

# Discovering a Community: The Mohammad Agha Women’s Association

## Reaching its One Year Anniversary

Last fall, Global Partnership for Afghanistan’s Women’s Program Manager Fatima Sardar began discussions with women leaders from Mohammad Agha District, Logar Province on ways to increase economic opportunities, organize around community goals, and engage local government services. The result was the Mohammad Agha Women’s Association. One year into its formation, the Association has enabled its members to discover the community outside their homes and served as a blueprint for empowering women in rural areas throughout the country.



GPFA Project Mgr Mariam Sediqi speaks at a meeting of the Association

In collaboration with the District Governor and his staff, the Afghan Dept. of Women’s Affairs, US Embassy staff, and the local shura, GPFA has developed a variety of income-generating activities for Association members, hosted regular meetings to discuss community issues, and encouraged other donor organizations and the Afghan government to support the group. These activities have impacted directly upon the Association’s 500 members.

“But,” says Mariam Sediqi, GPFA Project Manager, “the indirect impact would include as many as 3,000 to 4,000. The women go home to their villages and families and share what they have experienced with others.”

## Improving the Options

After introducing the Agha Women’s Association to a variety of agriculture-related income-generating activities over a series of meetings, members were invited to choose an enterprise to engage in with training and supplies provided by GPFA. Successive meetings attracted more attendees and generated further excitement at the prospect of economic advancement.

All of the diverse activities offered female farmers real opportunity to improve household incomes, learn new skills, and alleviate food security issues. Some activities are listed in the table to the right.

INCOME-GENERATING ENTERPRISE	# of Women
<b><u>Strawberry Cultivation</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided strawberry plants and training.</li> <li>• Projected annual income from this activity is \$822.</li> </ul>	45
<b><u>Vegetable Growing</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided vegetable seeds and instruction.</li> </ul>	50
<b><u>Orchards / Poplar Woodlots</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distributed 1,000 hybrid poplar cuttings to each farmer.</li> <li>• Trained in preparing soil, planting and care.</li> </ul>	23
<b><u>Solar Food Dryers</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distributed locally-made solar food dryers which help avoid pests and spoiling when drying food for consumption and sale.</li> </ul>	100
<b><u>Tailoring Training</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trained tailors to produce sports uniforms for 400 girls at a nearby school.</li> </ul>	25
<b><u>Food Preserving and Jam Making</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducted training seminars on canning goods and producing jam &amp; tomato paste.</li> <li>• Distributed to each participant a canning kit.</li> </ul>	100

“The Women’s Association has become a very effective means for understanding and addressing the needs of the women of the district and their families,” Mariam says. “It is also helping them to discover new ways of increasing family income and improving livelihoods.”



Roger Hardister sampled the homemade apple jam. “I ate it and I liked it!”

## Broadening Support

In the beginning, most of the Mohammad Agha Association members were residents of the village closest to the District Center. Gradually, as word spread of the opportunities available, women from more distant villages braved insecure conditions to join the meetings. Local police supported the effort by providing security. “Getting familiar with the other women of nearby villages,” was one of the unexpected benefits according to Farida, an Association member.

To capitalize on the momentum of this group, GPFA has become a catalyst for encouraging local organizations and donors to support additional activities for the Association in the realm of women’s health, empowerment, and enterprise development. One example is a tailoring training program which GPFA initiated and has now arranged to continue under another local charitable organization. Currently, GPFA is pursuing funding for a functional literacy and numeracy skills course for Agha members.



District Governor Abdul Hamed joined GPFA in distributing canning kits to women.

## Realizing Opportunity

“I think it has helped women farmers to improve their skills,” Mariam says, “but more importantly, it has helped house bound women, who were always limited by their compounds and family duties, to come out. Now they can participate in community meetings and realise that they are part of the community, the society.”

***“The reason that made me participate in the training course despite the threat from Taliban was the interest of mine to start a small business on my own.” – Zarmina***

“The small income generating activities have helped the women to realise something they had never known before: that they can make a contribution to their family income and not leave all the work to the men. Lack of education, literacy and cultural conditions meant that they had never really understood the opportunities that were open to them.”

Based on the success of this venture, GPFA has begun plans to form Women’s Associations in other localities. This project is only possible because of the generosity of GPFA Global Partners including the United States Department of State and individual supporters.