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**Fiscal Year 2010 Final Results Report
Single-Year Assistance Program**

**Save the Children/Tajikistan
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List of Acronyms

BCC	Behavior Change Communication
CDH	Community District Hospital
CHW	Community Health Worker
CERT	Community Emergency Response Team
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
FFW	Food for Work
HF	Health Facility
IPTT	Indicator Performance Tracking Table
LOA	Life of Award
LOP	Life of the Project
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MC	Mercy Corps
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
MoH	Ministry of Health
MT	Metric Ton
NSG	Nutrition Support Group
SAPQ	Standardized Annual Performance Questionnaire
SC	Save the Children
SO	Social Organization
SR	Strategic Result
SYAP	Single-Year Assistance Program
ToT	Training of Trainers
TJS	Tajik Somoni
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organization
WSSG	Women Self Support Group

1. Introduction: Annual Food Aid Program Results

Save the Children (SC) implemented the Single-Year Assistance Program (SYAP) in partnership with Mercy Corps (MC). SC worked in 222 villages across 35 jamoats in 13 districts in the Khatlon Region located in southern Tajikistan. MC, the sub-grantee, operated in 79 villages across 10 jamoats in 3 districts in the mountainous Rasht Valley, northeast of the country's capital. During the life of the project, **26,821 families (183,118 people)**¹ were reached with food aid and/or participated in health and nutrition, agricultural, and disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities. The total amount of commodities distributed to beneficiaries during the life of the project (October 2009 and December 2010) by SC and MC was **5,917.23 MT** including 3,602.28 MT of wheat flour, 1,575.14 MT of lentils, 539.81 MT of vegetable oil, and 200.00 MT of yellow peas. Additionally, to support the development of local civil society organizations SC worked with seven local NGOs, providing them with 53.28 MT of commodities and assisting them in implementation of small scale distribution projects.

The goal of SYAP was to reduce acute food insecurity for disaster-affected rural Tajikistan households through timely distribution of commodities and appropriate nutrition messages. Throughout the life of the project, the focus had been on two strategic objectives:

SO 1: Families enabled to maintain nutritional status of vulnerable members following natural disasters and severe crop losses.

SO 2: Communities and households better-prepared to reduce or mitigate future risks.

To lay the groundwork for the program, SC staff collaborated with local governments and disseminated information about the SYAP to local community leaders. Following initial meetings SC conducted community-wide meetings to familiarize participants with the SYAP and its goals in public spaces in the target communities. These meetings were attended by heads of villages, religious authorities, and community members to ensure (1) beneficiaries and stakeholders were aware of the aims and approaches of the project and (2) community members' participation in training events and complementary activities.

SO1: Families enabled to maintain nutritional status of vulnerable members following natural disasters and severe crop losses

SC completed the baseline survey in December 2009 while MC completed its baseline survey by June 2010. Due to a large number of discrepancies, the M&E team ended up covering 40% - 100% of the lists in MC targeted areas. Desperation frequently led volunteers to falsify some beneficiaries' eligibility, and even doctors and jamoat leaders in the Rasht Valley assisted in the falsification by providing fake documents. Thus the extensive time needed to verify the beneficiary lists pushed the distribution of the food commodities originally scheduled from May-June to June-July in Rasht Valley. The baseline surveys, which collected data on health and nutrition indicators, anthropometric measurements, and affected infrastructure, were used to ensure effective targeting.

Initially, SC targeted **8,000 beneficiary families** for food aid. These included: families with children up to 5 years of age, female-headed households with primary school aged children, elderly and disabled people who were living on their own without care-takers/family support and

¹ 116,082 people (19,347 families) were reached with food aid and/or participated in health and nutrition, agricultural, and disaster risk reduction activities (on average six persons per family in SC target area); 14,401 additional beneficiary people benefit from latrines provided by SC, and 135 individual children were reached with food aid in residential "internat" schools in Khatlon region. Beneficiaries reached by MC SYAP activities included 52,318 persons (7,474 families; beneficiary families are composed of 7 persons on average in the MC target area) and 182 individual people in one psychiatric hospital and two residential schools, which brings the total individuals reached under these combined activities to **183,118** (26,821 families).

households which were affected by localized disasters. MC targeted **6,813 beneficiaries** consisting of 6,381 women with a child under the age of 5 years and 432 village volunteers/educators.

Initially, 14,813 families were selected by SC and MC to receive family rations of wheat flour, lentils and vegetable oil at critical times during the winter season, in the spring when their food stocks are depleted, and in the fall, prior to the harvest. SC was due to conduct three distributions – January, April and October - to cover 11 months of food needs. As a result of limited road access during the winter in MC target areas, they planned to conduct two distributions – April and October – to cover eight months of food needs. Numerous constraints, cited below, hindered these initial plans.

SC commodities were delayed from March until late May due to the suspension of container shipments at the Uzbek border along the Kurgan Tube rail spur. To off-set the delay, SC borrowed commodities from the World Food Program (WFP) which enabled SC to commence food distributions between January and March 2010. However, WFP was unable to loan the full ration planned for the January distribution. Due to USAID restrictions on back feeding, SC was able to target additional families with commodities that arrived late. The variation in rations distributed was the result of the delay in receipt of commodities, and also stemmed from the varying amounts and types of commodities SC was able to borrow from WFP.

Food distribution to the original SC beneficiary families

- 1) Between January and February, the original 8,000 beneficiary families in Khatlon received two-month rations made up of wheat flour and yellow peas. Each ration contained 25 kg of wheat flour and 12.5 kg of yellow peas.
- 2) In March, after the first distribution, there was remaining wheat flour which was close to reaching its expiry date. SC decided to distribute the wheat flour to the original 8,000 beneficiary families. As a result, a four-month ration of wheat flour was distributed to 2,175 families and a two-month ration of wheat flour to 50 families. In a total, 2,225 families in high mountainous areas received food.
- 3) In June-July, the 8,000 beneficiary families received complete two-month rations. The monthly ration for each family consisted of 25 kg wheat flour, 12.5 kg lentils and 3.7 kg of fortified vegetable oil. Since the commodities were released from the border in June, SC was able to commence the distribution of complete rations. In June the WFP loan was also returned.
- 4) In November, the final set of SC planned food distributions under SYAP was implemented, with the initial 8,000 beneficiary families each receiving a two-month full ration.
- 5) In December, after the final set of planned food distributions was finished, there were still leftover food commodities. These were distributed to 2,598 (out of the initial 8,000) beneficiary families living in high mountainous areas. 1,435 families received a four-month ration of vegetable oil and a two-month ration of lentils, and 1,163 families received a four-month ration of vegetable oil only.

Food distribution to SC additional beneficiaries:

- 1) Between June and July, 8,300 additional beneficiary families were identified using the initial selection criteria to receive a two-month ration only. From the 8,300 families, 7,800 families received a one-month full ration and 500 families received a one-month ration made up of lentil and vegetable oil.
- 2) From July to August, SC implemented a second distribution for the additional beneficiaries (8,300 families). During this distribution an extra 318 families who were badly affected by

flooding in August were selected based on the head of Sari Khosor jamoat's request which brought the total number of additional beneficiary families reached to 8,618. From the 8,618 families, 7,055 families received one-month full ration and 1,563 families received a one-month ration made up of lentils and vegetable oil.

- 3) In addition, in December SC was enabled to reach 834 new beneficiary families who were also affected by spring 2010 flooding. Among these additional families, 789 families received a four-month ration consisting of vegetable oil and a two-month ration of lentils; 40 families received a four-month ration of vegetable oil and a two-month ration of wheat flour and lentils; and five families received a four-month ration of vegetable oil only.
- 4) Additionally, SC collaborated with local NGOs that distributed 39.68 MT of vegetable oil and 13.60 MT of lentils. Working collaboratively with local NGOs, SC reached an additional 1,895 families (11,370 people).
- 5) In response to repeated requests from local authorities for assistance to 135 vulnerable children in Residential School #1 in Kulyab City, Khatlon Region, SC provided them with the remaining of 0,12 MT of food including wheat flour, lentils, and vegetable oil.

In total, SC was enabled to reach 19,347 families (116,217 people) with food aid.

MC reached 7,474 families (52,318 people) and 182 adults and children, bringing the total number of people reached to 52,500. MC was able to target additional beneficiaries when the start of distributions was delayed because of the extensive time needed to verify beneficiary lists.

Food distribution to the MC original beneficiaries

- 1) In June-July, MC provided the initial 6,381 female beneficiaries and 432 village volunteer/educators (in total, 6,813 families) with four-month full rations.
- 2) Between October and December 2010, MC provided the initial **6,183 female beneficiaries** and **435 village volunteer/educators** with full four-month rations. Three more volunteer/educators were selected in October 2010. These beneficiaries, totaling 6,618, amount to fewer than the initial beneficiary families targeted in FY2010. The reason for the decrease is that 195 initial SYAP beneficiary families could not be reached due to migration, internal movements, or other circumstances.

Food distribution to the MC additional beneficiaries

- 1) At the end of December, 350 additional beneficiary families were provided with full four-month rations and 300 additional beneficiary families were provided with a four-month ration of wheat flour and a six-month ration of vegetable oil (in total, **650 additional families** were reached).
- 2) In December, by the time of the final set of distributions, a small quantity of remaining commodities were distributed to families that lost part or all of their property during the violence, to a psychiatric hospital which receives insufficient support for its patients, and some remaining oil was given to the local residential schools for students, many of whom are from single parent homes or have lost their parents. In total **1.88 MT** was distributed to **11** conflict-affected families and the other facilities serving **182** children or patients.

Support for the **total population of 26,821 beneficiary families** who received food from SC and MC can be more precisely defined in terms of the duration of benefit: the food security of 8,793 families was ensured for eight months; that of 5,352 families was ensured for six months; that of 2,102 families for four months; 8,350 families for two months; 318 families for one month and the food security of 394 children and adults including 11 conflict-affected families was guaranteed for some short period. In addition, 510 people received food-for-work rations through local NGOs

contracted by SC, bringing the total number of families reached with food aid to **26,821 (168,717 people)** within Khatlon Region and Rasht Valley combined.

SYAP food distributions from during the life of the project are summarized again in the following table:

Description	Area	Families	People
Population made food secure for <i>eight</i> months (SC and MC)	Khatlon Region and Rasht Valley	8,793	59,376
Population made food secure for <i>six</i> months (SC)		5,352	32,112
Population made food secure for <i>four</i> months (SC and MC)		2,102	13,457
Population made food secure for <i>two</i> months (SC)		8,350	50,100
Population made food secure for <i>one</i> month (SC)		318	1,908
Population made food secure during the <i>emergency</i> (SC and MC)		11	394
Population receiving <i>Food for Work</i> (SC local NGOs)		1,895	11,370
Total			26,821

Increased practice of key health and nutrition behaviors

SC and MC implemented complementary activities aimed at promoting improved health and nutrition practices through behavior change strategies relating to health and child feeding practices. Both SC and MC staff initially trained each topic to the community health volunteers. The volunteers were then responsible for disseminating messages and knowledge on these topics among men and women in their communities.

During April and June 2010, following the outbreak of poliomyelitis in Tajikistan, SC supported the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Ministry of Health (MoH) by sensitizing community members to and monitoring of the polio vaccination campaign through routine health and hygiene trainings in 11 SYAP targeted districts in Khatlon.

In April, MC's revised modules on Safe Motherhood, and on anemia and worms passed inspection of the MoH and training sessions began. After this topic, training on water-borne disease and diarrhea, anemia and worms was given to the Field Coordinators.

During May 2010, hygiene promotion refresher training was provided by the SC Health Manager to 12 SC health staff. The staff then conducted sessions on hygiene promotion for 300 community volunteers who then provided hygiene and sanitation training for 29,796 men and women in the target communities. During the life of the project, four brochures were also developed on breastfeeding, complementary feeding, hand washing with soap, and use of iodized salt. These brochures were developed by SC staff and approved by Ministry of Health. MC volunteers also continued repeating topics previously taught through the SYAP-1 with their groups of beneficiaries, such as on Acute Respiratory Illness (ARI) and Hygiene. All trainings include education about risk factors, symptoms and signs, consequences and prevention. The hygiene training also included personal hygiene, environmental sanitation, and instructions on the construction of wash stands, waste pits and latrine lids. MC volunteers continued to promote improved infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices. The final health topics introduced during the LOP to reinforce optimal nutritional status throughout the project area were on water-borne diseases and complementary feeding, and anemia and worms. To support the hygiene aspect of personal hygiene and water-borne diseases, SC and MC promoted latrine lids, hand-washing stands, waste pits, and hashars (free labor days organized by the volunteers specifically for focusing on cleaning the streets and common public areas).

As a means of supporting the messages given in all of the health and hygiene topics, MC distributed 7,000 hygiene and complementary feeding kits to beneficiaries and volunteers that included toothbrushes and toothpaste for children, children's soap, a small towel, small nail scissors, manganese crystals, a medicine dropper and thermometer, potato masher and metal grater for making purees of vegetables as complementary foods, and small plastic 250 gram bowls with small spoons. These items were promoted to assist and encourage women with proper hygiene care and complementary feeding of their young children.

In addition to hygiene promotion, latrines were installed in medical centers and schools in 43 communities across 17 jamoats in 8 districts within SC target areas. Two types of local wooden latrines – one cubicle (10 units) and two cubicles latrines (70 units) were delivered to 36 schools, 6 medical centers, 2 hostels (low income housing, where the extremely vulnerable families reside), 1 Regional hospital and 1 boarding school. Overall, 14,401 people benefit from the 80 latrines.

In June and July 2010, Ministry of Health trainers conducted training on breastfeeding and complementary feeding for 23 District Health Workers (DHW) in SC targeted communities. Also 160 volunteers were trained on these topics by SC staff. These were the most active people in communities who together with DHWs, following the training, conducted training sessions for 38,100 men and women on breastfeeding and complementary feeding. The training targeted mothers with infants as well as husbands and mothers-in-law. Targeting husbands and mother-in-laws with the training is essential as they are the decision takers in Tajik families. The training promotes changes in behavior among mothers-in-law and husbands to allow mothers, who conduct most household chores, adequate time for feeding their children. The anecdotal data showed that, as a result of training on complementary feeding conducted from June-November; mothers started feeding their children after 6 months age with eggs, purees, meat and fruits.

Both SC and MC training participants reported that they learned new information; that their ability to take care of their children was improved; that they received an opportunity to leave the house and socialize (particularly important for the young wives and mothers); and that the work burden of young mothers was reduced and family members were given an increased appreciation of their circumstances.

SC also introduced Women's Self Support Groups. SC staff supported women in target communities in forming groups which collected between one and two Somoni each month (0.22-0.44 USD)² from each group member. The members of the groups then decided the rules for being a group member and on what and when they would spend the funds they accumulated. By the end of December, the number of WSSGs had increased to 187, and the total number of members of such groups had increased to 4,857. In total, the groups saved 42,279 TJS (9,395 USD). From this total, 21,314 TJS (4,736 USD) was used by the women for medical needs, school supplies and clothes, community investment, events and celebrations, household food purchases, taxes or bills, and the purchase of agricultural inputs.

A similar organization, called a "Mother's Fund," established by MC during SYAP-1 is the lynchpin of the health program for providing a safety net and enabling women to seek medical care in times of need in Rasht Valley. By the end of December, the Mother's Funds had collected a total of over 29,713 Tajik Somoni (over 6,636 USD), and the women had used a total of nearly 13,736 TJS (over 5,568 USD) for their medical needs.

² 1 USD is equivalent to 4,50 Tajik Somoni.

Also, MC implemented family budgeting and credit management training to help families improve fiscal management and decision making. MC used the concept of the Mother's Fund, already in action, as an example of a type of small-input, yet potentially large-return practice for households, if they create a similar small savings fund for shocks or emergencies that might affect their family or community.

To broaden SC's beneficiary reach and strengthen the capacity of local NGO partners, SC selected the seven best proposals, which met the SYAP targeting criteria, and supported the NGOs in implementing their projects. Under SC's supervision, these NGOs assisted in the distribution of commodities to community workers, training participants and trainers. The NGOs used their own funds to cover the expenses associated with implementing the proposed projects.

With the support of SC, the local NGOs were able to reach 1,895 beneficiaries. Using food for work, the NGO projects provided training for 1,310 women on diarrhea prevention, breastfeeding, infant and young child feeding practices, hygiene and sanitation and conservation of fruit and vegetables. 3,827 meters of household plots, 2,500 meters of roads, 29,120 meter of secondary irrigation channels and 1,000 meter of gutters were cleaned from mud/debris. Two lakes of 430 meters were also cleaned from mud/debris and 280 square meter of refuse was taken away.

Improved community and household production of food

In addition to health and nutrition promotion, SC implemented complementary activities to increase household food production, including the promotion of tunnel greenhouses in the target communities. These greenhouses have several key advantages that contribute to increasing household food security: they allow for off-season production, which increases yields; they enable families to increase the amount and quality of crops grown for household consumption; and they are low cost and low maintenance.

By the end of February the project supported 200 families in Khatlon in constructing 200 greenhouses. Beneficiaries were selected on the basis of having land for the construction of a greenhouse, farming skills, having up to 4 children and the willingness to cooperate with SC. Each beneficiary household was provided with 13 meters of plastic sheeting for greenhouse construction as well as seeds including 50 grams of parsley, 50 grams of cilantro, 40 grams of tomato and 20 grams of cucumber. The seeds provided allowed families to cultivate 12.66 meters of land. During 190 training events, families were also trained on growing vegetables and controlling pest infestations in Khatlon. The success of the greenhouse, more than 1,000 non targeted households purchased plastic sheets to construct greenhouse in Khatlon.

MC also distributed plastic sheets to 4,428 households involved in the program, where the training on greenhouses had been conducted for participants. Cucumber and tomato seeds were distributed to 4,428 households too in order to get the seedlings started, followed by distribution of plastic sheeting in April. Trainings on green housing and distribution of plastic sheeting encouraged 4,428 program beneficiaries and volunteers to construct 7,784³ greenhouses. From April to the middle of June, and again after the second sowing in October-November, families that built tunnel

³ Many beneficiaries took half of their plastic (meant for the second layer) and constructed separate greenhouses – one for tomatoes and one for cucumbers, which is why the number of greenhouses is so much larger than the number of beneficiaries receiving them. This also includes the jamoat of Tojikobod, in which only volunteers were given plastic as demonstrations.

greenhouses received a good harvest of cilantro and parsley which they sold in the market. The average income from the tunnel greenhouses provided by SC over the life of project was an estimated 47,000 TJS (10,590 USD). Additionally, an estimated 76,000 TJS (19,036 USD) was earned from selling fresh tomatoes and cucumbers during the summer and autumn seasons and 35,000 TJS (7,800 USD) from selling preserved salads. Fresh tomatoes and cucumbers were also consumed by households.

In Rasht Valley a total harvest of **740,647kg** (estimated by households) was achieved included: 464,660kg of cucumbers and 275,987kg of tomatoes. During the October to December, a reported **8,785 greenhouses** were functioning, with a transition in some greenhouses from tomatoes and cucumbers to greens – cilantro, dill, and chives – a crop never produced in this region in winter prior to the introduction of greenhouses.

While families have a tradition of preserving home-grown fruits and vegetables, their methods are not considered safe by modern standards. According to their own accounts, women complain about the large quantity of product spoilage that occurred prior to trainings on this topic conducted by MC. The SYAP continued to promote safe preserving methods during this quarter and nearly **99,615 jars** were preserved in the MC target areas.

Training on the production of elite potato seeds was given by MC. In March 2010, each of the 216 agriculture volunteers received one gram of True Potato Seeds (TPS) – the botanical seeds collected from the potato plant. The goal of this activity was to enable beneficiary farmers to produce their own good quality elite vegetable and potato seeds in the future. This technology has particular relevance in Rasht Valley, where potatoes are considered one of the main sources of livelihoods. Many farmers took to the technology and as of September reported harvesting **1,300** grams of TPS from their own production, and **4,313** kilograms of potatoes to be used or sold as elite seed. Quality Elite seeds are said to obtain prices between \$6 to \$10 per kilogram potentially adding significantly to a household's income.

Additionally, SC livestock specialists conducted education sessions on livestock production and the prevention of infectious animal diseases. Over 2,500 people attended a total of 250 educational sessions. To support training activities, two kinds of leaflets, one focused on the promotion of improved livestock husbandry and one focusing on infectious diseases among livestock that can infect humans, were developed and distributed to 2,000 beneficiaries in Khatlon.

MC provided training to agriculture field coordinators on household poultry production and construction of chicken tractors.⁴ During the training by the field coordinators for the agriculture community educators, construction materials were given and used within training for the participants to practice constructing chicken tractors. Training modules on poultry care and construction of chicken tractors were distributed to all agriculture educators to be used in their educational sessions. This simple but new tractor technology was adopted by **774** households.

Improved household processing, preservation and storage practices

During August and October 2010, a consultant provided SYAP agriculture staff with training on fruit drying. Following the training, staff conducted 100 training events in targeted villages, training 1,000 project beneficiaries in fruit drying techniques and food preservation. The team also

⁴ Chicken tractors are moveable coops that allow households to control where their chickens feed and to collect the eggs, which are generally scattered about when chickens are left to roam free. Free range chickens cause a lot of damage in the household garden plots, destroying much of the production for households.

distributed 640 dehydrators (fruit drying racks). As a result of the training and provision of racks, 640 families were able to dry 17,200kg of apples, 8,400kg of apricots, 28,900kg of beans, 30,900kg of cherries and 14,700kg of plums, and 3,900 kg of pears. Families earned about 40,000 TJS (9,000 USD) from selling dried fruits in the market and to local businessmen.

In August, MC conducted training for volunteers in proper canning methods and dehydration of fruits. Within the same month, 15 jars and lids, one sealer and netting for fruit dehydration were distributed to all 1,339 program beneficiaries for a total of **20,085** jars. Program volunteers and beneficiaries focused on canning and preserving of foods such as wild sour cherries, tomatoes and cucumbers, wild onions and various fruits. A total of 140,230 jars were reportedly canned this year by volunteers and beneficiaries throughout Rasht Valley.

In addition, an estimated **33,000 kg** of fruits were dried, including apples, pears, wild cherries, rosehips, and even tomatoes, which are not a traditionally dried product. SC and MC also introduced the topic of collection and protection of fruit and vegetable seeds – proper storage methods and methods to increase their viability for future harvests.

Routine monitoring identified that the 200 SC-trained individuals produced and stored more than 34,000 (2-3 liter capacity) with various cucumber and tomato salads and made adequate preparations for the coming winter with sufficient conservation. About 900 jars were sold at market. In addition, over 500 people were identified, who did not participate in training events, producing more than 76,000 jars of jam, juice, pickled cucumber, pickled tomato, pickled cabbage, salads, and compotes.

SO2: Communities and households better-prepared to reduce or mitigate future risks

To support communities in reducing the risks associated with disasters, SC established 77 Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs). To support the groups in conducting community emergency preparedness activities and managing localized disasters, 2,000 shovels, 2,000 spades, and 2,000 hoes were distributed to the CERTs. The tools were widely used during flooding in April-May 2010 for clearing drainage canals and blocked irrigation channels. CERTs also used the equipment for digging holes to install latrines.

To support communities in reducing the risks associated with disasters, SC conducted Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) TOTs for 16 key SYAP staff. These staff then conducted PRA training to 77 CERTs in 99 communities. The disaster preparedness training taught volunteers and their family's steps that they can take to reduce risks within their own households by preparing their own emergency plans. These plans included identifying evacuation routes, developing family communication plans, knowing where to locate phones, flashlights, and cash and clothes in an emergency, and the storage of food and water for emergencies. CERTs also conducted emergency preparedness projects that sought to manage localized disasters and disaster recovery projects.

MC introduced training materials and formed and oriented CERTs composed of health and agriculture volunteers already active in each jamoat. The specific training topics included early warning communications systems, identification and prioritization of risks, emergency preparedness plans for households and villages, and appropriate responses for the CERTs. In addition, MC distributed first aid manuals to each CERT member and provided each of 435 volunteers with a first aid kit to facilitate their emergency responses, including sterile cotton, bandages, iodine, burn dressings, burn foam, thermometers, antibacterial ointment, and a tourniquet to stop bleeding. The other activities were shut down due to the conflict in this region.

2. Success Stories

Response in a Needy Time

Saifullo and his family live in Oftobak Village, Khatlon Region. He is 7 and attends first grade. The village is picturesque, surrounded by mountains, but last year a mudslide rumbled down and covered the whole village. Luckily, it happened during the day and no one was injured, but many animals were lost. Fortunately, Saifullo's family now has a new house. But even the new walls and tin roof cannot hide their poverty. Unlike their neighbors, who white-washed their new houses, Saifullo's house is unpainted, plain brown mud.

Before the mudslide, Saifullo's father earned 100 somoni a month herding the village's animals. But in the aftermath, the villagers have been unable to purchase new animals. Now, his father seeks odd jobs in the market, loading goods and working as a porter. But market day comes only once a week and the work is irregular. Saifullo's mother picks cotton and earns 20 Tajik dirams (.04 USD) per kilogram. But this work is seasonal, and they have to stretch her meager earnings to last from cotton season throughout the year.

"Our family received the flour, oil, and lentils from Save the Children," says Saifullo's mother. "It really helped us. We were able to save. Before, we often only had money for flour. Now I can save this money, and we used it to buy our son's school uniform and books. Before, we often had only flour, and sometimes we did not even have that. It was very difficult for us. I knew my children were not healthy, but what could I do?"

"I also learned a lot from the trainings. Before, my children were often sick with diarrhea. Now I'm like a magician: I can keep my children from getting sick."

Saifullo speaks up too. "I am in the first grade, and I am a good student," he declares. "My handwriting is beautiful, and I'm very good in math! Now I have new clothes and I feel very proud when I go to school – before, my clothes were old and not beautiful."

"Every morning I have breakfast before I go. My mom makes lentils and milk; it's very delicious. Now I'm not hungry when I go to school."

"I love my father very much. He gave me money for chocolate, but I didn't want it – I bought a book instead. It's better, because I can enjoy it all the time."

"Meet Our Businessman"

About 30 women in Kum Village, Khatlon Region, gather around their visitors to tell about their experiences in Women's Self-Support Savings Groups. A handful of them nudge one tiny woman forward. One of them declares, "Meet our Businessman!"

Although physically small, Bibisanam is a giant in her village. As a child she was often sick: in her large family there often was not enough food to go around. School clothes were always hard to come by. Then she became ill and lost her eyesight. Her brother went to Russia to support the family, and eventually they saved enough money for their daughter's surgery. Her sight has improved, but her family still struggles to make ends meet.

In early 2010, a savings group was formed in their village. Bibisanam's group of 17 women had an idea for helping her earn income, while also solving one of the community's problems.

The nearest store and bazaar are about 5 kilometers away, and the market only operates on Sundays. The villagers buy most of their essentials there, but these products have to last for a week or more. Families cannot always make purchases, for lack of money or transport, or other hardships. They are forced to go without, or rely on their neighbors. “If we don’t have matches or candles, it’s a problem. Before, we relied on neighbors if we ran out, but it’s awkward to ask; it makes you feel ashamed.”

The self-support group took their first month’s savings and started a business. “They chose me as their leader because they respect and trust me,” says Bibisanam. “I am proud of that.” The group collected an initial sum and went to the bazaar to buy some basic essentials. “Now, instead of borrowing, people come to my store, about a dozen people a day. My business is booming. We even bought a refrigerator with the profits and can store cold goods, like ice cream.

“Because these women believe in me, I am very happy. My health has improved, and I love my work. Before, I could never dream of having my own shop. Now I earn money for my family and the group, and help the community. I’m proud that my group calls me ‘the businessman.’”

How 1 Gram Can Produce 100 Kilos

Saodat has served since early 2010 as an agriculture volunteer in her village of Kul, in eastern Tajikistan’s mountainous Rasht Valley. She is 36 years old and lives with her 5 children and husband. The family has about one-third of an acre of land, and they mainly grow potatoes, like most people in the area.

Because farmers here lack access to reliable seed potatoes and have little information about how to produce quality seed potatoes, their harvests are very poor. Every year people pay high prices for vegetative seed, or they plant what was saved from the previous harvest. But buying the seeds is always a risk: it is difficult to know whether the seeds will really produce a harvest, and none of the locally available seeds are certified.

This year, through the SYAP, Mercy Corps trained agriculture volunteers on the technology of producing seed potatoes from True Potato Seeds (TPS), harvested in the fall from the potato plants. Each of the volunteers received one gram of these green, marble-sized fruits that resemble tomatoes. They are stored in a cool, dark place and later are placed in water to soften them again, and are minced and squeezed to free up the fertile potato seeds inside. TPS are naturally disease-free and are the most reliable method for producing the vegetative potato seeds that yield good harvests for at least for three to four years.

Since this was Saodat’s first experience with these seeds, she planted them with hesitation, not knowing whether they would give a good harvest. By September she had gathered 120 kilos of first-class potato seeds, known as “Elite seeds” by the people in the area. When Saodat and her husband saw their potato harvest, they were both astounded – one potato seedling had up to 44 tubers!

“I am so happy that now my family is provided with good potato seed for several years, and besides that we learned the technology of producing them ourselves,” exclaims Saodat.

The training that Saodat and other people in Tojikobod district received is helping them to save money and produce their own quality vegetative potato seed at home. In the future, perhaps they will not only produce their own seeds but also supply the market with quality seeds.

3. Program Success Factors

The following factors contributed to the SYAP's success:

- Food distributions motivated families to participate in training activities and to improve the environment in their villages affected by promoting the improved sanitation.
- Food aid not only allowed families to consume more meals, but also enabled families to economize their food budget and reallocate these funds to other household priorities.
- Involving selected local partners allowed SC to reach more beneficiaries with food aid and training and also helped to build the capacity of the local NGOs.
- Involving husbands and mothers-in-law in health and nutrition training ensures that young mothers are given adequate time for breastfeeding, complementary feeding and hygiene and sanitation activities for their children.
- Health and hygiene education sessions proved both very popular and yielded good, visible results. Participants felt that the importance and new nature of the information provided in these classes accounted for the positive experience.
- Focusing on growing locally important vegetables increased the impact of these efforts to expand and improve household production.
- In light of the very low overhead and input investment costs associated with starting and maintaining WSSGs and Mother's Fund, the results here proved very high yield, including the accumulation and loan or granting of significant amounts of money and the provision of strong financial and non-financial support to the groups' members and their communities.
- The WSSG and Mother's Funds strengthened the role of women in family and empowered them to take decisions and actions.
- The wooden latrines installed during the SYAP were low cost and designed so that they are hygienic and can be carried from one place to another. The latrine design has encouraged families in the target communities to adopt and use hygienic latrines.

4. Lessons Learned

The following will be taken into consideration for current and future programming:

- Requiring beneficiaries to use official documentation as means of verification for receiving meant that many women applied for official government identification documents which allowed them to have identities and vote, open bank accounts, access other official services, and receive husband's remittances without an intermediary. Also their children can receive birth certificates, register with the health facilities, and receive proper vaccinations.
- Working through exclusive beneficiary lists is a complicated process. The lists should have a number of other checks, including the jamoat chiefs or secretaries, and could be presented at mosques for view by the community.
- Local and regional procurement could be used to compensate for the late arrival of commodities from the US and the issues that it caused with distribution, especially for emergency projects. This depends on being able to find products of the same quality and nutritional standards.

- An increased focus on improving household production and the ability to store and utilize food during the lean months would extend and improve on the impact of emergency food assistance programs.
- Effective collaboration with local authorities and communities ensures mobilization of locally available resources and reduces the chance of conflict over beneficiary selection.
- Working with local authorities in the distribution of food aid builds the capacity of local government staff in implementing transparent process and improves their accountability.
- Using SYAP resources to work with local NGO partners is an effective approach to building NGO capacity.
- Experience exchanges among volunteers of different jamoats help to improve results in some of the more culturally or socially closed areas or in those without a lot of exposure to new ideas.
- Considering the short health training program of several sessions, participants absorbed the information communicated remarkably well.
- The program should look to discover local beliefs and customs and incorporate them during trainings as part of behavior change messaging.
- The budget training should be targeted more directly to others within the household – specifically mothers- and fathers-in-law and husbands – since it was found that young daughters-in-law have little knowledge or influence over family budgets.
- Providing household financial management training to WSSG and Mother’s Funds would improve their capacity.
- The WSSGs should receive more follow-up and monitoring visits. Groups that received fewer visits, especially early on, fell victim more easily to problems that stemmed from a lack of confidence and difficulty in answering organizational questions for themselves.

5. Conclusion

The SYAP helped to improve the food security status of 26,821 families during a critical time of the year. The complementary activities, health, nutrition and hygiene promotion, and improved agricultural techniques implemented under the SYAP provided sustainable outputs that will contribute to long-term household food security as well as family health and well-being. The SYAP also allowed SC and MC to continue innovative initiatives, such as the WSSGs and Mother’s Funds, which have empowered women and increased family resilience to shocks. Supporting communities by providing food aid linked to health, nutrition, and hygiene behavior-change messaging and activities and improving agricultural production has made a considerable contribution to improving food security in the districts targeted by SC and MC under the SYAP.