

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

«PAMIR AGAINST AIDS-2»

by

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFEW	AIDS Foundation East-West
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AKHS	Aga-Khan Health Service
DCC	District Coordination Council
FGD	Focus groups discussions
GBAO	Autonomous Mountainous Badakhshan Province
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PCC	Province Coordination Council on Prevention and Combating HIV, TB and Malaria
PLHIV	People living with HIV
RC	Resource Center
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
TB	Tuberculosis
WAC	Women's Affairs Committees
WSC	Women Support Centers

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Final evaluation of the Pamir against AIDS-2 project (the component, implemented by AFEW), identified the following key conclusions and recommendations:

- In general the evaluation demonstrated that AFEW greatly contributed to development of the partners' capacity in the province and project districts necessary for accomplishing the project goal and objectives. Partners emphasized that assistance and support provided by AFEW adequately addressed their needs, was timely, flexible and of high quality.
- Capacity of the project partners' first of all Women Support Centers (WSC), had significantly improved during the project, in particular taking into account that WSCs were established from the scratch and NGOs had no or little experience in this area. A wide partner network ensuring clients' access to all services existing in the province was created in each project district. Staff of WSCs obtained knowledge and skills necessary for provision of basic services related to HIV, STIs and TB to the vulnerable women.
 - Despite early termination of the project AFEW managed to implement all planned activities. Nevertheless, lack of time did not allow finalizing capacity building of the partners and ensuring sustainability of the activities. Sustainability of activities, structures and organizations created and supported within the project is the key problem; to address it a detailed exit strategy should be developed as soon as possible. In particular changes in the implementing partners' focus and range of services should be considered to improve their competitiveness and attractiveness for potential donors for whom HIV prevention may not be the top priority.
- Some capacity building needs of WSC, in particular increasing effectiveness of the internal capacity building mechanisms and training WSC staff on providing sensitive services to women, including supporting women on protecting their sexual rights, need to be addressed. NGOs also need technical assistance on organizational and institutional development issues. Cooperation and experience sharing between women NGOs should be continued and strengthened. This will require continuation of technical support and assistance from AFEW.
- As the result of the project women NGOs gained opportunity to influence HIV and TB-related programs in the province. First of all women NGOs became active members of the Province Coordination Council and were able to solve certain problems related to the project outcomes. However effectiveness of the coordination bodies may have been hampered by the lack of understanding of high-level province officials both the importance of HIV problem in the province and the role of province and district coordination mechanisms in addressing it. To improve effectiveness of province and district coordination mechanisms long-term advocacy targeted at high-level officials is needed to change their attitude to HIV-related problems and to ensure meaningful participation of the state structures and active involvement of civil society organizations in the work of coordinating bodies.
- WSC should more actively work on establishing links between their beneficiaries and local government in order to be able to address the causes of the problems, not only the consequences. WSC should constantly inform local government, international and local

organizations about typical problems and needs of vulnerable women and advocate for addressing them.

- Qualitative data suggests that respondents may mix the concepts of HIV and STIs risk (men are under higher risk due to risky practices) and vulnerability to HIV and STI (women are more vulnerable due to biological and social reasons). At the same time respondents who participated in project activities (both women and men) demonstrated understanding that women are more vulnerable than men, so it can be assumed that the project may have contributed to the increased awareness of population regarding this issue. Anyway, quantitative survey should be conducted to obtain more accurate data on this indicator.
- Awareness of general population, including vulnerable women, on HIV and STIs in project districts is high, which is presumably the result of collective efforts of many partners. Effectiveness of the awareness raising activities among the population can be further improved by wider use of video and audio materials in addition to the printed media (all materials should be pre-tested among the target audience).
- Ability of women to exercise their sexual rights depends on numerous factors, including cultural and historical context and socio-economical status of women. These factors may have caused difference in women's emancipation level in the project districts mentioned by the respondents. In this regard in the absence of quantitative data on this issue and taking into account that several partners and projects work with general population, including women, on HIV-related issues, it is hard to single out contribution of "Pamir against AIDS-2" project towards accomplishing this outcome.
- Limited involvement of men into the project activities might have decreased effectiveness of the project activities on empowering women to protect their sexual rights. In future to overcome gender stereotypes and ensure favorable environment in families and community for protecting women's sexual rights WSC should provide HIV and STI-related services both to men and women and involve men into the project activities.
- Combination of the income generation activities with provision of information and services on HIV and other diseases may build women's confidence and independence, thus leading to higher status of women in families and improved ability to protect their own sexual rights.
- Resource Centre and Hayot newspaper have great potential in accomplishing overall goal of the project. However their current goal – increasing awareness of population, including youth and vulnerable women, cannot be accomplished due to the limited resources to cover significant part of their target audience. For more effective use of limited resources Resource Centre should change its focus from increasing awareness of youth to strengthening capacity of professional taskforce (volunteers, peer educators, school teachers etc.) who in turn will work with youth, thus ensuring much larger coverage than RC staff can achieve alone.
- It is advisable to redesign Hayot newspaper strategy. One of the options is to narrow its focus on decision makers (first of all province and district authorities) so the newspaper can act as the advocacy tool to reduce stigma and discrimination towards at-risk populations and catalyze support for HIV and TB-related public health interventions (e.g. methadone therapy, that remains a controversial topic) in the province. In addition newspaper may aim at activists working with general population (community educators, volunteers, health care providers) to provide them with information and tools necessary for the work with general population. If

Hayot newspaper continues focusing on general population, then in order to have impact on population awareness its circulation volume should be significantly increased to cover significant part of the population, and the ways disseminating the newspaper to the remote mountainous areas should be identified. Also it would be important to ensure that materials are relevant to the general population, interesting and understandable.

INTRODUCTION: PROJECT DESCRIPTION, GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The Dutch non-governmental humanitarian organization AIDS Foundation East-West (AFEW) implements in collaboration with the civil society organization “Volonter” the second phase of the Oxfam Novib-funded “Pamir against AIDS” project in Autonomous Mountainous Badakhshan Province (or GBAO, from Russian *Gorno-Badakhshanskaya Avtonomnaya Oblast*) from October 1, 2009 till December 31, 2011.

Overall project goal:

To reduce the negative impact of HIV epidemic and other socially significant diseases in the GBAO by raising public awareness and enhancing access of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, especially women, to gender-sensitive prevention, health and social. The Project facilitates strengthening of coordination mechanisms; helps to improve access to prevention, health and social services related to HIV and AIDS, and raise public awareness on HIV, TB, other infectious diseases with wide involvement of women’s organizations, community of people living with HIV (PLHIV) and injecting drug users (IDU) into the project activities.

Final project evaluation scope included assessment of the following project objectives, for accomplishment of which AFEW was responsible:

- To raise public awareness on the issues of gender, HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment as well as other socially-significant diseases;
- To build the organisational capacity of local women’s organisations to educate and promote an understanding of HIV and other socially significant diseases amongst women in the GBAO region.

Activities under these objectives were implemented in the province capital Khorog as well as in Darvaz, Vanj and Ishkashim districts of GBAO.

Key partners:

Province Women’s Affairs Committee, the Province Coordination Council on Prevention and Combating HIV, TB and Malaria, province and district TB, AIDS and Healthy Lifestyle Centers, Resource Center (within the AIDS Center), law enforcement agencies, local NGOs Marifatpocho, Bonuvon and Khayrandesh.

Project target groups:

Professionals: Representatives of women's organizations, staff of the Women Support Centres (WSC), health care providers and education specialists, religious figures, journalists and law enforcement staff.

Vulnerable women: single mothers; widows with children and other dependants; women whose husbands are abroad for more than one year and do not provide any financial support; sex workers, ex-prisoners, wives of injecting drug users, women from families affected by HIV epidemics.

People living with HIV.

General Population.

EVALUATION SCOPE

To review project activities implemented by AFEW, identify existing barriers and provide recommendations on improvement of quality of work of AFEW and partner organizations and better addressing needs of the project target groups.

The subject of the evaluation and effectiveness indicators:

Evaluation subject is "Pamir against AIDS-2" project activities implemented by AFEW with financial support of Oxfam Novib.

The evaluation was aimed at assessing the effectiveness of program and organizational activities of AFEW as related to the commitments made within the project.

Effectiveness indicators (project outcomes):

- The general population will understand that women are more vulnerable towards HIV and other sexual transmits infections.
- Women organizations and female leaders are actively participating in planning and implementation HIV/AIDS programs throughout the GBAO region.
- At this end of this project women will be able to demonstrate increased levels of knowledge about HIV/AIDS and other social significant diseases prevention and have the support necessary to begin discussions in the home with regards to sexual expectations.
- Women are empowered to talk with their husbands about their sexual rights and establish peer-support sessions with governmental health units to engage their peers and neighbors in discussions on safe sex, norms related to gender inequalities and sexual discrimination.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY, OBSTACLES AND LIMITATIONS

In order to accomplish the evaluation objective the following qualitative methods were applied:

- Consultations with the Project Coordinator on key evaluation issues;
- Review of available documents, including project proposal, reports on indicators and narrative reports, statistical data, monitoring reports, documents provided by partners etc.
- Key informant interviews with province and district government officials, law enforcement staff;
- Interviews with the directors and staff of the implementing partners and structures (OSC Marifatpocho, NGOs Bonuvon and Khayrandesh, the Resource Centre) and service providers (AIDS, TB Centers) ;
- Key informant interviews with representatives of other organizations working on public health in GBAO – Aga Khan Health Service, NGO “Rushdi Ishkoshim”;
- Focus groups discussions (FGD) with project beneficiaries (vulnerable women);
- FGDs with men representing government employees and general population;
- Observations.

Overall 14 interviews with key informants, including government representatives, partner organizations staff, employees of the Resource Centre and ‘Hayot’ newspaper were conducted in Khorog town and three project districts. Six focus groups were conducted in the centers of Vanj and Darvaz districts as well as in Andarob Jamoat* of Ishkashim district (two focus groups in each site – see Annex 1 for details). Total 50 women and 33 men aged 15 to 63 took part in the focus groups. Evaluation team developed 10 structured interview and focus group guides that were agreed with the Project Coordinator,

Obstacles/limitations:

1. Only qualitative information and some statistical data were collected;
2. Limited time – evaluation team spent less than one working day in each district;
3. Remoteness of project districts and sites from each other;
4. Focus group participants often were gathered on the spot; as the result not all FGD participants were project beneficiaries. E.g. in Darvaz almost 80% of FGD participants were employees of Marifatpocho sewing shop;
5. Aggregated pre- and post-test data on project beneficiaries’ awareness level was not available. In addition project statistics in Darvaz were not accessible due to electricity cutoff.

* *Jamoat* – the smallest rural geo-administrative unit in Tajikistan, usually consisting of one or several villages.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

Outcome 1: The general population will understand that women are more vulnerable towards HIV and other sexually transmitted infections

Evaluation team included this question to the key informant interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholders. Different responses were received on this point. Dr. Mulloabdolov, Head of AIDS Centre, noted that lack of research on this issue in GBAO does not allow assessing to what extent general population understands vulnerability of women to HIV and other STIs.

FGDs with women in Darvaz, Vanj and Ishkashim demonstrated that women are aware of their vulnerability towards HIV and STIs. FGD participants mentioned such vulnerability factors as mass labour migration (women are under the risk of being infected by their husbands), limited access to information on sexual health, limited accessibility of health care services due to their remote location or mere absence, still limited role of women while making decisions in families etc.). Women – project beneficiaries who participated in focus group discussion in Vanj indicated that women usually more often get sick with STIs than men and are embarrassed of going to STI specialist for treatment; often women do not dare to raise the issue of STI prevention and condom use with their husbands. Most of participants of focus group with men (Andarob Jamoat, Ishkashim) said that women are more vulnerable to STIs than men.

Women's body is more fragile, so they can easier get STIs

- Participant of focus group with men, Ishkashim district.

However men - district municipality (“hukumat”) staff in Darvaz and Vanj stressed during the focus group discussions that men are more vulnerable to STIs than women due to high migration level among men and high prevalence of risky sexual practices, especially while away from home.

Women usually sit at home, while men hang around a lot, go to Russia, so men more frequently get HIV

- Participant of focus group with men – municipality employees, Darvaz district.

Outcome 2. Women organizations and female leaders are actively participating in planning and implementation HIV/AIDS programmes throughout the GBAO region.

The role of women organisations in planning and implementation of HIV programmes is strengthened via participation of three women NGOs in the Province Coordination Council on

Prevention and Combating HIV, TB and Malaria (PCC). This was made possible mostly thanks to the “Pamir against HIV-2” project, since it was AFEW that initiated establishment of the women NGOs in Vanj (Bonuvon) and Ishkoshim (Khayrandesh) districts and provided support to OSC Marifatpocho within the project. Heads of NGOs participate in the PCC sessions held quarterly and chaired by the Deputy Head of the Province. NGOs actively availed of the opportunities membership in PCC provided, to lobby for the project objectives. For instance, NGO Marifatpocho raised the issue of premises for the WSC in Darvaz district at one of the PCC sessions, so later Darvaz district authorities allocated premises for the centre. In addition the Darvaz District Coordination Council (DCC) on HIV was established. During another PCC session NGO Bonuvon presented information on high prevalence of TB in Yazgulom Jamoat, as the result TB center conducted X-ray of all Jamoat people and other counter-TB measures were taken.¹

It should be noted that Marifatpocho is not a full member of DCC in Darvaz – the latter is comprised mostly by the government structures. NGOs are invited to participate in the sessions on ad hoc basis. Evaluation team was unable to obtain meaningful information on DCC activities in Darvaz. No DCC was established in Vanj and Ishkashim districts, however partner NGOs are invited to the sessions of local government structures, where they present information on their activities and provide suggestions on improving the situation. NGOs closely cooperate with their key counterparts - local Women’s Affairs Committees (WAC), however the latter have very few opportunities for active work due to the limited resources. NGOs enjoy support from Province WAC as well. Thus, Head of Province WAC Ms. Mehri Gulomshoeva promised to address the issue of providing premises for WSC Marifatpocho.

Some respondents indicated that Province Coordination Council works somewhat “formally”, its sessions lack discussions, analysis, session topics do not always reflect the most burning issues. Also some key informants mentioned that HIV is not among priority problems of the province high-level officials, which results in lack of province government support in HIV-related activities. However, despite this opinion, PCC is the forum for women NGOs to exchange ideas, share experience and state their position on HIV and other issues relevant to the project activities and women organisations as the whole.

Partners are well aware of the women NGOs work. Respondents highly commended the work done within the project, noting the need to find new sources of project funding and to cover remote areas.

Economical activity of women, awareness of reproductive and sexual rights, skills building helps to prevent such problems like prostitution and drug use. In this regard Marifatpocho plays important role in the district.

- The Militia Major Jumakhonov, Deputy Head of District Committee of Internal Affairs.

Despite the good working relationships between women NGOs and local authorities, interaction between vulnerable women and local authorities, first of all Women Affairs Committees, still needs improvement. Government authorities think of their work with vulnerable groups as active and relevant to the population needs, however vulnerable women may be reluctant to bring up their needs to the authorities. For instance, women-FGD participants in Ishkashim and Darvaz indicated that they

¹ Interviews with directors of Marifatpocho (M. Negmatova) and Bonuvon (M. Alimahmadova).

visited WSCs to receive assistance with official papers, obtain financial help to cover health care costs (including travel expenses). When asked why they had not approached Government structures with such requests, no response was received

Outcome 3. At the end of this project women will be able to demonstrate increased levels of knowledge about HIV/AIDS and other social significant diseases prevention and have the support necessary to begin discussions in the home with regards to sexual expectations.

According to the respondents (FGD participants, government employees and NGO staff), awareness level of general population, including women, is quite high.

Today even schoolchildren may explain what is HIV and AIDS, ways of transmission and methods of prevention. Mass events, quizzes, meetings demonstrate that showing one's knowledge on this is not something shameful. People wear T-shirts with AIDS written on them, it was impossible before.

- Sayora Zamirova, Deputy Head of Ishkashim District

All respondents highlight increase in awareness of general population, including women, during the last 3-4 years. At the same time they note the difference between the awareness level of people living in district centers and nearby settlements with that of people in remote villages. Access to information and services is limited for the latter due to their remote location, expensive transportation, lack of locally situated service providers. Darvaz respondents pointed out absence of midwives in many jamoats. At the moment of evaluation the only Ob-Gyn working in Darvaz was in Dushanbe for hospital treatment, so Darvaz women had to travel to Dushanbe or Khorog for gynaecological care.

Women who participated in FGD in Andarob demonstrated good awareness on HIV and lack of stigma when asked about hypothetical case of a neighbor living with HIV. In Vanj some women – FGD participants get confused responding about HIV, hepatitis and TB transmission ways. In some cases women correctly remembered the topic of the meeting or session they attended but experienced difficulties recollecting the content of the event. Men (general population) in Andarob Jamoat (who almost all participated in the informational session within the project) demonstrated high awareness level on HIV, TB and STIs. In addition focus group participants in Darvaz (women) and Ishkashim (women and men) also demonstrated understanding of confidentiality of information on people with HIV and STIs and importance of eradicating stigma and discrimination towards PLHIV.

These results correlate with findings of the survey conducted by the research company Zerkalo within the project in January 2011, where 84% of respondents in project districts correctly cited HIV transmission ways².

At the same time many respondents stressed that high public awareness of population is the result of collective efforts of many partners – public health structures (AIDS, TB, Healthy Lifestyle Centers, primary health care system), Aga Khan Foundation, NGOs working on HIV prevention among the migrants. During the meetings with representatives of Aga Khan Foundation and NGOs working with migrants evaluation team found that an extensive network of volunteers – community health educators work in virtually all villages of the province for several years, while in some jamoats outreach workers recruited by the NGOs - partners of the International Organization on Migration educate population on HIV and STIs and distribute condoms.

WSC staff conducted educational work on HIV and other infections among vulnerable women both during women's visits to the centers and field informational sessions. Often health care specialists from AIDS, TB and Healthy Lifestyle Centers were invited as trainers. Total number of clients covered by WSC services, including awareness raising, comprised 2,410 clients, which is significantly higher than initially planned.

However many staff of WSC did not use modules or plans while conducting informational sessions. Regular pre- and posttests of WSC clients' awareness level was conducted, however no aggregate data on clients awareness increase was made available.

In addition to WSC, project contributed to increasing public awareness via the Resource Center (RC) and the newspaper 'Hayot'.

Resource Centre

Resource Center (RC) was established within the first stage of the project and AFEW continued supporting RC within the Pamir against AIDS-2 project. According to the RC manager, the goal of the center is increasing awareness of youth (age 15-24) on HIV, STIs, TB-related issues. RC works under supervision and guidance of the province AIDS Center and RC workplans are approved by the Director of Province AIDS Centre and AFEW Director. During the project implementation Resource centre conducted mini-trainings and informational sessions for 910 young people (almost half of them female), including high school, medical college and university students and military personnel. Effectiveness of the trainings were assessed via pre- and post-tests, though no aggregate data on average increase of trainees' knowledge was made available.

² HIV knowledge and practice, gender aspects of the epidemic and population preferences regarding provision of information. Research Center Zerkalo, January 2011.

In addition to the work with youth, RC conducted trainings and workshops for people working in the area of HIV prevention and treatment – volunteers, school teachers, journalists, community leaders and health care providers (for the detailed breakdown see Annex 2). RC staff also took active part in organization of mass events devoted to the World AIDS Day, World Day against Drugs, World TB Day etc. in Khorog and assisted in broadcasting HIV-related video and radio spots.

Currently RC has no detailed sustainability plan, although RC staff mentioned that they will continue working and will look for the opportunities to raise funds, e.g. by conducting trainings and workshops for partners for a fee. Adding RC staff into the province AIDS Centre payroll is not feasible due to the extremely limited budget of health department in GBAO, as it was mentioned by the AIDS Centre Director.

Hayot newspaper

Publishing of Hayot has been started within the Pamir Against AIDS-2 project with the aim to increase awareness of general population on such public health issues as HIV, STI, TB, drug dependence, alcohol and tobacco. Newspaper circulation is 800 copies per month. Newspaper is distributed to all districts of the province (50-70 copies per district), also via university, province government and newspaper stand for free. Half of the materials are printed in Russian, half – in Tajik.

Interviews with key informants from province and district AIDS centres, TB centres and police revealed that Hayot is popular among these categories of readers, in particular many respondents mentioned importance of statistics on HIV and TB. Province TB Dispensary representative (Mr. Kandinov) indicated that TB centre staff use the newspaper for increasing awareness of their patients on HIV, TB and other important issues. Deputy Head of the Province Health Department mentioned that this is the only province-level newspaper in the country devoted to HIV and STIs-related issue and emphasized his interest in the newspaper.

I have little free time; however I always find time to read Hayot.

– Mr. N. Dodaliev, Deputy Head of GBAO Province Health Department.

NGO Marifatpocho and Bonuvon staff also mentioned popularity of the newspaper. Women – clients of Marifatpocho mentioned during the focus group their interest in the article about the NGO and sewing courses. Head of GBAO Women's Affair Committee also confirmed that newspaper is popular among the readers, however suggested to publish more articles relevant to the life in the province, to use simple language understandable by common people.

However there is lack of strategic approach to managing the newspaper. Focus and contents of each newspaper issue are identified together with the Province AIDS Center Director prior to each issue; no topic plan is prepared ahead. Part of the materials are prepared by the editor, some materials are downloaded from the Internet, in some cases articles are written by the AIDS Centre specialists or readers

Mr. Mardonov said that according to the readers' feedback and observations at the newsstand the newspaper is popular among the population. Also the editor involved other journalists to conduct expert assessment of the newspaper. Conclusion of the assessment was to make the materials less formal and more interesting for the common reader by adding personal stories. The newspaper editor attempted to make improvements in the newspaper, however the evaluation team had an impression that Director of the Province AIDS Center was satisfied with the situation and had no intention to make significant changes in the newspaper.

No systematic assessment of the newspaper popularity had been conducted by the RC either. Furthermore, though the newspaper is aimed at general population, no pre-testing of the materials in focus groups were conducted to assess whether the materials are interesting and understandable for the target audience.

Another obstacle is that the newspaper is not able to reach all target population. Several key informants in Darvoz indicated that they receive the newspaper irregularly. Participants of focus group in Vanj (Hukumat staff) and Ishkahsim (men from general population) noted that they never received Hayot newspaper.

Representatives of Aga-Khan Health Service (AKHS) mentioned during their meeting with the evaluation team that AKHS issues a quarterly bulletin "Madadi Sino" for primary health workers and that they are ready to cooperate with Hayot newspaper, including printing articles prepared by the Hayot editor.

As in case with the RC, no concrete sustainability plan for Hayot is developed. Existing funds will suffice to print the newspaper till February 2012. After that RC and AIDS Centre plan to mobilize funds from other sources. RC staff also is contemplating on selling the newspaper for a small fee and to sell advertising space to cover at least part of the costs.

In future the editor plans to expand circulation to 1,200 copies per month and to widen the range of the topics, including hepatitis, seasonal diseases (cold and flu in the winter, water-borne diseases in the summer), to make the language of the articles more simple.

In addition to 'Hayot' newspaper, population awareness is raised by other printed materials – brochures and leaflets, that according to the respondents are easy to read and understand. In

Ishkashim women explained the meaning of some phrases from the brochure, demonstrated understanding of confidentiality of information on people with HIV and STIs and importance of eradicating stigma towards PLHIV. Mass events devoted to the World AIDS Day, World Day against Drugs, World TB Day, as well as broadcasting video and audio clips on HIV that have broad audience of various age also play important role in increasing awareness of the general population.

At the same time survey by Zerkalo revealed that respondents had low level of perceived own risk of contracting HIV and STIs since they were confident of themselves. Survey respondents' demonstrated varied attitude towards condoms - 40% had positive attitude towards condoms and the same share of the respondents indicated their negative attitude. Majority of the respondents who reported that they did not use condoms explained this by their confidence in fidelity of their sexual partner. In Ishkashim FGD participants mentioned that condoms are popular among the customers of weekly bazaars arranged in the border areas ('*afghanbazaars*').

It should be noted that WSCs are not proactive in disseminating information on the range of services and the target group of the Centres - there are no announcements, booklets or leaflets on the WSC activities. Women learn about the Centers mostly during the informational sessions, from their friends and from local authorities. However this can be also related to the limited client uptake capacity of WSC, as they already covered much more clients than initially planned.

Outcome 4. Women are empowered to talk with their husbands about their sexual rights and establish peer-support sessions with governmental health units to engage their peers and neighbours in discussions on safe sex, norms related to gender inequalities and sexual discrimination.

During the discussions of issues related to empowering of women with respondents from different social and age strata (men and women), the following factors were frequently mentioned by the respondents as facilitating women empowerment:

- Sufficient and sustainable awareness of women on HIV and AIDS, STIs, TB and access to information;
- Economical wellbeing of women;
- Educational status of women;
- Women are motivated/able/confident enough to negotiate and protect their sexual rights with their husbands;
- Women enjoy support of local communities and authorities (favorable environment) regarding their equal status while discussing norms related to gender inequalities and sexual discrimination;
- Women have access to health care services;
- Women have access to justice in case their rights are violated.

According to the respondents, project districts vary by the ability of women to discuss their sexual rights in the family. Thus in Darvaz district government representatives mentioned that women are able to state their sexual rights and speak on equal terms with their husbands only in 15 families out of 100. In Vanj respondents from Government structures had no single opinion – several focus group participants responded that around 60% of women were able to protect their sexual rights, while couple of participants agreed that only 20-25% of women were capable of this. In Khorog and Ishkashim respondents indicated that share of emancipated women is significantly higher (around 90% and 80% respectively). In all districts respondents stressed that status of women in GBAO was historically higher compared to other provinces of the country, which also is conducive for respect of women's sexual rights in families; moreover, in recent years this trend is further improving, facilitated, among other factors, by the informational and educational activities of women-oriented projects.

Women are more active in social life than men. According to my observations mentality of people is changing. Young people prefer to marry more educated girls who can earn money. There are situations when a man does not dare to say something, while a woman will say whatever she thinks.

- The Militia Major Jumakhonov, Deputy Head of District Committee of Internal Affairs.

At the same time many government employees, in particular in Darvaz and Vanj, noted the difference between the people living in the areas close to the district center and those from remote villages – the latter, according to the respondents, are less prone to accept the ideas of gender equality as the whole, and women's sexual rights in particular, due to the lower educational level and limited economical independence of women, as well as restricted access to information.

Women in project districts were reported to exercise influence in family planning. Women respondents noted that having many children is not popular among younger generation. The number of children is decided mutually by spouses, and usually it is less than four children.

Fifty women took part in FGDs, 30 of them have husbands who migrated to Russia for work. When asked what measures they'll undertake when their husbands will return, some women openly described what they will do to protect their health, while the rest of women expressed their support to the speakers, sometimes very emotionally. .

It's been a year since my husband is in Russia. As soon as he back, I'll send him for testing if he comes without [an HIV] certificate If he drags it out, we'll use condoms. I'll be able to have it my way. And I was taught how to use a condom.

A woman, 30, an FGD participant from Andarob.

On other hand, focus of CSW on women and limited access of men to CSW services, in particular lack of counseling for men, family or couple counseling on sexual rights issues could have impeded accomplished of the stated outcome. Majority of the respondents also emphasized the need for active involvement of men to increase their awareness on HIV and STIs and make other related services available to them.

To influence her husband on sexual rights' issues, a woman should bring strong arguments, should be able to speak up, and she needs capacity for this. And it is better to educate wives and husbands together, than effectiveness will be much higher.

Azimdjon Shamsiddinov, Deputy Head of Vanj district Government.

In some cases FGD participants mentioned that husbands may express discontent if their wives demonstrate knowledge about HIV and STIs or bring condoms home. This is caused by the suspicions on wives' infidelity – according to them there is no need to use condoms with a regular sex partner (a husband). It should be noted that WSC mostly work with women who come to the center. WSC are not sufficiently pro-active in identifying the women's needs regarding protection of their sexual rights and in providing relevant assistance.

Process evaluation - to what extent assistance provided by AFEW addressed partners' needs, was timely, of adequate quality and flexible

From the very beginning of the project AFEW applied significant efforts to ensure smooth and effective implementation of the project. Strategy and activities planning workshop arranged at the beginning of the project attended by province and district authorities as well as existing HIV-service organizations helped to enlist support of key stakeholders and provided an opportunity to adjust project implementation strategy based on the lessons learned from the first phase of the project.

AFEW heavily invested into establishment of three women-support centers in project districts. Furniture and office equipment was procured and renovation of the premises was financed. After the centers were equipped, AFEW staff conducted series of trainings on various aspects of the project – financial and administrative management, program management, client recruitment, registration and documentation. In addition NGO staff took part in the training on client management in Khujand within another AFEW project, which allowed project implementers learning from the experience of other organizations working on client management for a long time. Project staff also took part in the 3-day training on effective HIV prevention among vulnerable women through gender-sensitive client management program.

Project was also supported by other printed and video informational and visibility materials – video reel, calendars, posters, brochures, t-shirts, caps. In several occasions respondents from various groups noted high quality of the materials and indicated that they helped to familiarize population with the project goal and activities.

In general NGO staff highly commended all support and assistance rendered by AFEW and noted that activities of women support centers would have been impossible without such support. Flexibility and openness of AFEW to the partners' needs was also stressed – an example of this was AFEW's decision to procure five sewing machines when NGO Marifatpocho suggested opening handcraft training courses for the center clients (during the focus group the centre clients expressed special gratitude to AFEW for supporting the sewing courses). Another example – coverage of newspaper design courses fee for the editor of “Hayot” newspaper. Project partners from Government structures also noted effective cooperation with AFEW within the “Pamir against AIDS-2” and other projects.

Respondents (NGO staff) highlighted that technical assistance and coaching provided by AFEW helped to build capacity of women support centers. Trainings were useful in learning about the system of client management, general HIV, STI and TB prevention, treatment and care issues. Centers implemented their activities and provided services to the clients based on the client management concept tailored to the Tajikistan context during several years of application in other projects. Project staff who participated in AFEW capacity building events noted that these activities helped them to better understand issues related to HIV and STI prevention and provide effective client management.

Evaluation team raised the issue of internal capacity building in NGOs. NGO “Khayrandesh” director reported that she regularly conducted training sessions for the project staff on HIV and STI prevention and client management. New social workers work under the supervision and guidance of an experienced staff member for 2-3 months before starting to work on their own. However since the project duration was significantly reduced, some needs in capacity building left unaddressed. For instance, no formal system of follow-up and assessing effectiveness of the internal training activities was established, which resulted in certain gaps in knowledge and skills of service providers. For instance, majority of social workers in the NGO were not familiar with the AFEW mini-training module and did not use it for their work. Some new staff members were not able to demonstrate advanced knowledge on such issues like condom use (e.g. social workers failed to answer the question why oil-based lubricants should not be used with condoms) or motivating vulnerable women for protecting their reproductive and sexual rights in the family. In general in all NGOs evaluation team noticed reluctance or unpreparedness of many social workers to raise sensitive topics, including demonstration of proper condom use, with clients.

AFEW provided support to the Hayot newspaper as well. Mr. Amonullo Mardonov, the editor of the newspaper “Hayot” and assistant of the RC manager, participated in the training for the journalists on media coverage of HIV-related issues. He noted that the most interesting component of the training was familiarization with the work of AIDS-service organizations in Dushanbe. In addition AFEW covered the cost of his participation in the newspaper layout design. When asked of further capacity building needs, Mr. Mardonov mentioned that he would like to participate in the training on how to make an interesting newspaper and to improve further newspaper layout skills in Corel Draw.

Constant coaching by AFEW helped to improve effectiveness of project activities and ensured development of implementing women NGOs as civil society organizations. Evaluation team did not plan to assess institutional development of NGOs, however at the first glance Khayrandesh and Bonuvon are visually better positioned as civil society organizations - all key information such as

mission of the NGO, organizational chart, list of WSC services, information on client management, clients feedback book, table of indicators etc. is posted and available to the visitors, thus contributing to the transparency of the organizations.

NGOs strived to share experience and provide mutual support to each other. Thus, Khayrandesh and Bonuvon together developed the idea of the stand demonstrating project indicators. Khayrandesh and Marifatpocho are planning to share experience on job skills training for women, such as sewing, knitting etc.

In their development NGOs face problems, common for the Tajik society nowadays. These are problems of bureaucracy, corruption, limitation of resources, in particular at local government level, poverty, gender and home-based violence etc. For example, key informants in Vanj noted that some employees of state body responsible for registration of citizens (so called ZAGS) procrastinate issuing of passports and other documents to WSC clients in order to extort bribes (though all official fees and fines were covered by WSC).

Sustainability of the organization is the key indicator of its maturity. NGOs took already some steps to raise additional funds and added income-generating activities to the list of services available for women. AFEW is also assisting NGOs in finding other sources of funding. It can be safely assumed that at this point all three NGOs have sufficient potential for further development based on the principles of social partnership with local authorities, other civil society organizations and local population in project districts.

CONCLUSIONS

- In general the evaluation demonstrated that AFEW greatly contributed to the development of the partners' capacity in the province and project districts necessary for accomplishing the project goal and objectives. In the respondents' opinion assistance and support provided by AFEW addressed their needs, was timely, flexible and of high quality.
- Capacity of the project partners' first of all WSC, had significantly improved during the project, in particular taking into account that WSCs were established from the scratch and NGOs had no or little experience in this area. A wide partner network ensuring clients' access to all services existing in the province was created in each project district. Staff of WSCs obtained knowledge and skills necessary for provision of basic services related to HIV, STIs and TB to the vulnerable women.
- Despite early termination of the project AFEW managed to implement all planned activities. Nevertheless, lack of time did not allow finalizing capacity building of the partners and ensuring sustainability of the activities, structures and organizations created and supported within the project.
- Some capacity building needs of WSC, in particular increasing effectiveness of the internal capacity building mechanisms and training WSC staff on providing sensitive services to

women, including supporting women on protecting their sexual rights, issues related to the organizational development of NGOs also need to be addressed.

- As the result of the project women NGOs received opportunity to influence HIV and TB-related programs in the province. First of all women NGOs became active members of the Province Coordination Council and were able to solve certain problems related to the project outcomes. In addition women NGOs established active cooperation with district authorities. However more active involvement of women NGOs to the planning and implementation of the programs in the province seems to be hampered by the lack of understanding of high-level province officials both the importance of HIV problem in the province and the role of province and district coordination mechanisms in addressing it.
- Qualitative data suggests that respondents may mix the concepts of HIV and STIs risk (men are under higher risk due to risky practices) and vulnerability to HIV and STI (women are more vulnerable due to biological and social reasons). At the same time respondents who participated in project activities (both women and men) demonstrated understanding that women are more vulnerable than men, so it can be assumed that the project may have contributed to the increased awareness of population regarding this issue. Anyway, quantitative survey should be conducted to obtain more accurate data on this indicator.
- Awareness of general population, including vulnerable women, on HIV and STIs in project districts is high, which is presumably the result of collective efforts of many partners.
- Ability of women to exercise their sexual rights depends on numerous factors, including cultural and historical context and socio-economical status of women. These factors may have caused difference in women's emancipation level in the project districts mentioned by the respondents. In this regard in the absence of quantitative data on this issue and taking into account that several partners and projects work with general population, including women, on HIV-related issues, it is hard to single out contribution of "Pamir against AIDS-2" project towards accomplishing this outcome.
- Limited involvement of men into the project activities might have decreased effectiveness of the project activities on empowering women to protect their sexual rights.
- Combination of the income generation activities with provision of information and services on HIV and other diseases may build women's confidence and independence, thus leading to higher status of women in families and improved ability to protect their own sexual rights.
- Resource Centre and Hayot newspaper have great potential in accomplishing overall goal of the project. Resource Centre has an opportunity to interact with various stakeholders - government structures, civil society organizations and general population. Hayot newspaper seems to be popular among certain sub-groups – health care providers and managers, local municipality staff. However their current goal – increasing awareness of population, including youth and vulnerable women, cannot be accomplished due to the limited resources to cover significant part of their target audience.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Ensuring sustainability of the project requires development of the exit strategy. In particular changes in the partners' focus and range of services should be considered to improve their competitiveness and attractiveness for potential donors for whom HIV prevention may not be the top priority. For instance, WSC may focus on broader goal of reducing social and economical vulnerability of women (which, among others, will involve protection of women's health, including prevention of HIV and STIs). Range of services in WSC can be expanded by adding or strengthening income generation component, job skills training, reproductive health and family planning information and services, preventing and addressing home-based violence, child care education, legal aid (including applications for pensions, alimonies, state allowances). In addition to expanding the range of potential donors, this will allow to increase popularity of WSC among women and assist the centers to achieve partial sustainability. This will require continuation of technical support and assistance from AFEW, including the following areas:
 - Strengthening fundraising skills;
 - Ensuring access to information on other donors that may support similar activities in Tajikistan.
 - Consider the opportunities for mobilizing community funds or attracting local government resources (however the latter is less feasible due to the scarceness of local budgets);
 - Involving Aga Khan Foundation, including AKHS, to provision support and assistance to WSCs (though staff salary cannot be covered by AKF).
- To ensure sustainability of the newspaper AFEW and Province AIDS Center should work with the potential donors and governmental bodies who may be interested in supporting the newsletter. An alternative may be to discontinue printing the newspaper and posting the HIV and TB-related materials in other publications, such as AKHS's "Madadi Sino" bulletin, the newspapers issued by the province and district governments. This approach will be less costly and will allow for targeting the materials for specific audiences. Anyway, the newspaper editor should have certain degree of freedom in identifying the newspaper contents and form of publication in order to make it interesting for the readers and thus ensure its sustainability. In addition, establishment of editorial board comprised of partners from Government and civil society should be considered, as it is difficult for one person to perform all functions effectively.
 - AFEW should identify ways for continuation of building capacity of women NGOs on prevention of HIV and STIs, in particular on internal capacity building mechanisms and work with sensitive matters. AFEW can conduct training for trainers for key WSC personnel and invite WSC staff to the trainings arranged within other projects or negotiate their participation in the trainings of other partners. Cooperation and experience sharing between women NGOs should be continued and strengthened, perhaps with external guidance from AFEW.
- To improve effectiveness of province and district coordination mechanisms long-term advocacy targeted at high-level officials to change their attitude to HIV-related problems and

to ensure meaningful participation of the state structures and active involvement of civil society organizations in the work of coordinating bodies.

- In future to overcome gender stereotypes and ensure favorable environment in families and community for protecting women's sexual rights WSC should provide HIV and STI-related services both to men and women and involve men into the project activities. Activities may include mini-sessions targeted at men, couple counseling for husbands and wives before departure to migration and after return, advocacy among community leaders to create favorable environment for protecting women's rights in the communities, informational campaigns addressing gender stereotypes, such as putting the blame \for home-based violence on women or perceiving women who bring the home-based violence matters to the law enforcement as disrepute and shameless persons.
- WSC should more actively work on establishing links between their beneficiaries and local government in order to be able to address the causes of the problems, not only the consequences. WSC should continue acting as intermediaries between the local government and vulnerable women and represent the latter in the relevant structures. WSC should constantly inform local government, international and local organizations about typical problems and needs of vulnerable women and advocate for addressing them. For instance, WSC may cooperate with Women's Affair Committees on ensuring women's access to presidential grants for entrepreneurial activities. Another potential area is advocacy among the state structures of waiving fines for restoring the lost documents for the most vulnerable populations, including women living in poverty.
- For more effective use of limited resources Resource Centre should change its focus from increasing awareness of youth to strengthening capacity of professional taskforce (volunteers, peer educators, school teachers etc.) who in turn will work with youth, thus ensuring much larger coverage than RC staff can achieve alone. In addition to education of volunteers and trainers RC should continue its leading role in advocacy campaigns in the province.
- In addition to the pre- and post-tests RC should assess longer term outcomes of their activities, possibly by conducting rapid surveys using simple methodology.
- It is advisable to redesign Hayot newspaper strategy. One of the options is to narrow its focus on decision makers (first of all province and district authorities) so the newspaper can act as the advocacy tool to reduce stigma and discrimination towards at-risk populations and catalyze support for HIV and TB-related public health interventions (e.g. methadone therapy, that remains a controversial topic) in the province. In addition newspaper may aim at activists working with general population (community educators, volunteers, health care providers) to provide them with information and tools necessary for the work with general population. If Hayot newspaper continues focusing on general population, then in order to have impact on population awareness its circulation volume should be significantly increased to cover significant part of the population, and the ways disseminating the newspaper to the remote mountainous areas should be identified. Also it would be important to ensure that materials are relevant to the general population, interesting and understandable. However this strategy will require much more resources and there is the risk that it will duplicate other existing channels on providing information to the population (such as brochures and the network of community educators). Regardless of what strategy will be chosen, more proactive and

systematic feedback from the newspaper readers should be collected. This may include focus groups with potential readers, pre-testing of the materials, rapid surveys etc. WSC should also more actively collaborate with the newspaper by submitting articles containing success stories, examples of best practices as well as raising the most important problems requiring government or civil society interventions.

- As recommended by the Director of the Province AIDS Center, effectiveness of the awareness raising activities among the population can be improved by wider use of video and audio materials in addition to the printed media (all materials should be pre-tested among the target audience).

ANNEXES

Annex 1. Schedule of meetings, FGDs and interviews

Partner/respondent	Method
November 18, Khujand	
Mr. Mulloabdol Abdulloev, Head of Province AIDS Center	Interview
November 28, Darvaz district	
Ms. Surayo Shoeva, Deputy Head of District Government	Interview
Ms. Gulshan Abdrazykova, Head of District WAC	Interview
Mr. Shuhrat Shokirov, Director of the District AIDS Center	Interview
Mr. Amindjon Djumakhonov, Deputy Head of District Internal Affairs Department	Interview
Ms. Marifat Negmatova, Head of WSC 'Marifatpocho', social workers	Group interview
Women – clients of WSC	FGD
Men – employees of district government	FGD
November 29, Vanj district	
Mr. Azimdjon Shamsiddinov, Deputy Head of Vanj District Government	Interview
Ms. Mosharif Khomusheva, Head of District WAC	Interview
Ms. Malikabonu Gharibova, Head of District TB Center	Interview
Ms. Madina Alimahmadova, Director of NGO Bonuvon, staff of WSC	Group interview
Women – clients of WSC	FGD
Men – employees of district government	FGD
November 30, Khorog town	
Mr. Nurali Dodaliev, Deputy Head of the Province Health Department	Interview

Ms. Guldarbog Sadonshoeva and Ms. Dilafruz Shakarmamadova, AKHS	Interview
Mr. Saodatkadam Davlatkadamov, Deputy Head of Province AIDS Center	Interview
Mr. Kandinov Kholiknazar, Deputy Head of Province TB Dispensary	Interview
Ms. Sharifa Khudoyorova, Manager of the Resource Center, Province AIDS Center	Interview
Mr. Amon Mardonov, Editor of the newspaper Hayot	Interview
Ms. Mehri Ghulomshoeva, Head of Province WAC	Interview

Partner/respondent	Method
December 1, Ishkashim district	
Ms. Sayora Zamirova, Deputy Head of Ishkashim District Government	Interview
Ms. Gulshan Mulloeva, Head of District WAC	Interview
Mr. Usmon Payshaev, Head of District Internal Affairs Department	Interview
Mr. Shirinbek Davlatmamadov, Physician of the Friendly Cabinets (for STI treatment among the migrants)	Interview
Mr. Oshur Gulmirov, Director of NGO Rushdi Ishkoshim	Interview
Ms. Nargis Khushkadamova, Director of NGO Khayrandesh, staff of WSC (social workers and accountant)	Interview
Representatives of vulnerable women (Andarob Jamoat)	FGD
Representatives of men from general population (Andarob Jamoat)	FGD

Annex 2. Service provision indicators of the Women Support Centers

Bonuvon (Vanj)	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Number of clients	200	337	537
Number of clients in the program	170	246	416
Number of clients received HIV testing and counseling	92	157	249
Number of clients tested for TB	27	52	79
Number of clients tested for STI	47	79	126
Number of clients received informational materials	250	733	983
Total number of all service provision episodes	652	1376	2028
Total number of direct service provision episodes	320	881	1201

Khayrandesh	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Number of clients	285	391	676
Number of clients in the program	196	302	498

Number of clients received HIV testing and counseling	67	309	376
Number of clients tested for TB	36	60	96
Number of clients tested for STI	59	70	129
Number of clients received informational materials	546	904	1450
Total number of all service provision episodes	640	1509	2149
Total number of direct service provision episodes	529	1109	1638

Marifatpocho	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Number of clients	233	964	1197
Number of clients in the program	45	129	174
Number of clients received HIV testing and counseling	32	233	265
Number of clients tested for TB	26	367	393
Number of clients tested for STI	52	233	285
Number of clients received informational materials	455	1320	1775
Total number of all service provision episodes	759	2986	3745
Total number of direct service provision episodes	427	1858	2285

Annex 3. Regional Training and Resource Centre statistic report (Years I- II)

Year 1

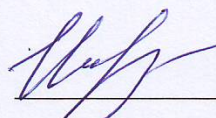
Event	Male	Female	Total
Mini-sessions for Khorog high school students on HIV and STIs	123	162	285
Training for Media workers on covering HIV issues	9	9	18
Training for volunteers from medical college on HIV prevention and vulnerability of women towards HIV	3	17	20
Training for heads and activists from women's community councils of Khorog and seven GBAO districts on HIV prevention, vulnerability of women towards HIV, stigma and discrimination of PLHIV	1	13	14
Total	136	201	337

Year 2

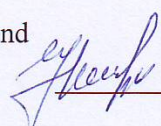
Event	Total	Male	Female
Training for health care providers on stigma and discrimination of PLHIV	20	6	14
One-day training for secondary school teachers on the need to conduct HIV education for the high school students	20	2	18

5 mini-sessions for the university students on HIV-related myths	152	56	96
One-day training for volunteers from the university on healthy lifestyle	12	4	8
6 mini-sessions for military from Khorog	106	97	9
6 mini-sessions for the university students on HIV-related myths	104	32	72
6 mini-sessions for school students in summer camp	175	92	83
One mini-sessions for the university students and two mini-session for the medical college students on HIV-related myths	88	21	67
Total	677	310	367

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 23 Dec 2011 Ibragimov U.
Date, signature

Najiba Shirinbekova,
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Prosperity"

 23.12.2011 Shirinbekova N.
Date, signature