were the resources including human, material and financial resources used to achieve the above results in a timely manner? • To what extent was the existing project management structure appropriate and efficient in generating the expected results? • To what extent has the project implementation strategy and its execution been efficient and cost-effective?

Criteria	Evaluation Questions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent were the resources used to address inequalities in general, and gender issues in particular?
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent did the project interventions contribute towards sustaining the results achieved by the project? What are the plans or approaches of the local authorities and beneficiary communities to ensure that the initiatives will be continued after the project ends? What could be potential new areas of work and innovative measures for sustaining the results? To what extent have lessons learned been documented by the project on a continual basis to inform the project for needful change? What could be done to strengthen exit strategies and sustainability of the project?
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent the project initiatives indicate that intended impact will be achieved in the future?
Human rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent have rural young people, NEET, physically challenged, women and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups benefitted from the work of the project and with what impact?
Gender equality and social inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent the project approach was effective in promoting gender equality and social inclusion - particularly focusing on the marginalized and the poor through knowledge transfer, livelihood action, planning and training? To what extent has the project promoted positive changes of women and marginalised group? Were there any unintended effects?

Methodology:

The evaluation methods provided here are indicative only. The consultant should review the methodology and propose the final methods and data collection tools as part of the inception report. The methods and tools should adequately address the issues of gender equality and social inclusion.

The evaluation should include a mix of qualitative and quantitative processes and methodologies. The evaluator must provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful. The evaluator is expected to follow a participatory and consultative approach ensuring close engagement with government counterparts, project team, UNDP Country Office and other key stakeholders, including project participants. Therefore, the evaluator will work closely with the UNDP Country Office team to undertake the evaluation adopting at least the following methods:

- Document review: review of project document/proposals, project's interim progress report, project modification document, Steering Committee minutes, progress reports, other relevant documents.
- Consultations with UNDP programme and project staff, officials of SCISPM and other government partners, local authorities of the project areas at the district and jamoat levels.
- Consultations with other project partners, including private sector and CSOs, from Tajikistan and Russia as applicable.
- Field observations, interactions (structured, semi-structured) and consultations with the beneficiaries (youth trained, project grantees, microfinance recipients, and livelihood supported communities), plus beneficiary local authorities
- Briefing and debriefing sessions with UNDP and Project team as well as with other partners will be organized. The evaluator should ensure triangulation of the various data sources to maximize the validity and reliability of data.

The process/steps mentioned above should ensure that the most appropriate and relevant data are gathered for the above-mentioned objectives. Based on the analysis and findings, the recommendations should be provided

for future direction of the initiatives.

The consultant will have to submit the final full report in English. The structure and content of the report should meet the requirements of the UNDP Evaluation Guideline.

The final methodological approach including interview schedule, field visits, evaluation matrix and data to be used in the evaluation should be clearly outlined in the inception report and fully discussed and agreed with UNDP. The evaluator should select the respondents using an appropriate sampling technique. While selecting the respondents, the evaluator should ensure gender balance.

Expected Deliverables:

The evaluator should submit the following deliverables:

- Inception report detailing the reviewer’s understanding of what is being evaluated, why it is being evaluated, and how (methodology) it will be evaluated. The inception report should also include a proposed schedule of tasks, evaluation tools, activities and deliverables.
- Evaluation matrix that includes key criteria, indicators and questions to capture and assess them.
- Evaluation debriefing- immediately after completion of data collection, the evaluator should provide preliminary debriefing and findings to the UNDP/Project team.
- Draft Evaluation report for review and comments.
- Evaluation Audit Trail – The comments on the draft report and changes by the evaluator in response to them should be retained by the consultant team to show how they have addressed comments.
- Final report within stipulated timeline with sufficient detail and quality by incorporating feedback from the concerned parties.
- An exit presentation on findings and recommendations.

This is the expected timeframe for the above deliverables:

ACTIVITIES	RESPONSIBILITY	TIME-FRAME (tentative)
The Project evaluation is expected to be implemented in the period from December 2021-February 2022		
a. Desk review of the contextual and project-related documentation	International Consultant	By 10 December 2021
b. Inception report detailing the reviewer’s understanding of what is being evaluated, why it is being evaluated, and how (methodology) it will be evaluated. The inception report should also include a proposed schedule of tasks, evaluation tools, activities and deliverables.		
c. 7-day in-country mission and presentation of findings at the end of the mission	International Consultant	by 25 December 2022
d. First draft of the Project Evaluation report submitted within 2 weeks after the mission.	International Consultant	By 15 January 2022
e. Final Project Evaluation report with the strategic and feasible recommendations in a form and substance satisfactory to UNDP, submitted within 2 weeks after the receipt of final comments from UNDP	International Consultant	By 30 January 2022
f. An exit presentation on findings and recommendations	International Consultant	By 05 February 2022

ACTIVITIES	RESPONSIBILITY	TIME-FRAME (tentative)

The exact delivery and sequence of the products will be determined in discussion with the UNDP Team Leader on Sustainable Economic Development Cluster.

Team composition and required competencies

The evaluation will be carried out by an international evaluation consultant with possible involvement of additional 1 national consultant. The person involved in any way in the design, management or implementation or advising any aspect of the intervention that is the subject of the evaluation will not be qualified. The lead evaluator and national consultants (as needed) will be selected by UNDP CO.

Duty Station: Home based with trips to project implementation sites. It will be home base in case the restrictions for travels due to COVID-19 continues in Tajikistan.

Working days: 26

Major roles and responsibilities:

The international consultant will be responsible for conducting the final evaluation of the above-mentioned project. He/She will be solely responsible to complete all the steps and produce the deliverables as mentioned above. Specifically, the international consultant will have the following roles and responsibilities:

- Gathering and review of relevant documents;
- Finalizing and designing the methodologies and data collection instruments;
- Prepare inception report, evaluation matrix including the evaluation questions, data collection instruments, etc.;
- Coordinating and guiding the work of national consultant(s) in support of evaluation activities.
- Conduct field visits in selected communities and conduct interviews with the selected target groups, partners and stakeholders
- Facilitate stakeholders’ discussion and focus groups to collect, collate and synthesize information
- Analyse the data and prepare a draft evaluation report in the prescribed format
- Incorporate the feedback and finalize the evaluation report

Evaluation Ethics

“This evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNEG ‘Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation’. The consultants must safeguard the rights and confidentiality of information providers, interviewees and stakeholders through measures to ensure compliance with legal and other relevant codes governing collection of data and reporting on data. The consultant must also ensure security of collected information before and after the evaluation and protocols to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of sources of information where that is expected. The information knowledge and data gathered in the evaluation process must also be solely used for the evaluation and not for other uses without the express authorization of UNDP and partners.”

Consultants will be held to the highest ethical standards and are required to sign a Code of Conduct upon acceptance of the assignment.

Responsibility for Expenses and their Reimbursement:

The International consultant will be responsible for all personal local travel, living and accommodation, and these expenses are included in the total amount offered by the contract.

Duration, Monitoring and Reporting:

The assignment is scheduled to begin no later than October 2021. The successful candidate will report to the UNDP Team Leader on Sustainable Economic Development Cluster. Reporting will be based on deliverables specified in the above.

Payment

Payments are based upon output, i.e. upon delivery of the services specified in the TOR that contribute to the overall project deliverables as state above under “Expected Deliverables”.

Academic Qualifications:

At least Master’s degrees in Economics, Development Studies, Sociology, Economics, Management or any other relevant subjects.

Professional experience.

- At least 7 years of demonstrated work experience in the field of project implementation, monitoring and/or project design in development sectors;
- Demonstrated experience of conducting similar evaluations of development projects related to youth development, livelihood promotion, sustainable economic development or related areas;
- Adequate knowledge on gender equality, youth policies and human rights issues;
- Strong analytical and report writing skills;
- Excellent command in different data collection methods including FGDs, KIIs and Social Surveys

Knowledge of languages:

- Fluency in English, knowledge of Russian is an asset.

Corporate Competencies

- Demonstrates integrity by modeling the UN’s values and ethical standards;
- Promotes the vision, mission, and strategic goals of UNDP;
- Displays cultural, gender, religion, race, nationality and age sensitivity and adaptability;
- Treats all people fairly without favoritism;
- Fulfills all obligations to gender sensitivity and zero tolerance for sexual harassment.

Functional Competencies

- Maintains and establishes network of contacts with national counterparts and development partners for information sharing and responding to capacity development request;
- Analyzes and selects materials for strengthening strategic alliances with partners and stakeholders;
- Technical expertise in area-based development process;
- Demonstrates good knowledge of Integrated Rural Development strategies, and good understanding on Local Development issues;
- Relevant international experience and cross-cultural communication skills;
- Proven interpersonal skills;
- Attitude and ability to motivate people;
- Flexibility and resourcefulness;
- Computer skills (common software programmes).

Annex 2 – YBI’s indicators and status of their achievement

Expected outputs	Output indicators	Baseline (2018)	Target Value (2021)	Actual value Completion (2021)	
				Value	%
Output 1 Enhanced skills and knowledge of youth for innovative entrepreneurship and business	<i>1.1 Promoting skills and knowledge on innovative technologies and job opportunities among youth</i>				
	1.1.1. # of needs assessment conducted among private sector and target groups of youth on job and business opportunities in innovative and emerging economic sectors	0	1	1	100%
	1.1.2. # of developed comprehensive training module on doing business in the new emerging sectors of entrepreneurship;	0	1	1	100%
	1.1.3 # of young people benefited from start-up trainings, by sex and age and disability status	210	200 (60 women)	523 (222 women)	260%/370%
	1.1.4 # of youth participated in the trainings on provision of rural/ethnic/eco-tourism service	0	120 (36 women)	190 (70 women)	158%/194%
	1.1.5 - # of research on opportunities for engagement of youth in advocacy and development of digital economy culture in Tajikistan	0	1	1	100%
	1.1.6. # of universities which introduced a course on Technological and Innovation Entrepreneurship	0	1	1	100%
	1.1.7. # of young entrepreneurs and professionals developed business plans and prototyping models for running innovative businesses in emerging or growing sectors	0	10 (4 women)	38 (17 women)	380%/425%
	<i>1.2. Support in development of startup ecosystem and innovation entrepreneurship in Tajikistan using Russian expertise</i>				
	1.2.1. # of organized national level events on youth entrepreneurship and provision of platforms for discussion	3	6	8	133%
	1.2.2. # of youth, people with disabilities and women attended open lectures, master classes of famous entrepreneurs in the regions of Tajikistan	150	300 (90 women)	591 (179 women)	197%/199%
	1.2.3. # of established cooperation among business incubators and start-ups of Tajikistan with foreign business incubators	4	8	6	75%
	1.2.4 # of conducted study tours for business incubators and start-ups of Tajikistan to the foreign business incubators	4	1	2	200%
	1.2.5. # of young people from Tajikistan engaged in events in Russian Federation and CIS countries to present their innovative ideas/products	6	1	4	n/a

Expected outputs	Output indicators	Baseline (2018)	Target Value (2021)	Actual value Completion (2021)	
				Value	%
Output 2: Increased access of rural young men and women to new vocational skills and local productive capacities that are sustainable, employment- and livelihood intensive	2.1. Improving access of rural youth to new vocational skills				
	2.1.1. # of young people, including women from remote villages passed vocational trainings	200	200 (60 women)	231 (90 women)	116%/150%
	2.1.2 - # of developed vocational training modules	2	2	2	100%
	2.1.3. # of equipped vocational institutions for conducting vocational trainings	9	3	9	300%
	2.2. Support in sustainable jobs creation for youth living in the rural areas				
	2.2.1 # of young people benefited from trainings and consultations for rural youth on green products, value chains, sustainable technologies in agribusiness, access to markets and trade, etc.	0	280 (84 women)	181 (80 women)	64.6%/95.2%
	2.2.2 - # of rural youth participated in national and regional networking events, trade fairs and forums.	0	15 (6 women)	13 (9 women)	86.7%/150%
	2.2.3 # of rural youth presented innovative project in national and regional networking events	0	4 (2 women)	14 (5 women)	350%/250%
	2.2.4. # of supported youth-led small economic initiatives in rural areas applying innovative solutions and green technologies benefiting this rural youth	8	12 (4 women)	51 (18 women)	425%/450%
	2.2.5 # of provided grants for innovative ideas to youth-initiated start-ups in IT and digital economy sectors, sustainable local tourism, green technologies for rural development, etc.	0	5 (2 women)	10 (3 women)	200%/150%
	2.2.6.1. # of conducted events under Start Up “Choihona” initiative	7	5	7	140%
	2.2.6.2. # of people that presented business ideas in the Start Up “Choihona” events, by sex, age and disability status	210	108 (32 women)	166 (74 women)	154%/231%
	2.2.7. # of new full-time jobs for women and youth created;	20	56 (18 women)	256 (121 women)	457%/672%

Annex 3 – List of Stakeholders and Key Informants interviewed

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

UNDP

Lenni Montiel, Resident Representative
Mubin Rustamov, Assistant Resident Representative,
Zebo Jalilova, Team Leader on Sustainable Economic Development
Firuz Saidkhadzhaev, Project Manager / Economic Development Advisor
Zarina Juraeva, Youth and Social Cohesion Officer
Jamilya Mirsaidova – Khujand LIIC Manager
Jahongir Olimov - Rasht LIIC Manager
Gulos Sherzamonov – Rasht LIIC Engineer
Saimuddin Muhiddinov – Rasht LIIC Local Development Specialist

Embassy of the Russian Federation

Oleg Ilyshev – First Secretary of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Tajikistan

State Committee on Investments and State Property management of the Republic of Tajikistan

Manzura Barzudi – Chief Specialist of the Entrepreneurship Support Department,

Ministry of Industry and New Technologies

Bahriddin Abdurakhimzoda, Head of the Department of New Technologies

Youth Employment Unit within the Youth Committee

Mahmadrajab Aliev, Deputy Director of the Youth Employment Unit

Sughd Regional Department of State Executive Power

Akhmedov Sharifjon, Head of the Investment Department – NB Not Met

Rasht Regional Department of State Executive Power

Nozimov Muqim

State Institution “Formation and Development of Entrepreneurship”

Sulaimon Kurbonov, Deputy Director of the State Business Incubator

Khaidarov Khojiakbar, Manager on Regional Development

Afonina Lola, Head of Co-working

State Business Incubator in Khujand -

Dilshod Holmatov, Director

Technopark of the Khujand State University named after B. Gafurov

Babajanov Shukur, Director

Lakhsh TVET

Inoyatullo Negmatov, Director

Educational and Informational IT Center for youth of Lakhsh district

Tukhta Rahmatov, Team Leader

Jumaeva Gulmira, English language instructor

Istaravshan College of National Crafts

Mr. Khadzhiev Nasriddin, Director

Implementing Public Organisations

Alif Academy, Bonu Hafizova, Director

PO IRODA, Lola Nasriddinova, Director

PO Peshraft, Matlyuba Salikhova, Director

PO JOVID, Husein Toshmatov, Project Coordinator

PO QMC, Bahrom Haydarov, Deputy Director

PO Nur, Mr. Miralibekov Shahboz, Director

Delovaya Eurasia Initiative, Darya Chizhova, Director

PO Unona, Uktam Rahimov, Director

LLC Himoya, Navruz Odinaev, CEO

Tajrupt AI Initiative – Muhsinjon Muhamadjonov, Business Development Lead

Beneficiaries

Company producing Dry fruits Bar, Director,

Strawberry valley (Halif LLC) – Bakhtiyor Abduvokhidov, Director

Qurbonov Hamza, Head of the Workshop for repairing furniture, Tojikobod district

5 Participant to Chohona Hack Dushanbe

10 Beneficiaries of BizConstructor,

15 Trainees of Alif Academy

12 Trainees of Tajrupt Machine Learning Course

5 Beneficiaries in Dushanbe Business Incubator

8 Beneficiaries in Istaravshan

10 Beneficiaries in Lakhsh and Tojikobod

OTHER STAKEHOLDERS/INFORMANTS

European Union Delegation

Francesco Straniero, Attaché

Accelerate Prosperity

Roziq Chorshanbiev, Country Director

IRDP Project - Trigger

Jumaboy Shohmurodov, Consultant

Project Peak

Sabohat Dustova, PEAK Project Manager

Annex 4 – List of Main Documents Consulted

President of the Republic of Tajikistan, *Address on Major Aspects of Tajikistan's Foreign and Domestic Policies by the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Leader of the Nation, H.E. Emomali Rahmon*, 2021, available at <http://prezident.tj/en/node/27419>

Government of Tajikistan, “*Concept DIGITAL ECONOMY IN TAJIKISTAN*” (unofficial translation), 2019, available at <https://policy.asiapacificenergy.org/sites/default/files/Concept%20of%20the%20Digital%20Economy%20in%20the%20Republic%20of%20Tajikistan%20%28EN%29.pdf>

Center for Strategic Research under the President of Tajikistan, *National Study on Adolescents and Youth – Assessment of Needs and Interests*, 2018, available at <https://www.unicef.org/tajikistan/reports/adolescents-baseline-study-2018>

UNDP, *UNDP Strategic Development Plan 2018-2021*, 2017, available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1318769>

UNDP, *Country Programme 2016-2020*, available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/797280>

Independent Evaluation Office UNDP, *Independent Country Programme Evaluation Tajikistan*, 2020

UNDP, *Project Document - Youth for Business and Innovation*, 2018

UNDP, *YBI Annual Report 2019*, 2020

UNDP, *YBI Annual Report 2020*, 2021

UNDP, *YBI Semi- Annual Report 2021*, 2021

UNDP, *Project Document - Youth Empowerment through Skills Development and Promotion of Innovations in Tajikistan*, 2021

Agreement between UNDP and LLC Harif and supporting documents

Agreement between UNDP and LLC Khair

Agreement between UNDP and Peshraft

PO RuralAid, *Final Progress Report*, Nov 2021

PO Unona, *Final Report of Contract 17-2021-RFP-UNDP-YBI-@*, undated

PO Nur, *Final Report*, undated,

PO Alif Academy, *Report*, undated

UNDP, *InnoResponse Challenge Concept Note*, undated

UNDP, *InnoResponse Challenge Round 2 - TOR and related documents*, undated

UNDP, *Bizconstructor Concept note*, undated

UNDP, *One-pager on Tajrupt Artificial Intelligence Academy*, undated

UNDP, *One-pager on PO Mis*, undated

UNDP, *One-pager on Khujand Technopark*, undated

Other video material consulted - UNDP Tajikistan web-site, various press-releases and post on social-media, etc.