



## A day in the life of a rural woman

**PUBLICATION PRODUCED BY**

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### “Rural Women's Economic Empowerment in the Kyrgyz Republic”

This brochure provides insights into the everyday lives of women living in the rural areas of Kyrgyzstan, who despite the often harsh and drab realities of rural life continue to work heroically hard to improve their lives as well as those of others around them. Adopting a deliberately narrative approach, the brochure draws together stories of remarkably strong and yet at the same time soft women, whose bravery and confidence are inspirational to women and men alike and can serve as proof of change for the better.

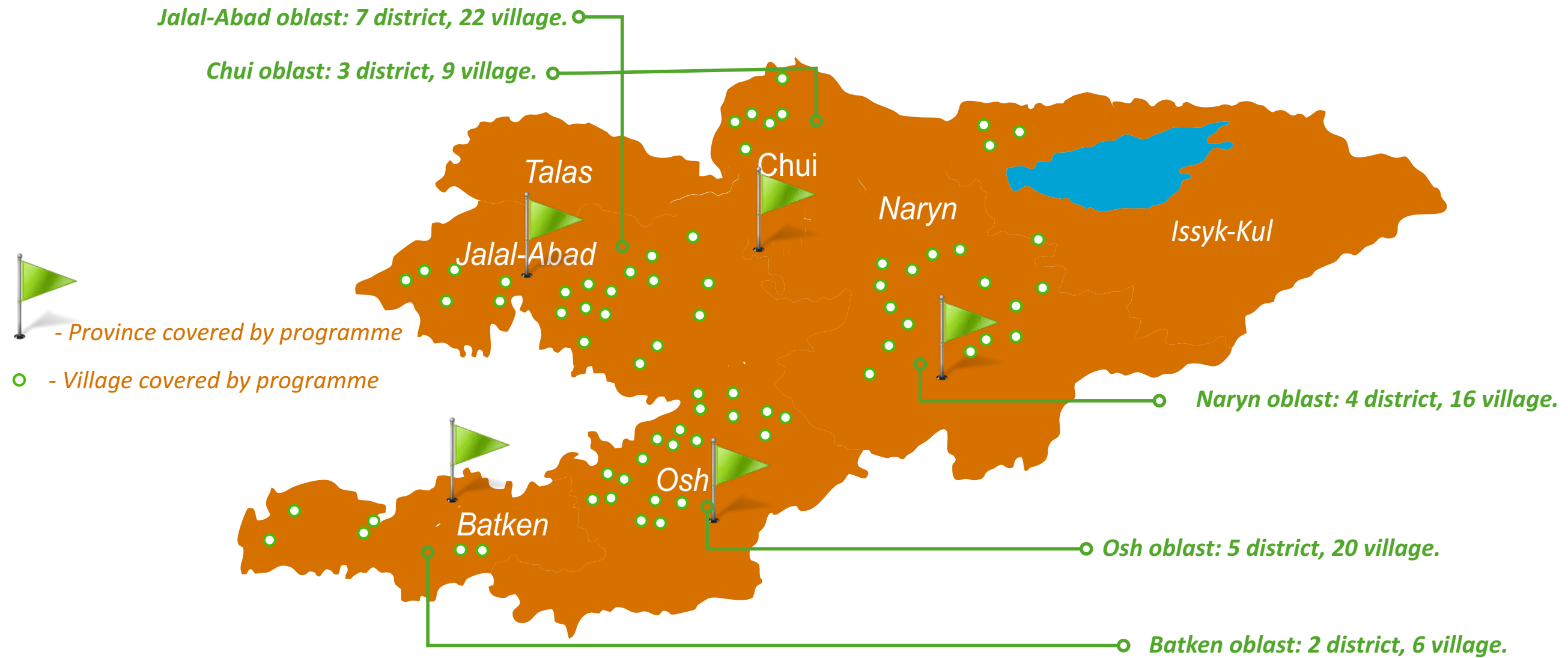
The narratives were collected during the months of March and April in Naryn oblast, when the weather was still unpredictable and snow, heavy rainfall and winds were likely. Despite the gloomy weather conditions, women in Naryn remain extremely positive. Their genuine joy and the heart-warming smiles on their faces are encouragement to live in the present with enthusiasm and look forward to the future with confidence.

The brochure features some of the rural women and men who participated in the Joint Programme on Acceleration of the Progress towards Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Kyrgyzstan (RWEE). This is a joint global initiative of UN Women, Food and Agriculture Organization, International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the World Food Programme, which has been running in Kyrgyzstan since November 2014. The programme's overall objective is to secure rural women's livelihoods and rights in the context of sustainable development. It builds on the comparative advantage of the four UN agencies to provide a multidimensional response to the multiple challenges faced by rural women and girls in Kyrgyzstan, and aims to achieve the following outcomes: improved food and nutrition security, increased incomes to sustain livelihoods, enhanced participation and leadership of women in decision-making, and a more gender-responsive policy environment conducive to economic empowerment of rural women. By the end of 2016 the Joint Programme RWEE was operating across 73 villages in five oblasts, and had directly benefitted 3,150 rural residents. An estimated further 8,500 people have benefitted indirectly.



Map of target villages covered by Rural Women's

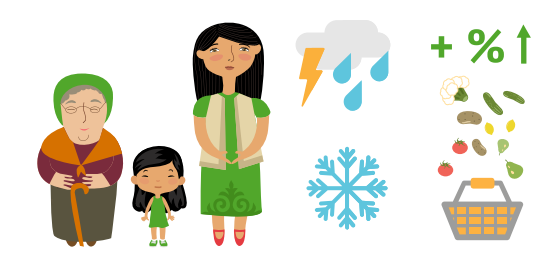
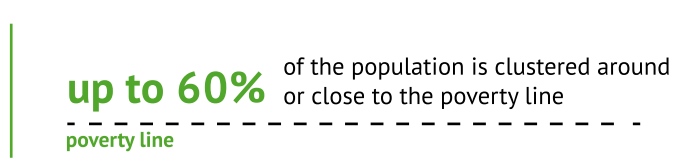
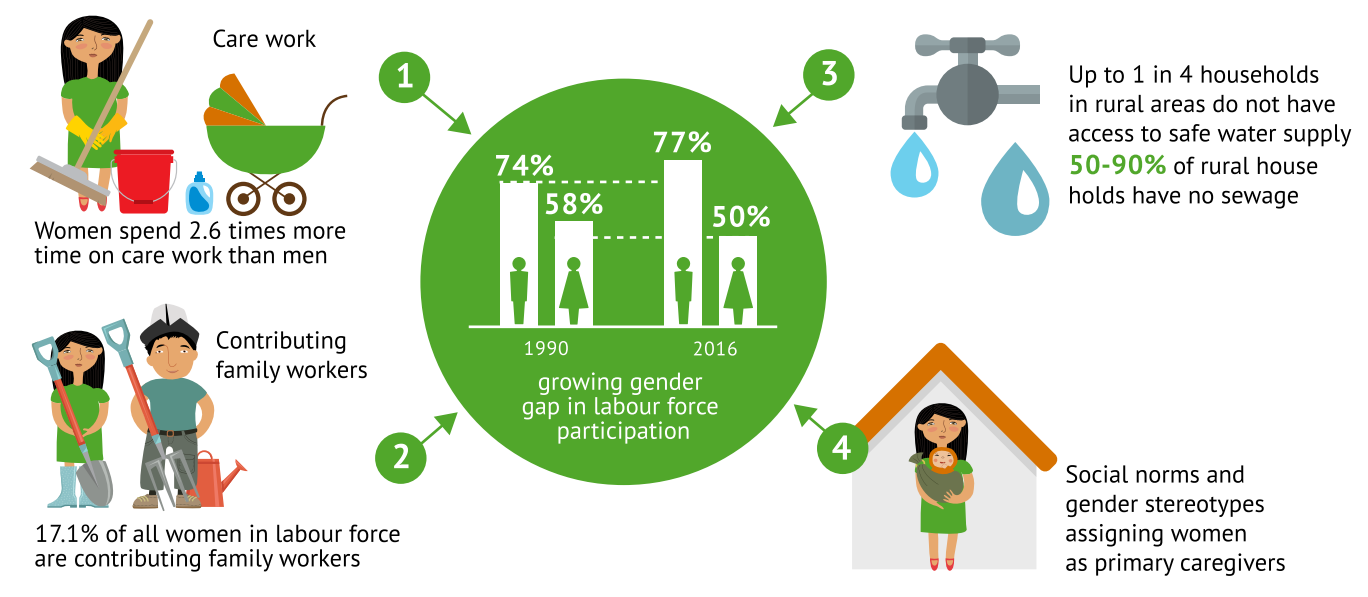
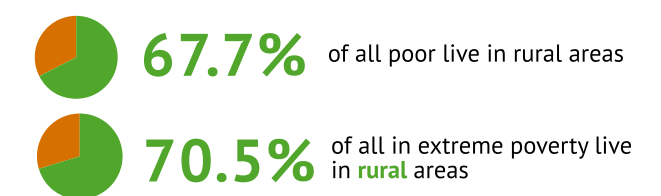
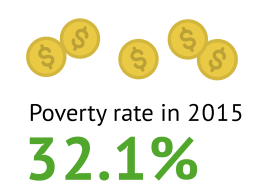
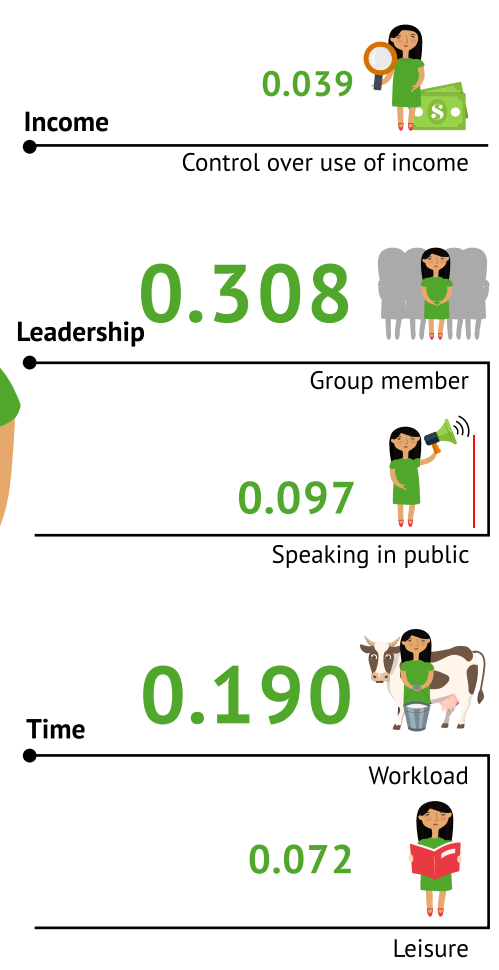
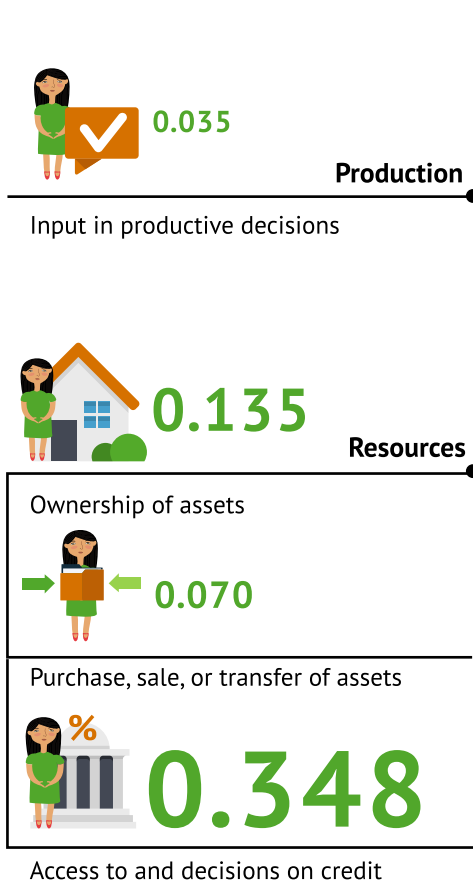
Economic Empowerment Programme



# RURAL WOMEN AND GIRLS IN KYRGYZSTAN



In 2015 rural women have reported\* the rates of disempowerment in the following dimensions:



\* According to Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index. USAID/Kyrgyz Republic Economic Growth Project: Zone of Influence Baseline Report. September 2015



**Gulzada Kermakunova**

28 March, 2017, Kyzyl –Tuu village, At-Bashy district



*If a woman has the necessary knowledge and skills and works hard, she becomes more confident in herself and her abilities. This helps her to get more involved in income-generating activities and to become independent both within her family and the community.*

*It is the cattle-breeding season. Every day I go and turn the cattle out, feed the lambs, look after the horses and foals. Then I go and heat the house. To do this, I first need to clean the ashes out of the woodstove and then fetch wood. Aside from these tasks, I need to prepare meals for my family. My son goes to school, and I oversee his studies as well as taking care of his school clothes. I try to finish all my household tasks by lunchtime so I can have my afternoon for felt making. Together with other village women, I participate in felt festivals during which we sell our felt carpets. This motivates us to work harder. With the money made on the sale of carpets, we've bought more cattle. Now I think I can say with confidence that our lives are getting better and better.*



## A day in the life of a rural woman



**Gulzada continues to grasp every opportunity to learn and broaden her knowledge. Everyone was amazed when she came to the training organised by UN Women with her one-month-old baby in her arms.**

Gulzada is 28 years old, married and has two young children. Despite her overwhelming care and domestic responsibilities, she is in charge of small business activities that employ 25 women. Although Gulzada got married young, she had always wanted to study. As a result of her unshakable thirst for knowledge, she holds both bachelor's and master's degrees.

Confident in her knowledge and abilities, Gulzada now helps to provide not only for her family but also for her fellow village women. She has formed a women's group to make traditional Kyrgyz felt carpets for sale. She quickly mastered social media applications such as Instagram and WhatsApp in order to promote carpet sales. As a result, her carpets have been sold not only within Kyrgyzstan but abroad. She is currently searching for other ways to improve her sales effectiveness.





**Nurzhan Toktomambetova**

*28 March 2017, Ak-Zhar village, At-Bashy district.*



*I like going to work. While meeting, and talking to my colleagues, I achieve many things. When I come home, I do household chores together with my family. I think it is much easier for a woman when all the family members do household chores together. It's inevitably harder when a woman has to do all the household chores by herself.*

*I wake up at 6:30 am and prepare breakfast for my family. At 7 am we all sit down for breakfast during which we usually discuss things to be done during the day. At 8 am I go to work. When I come home at 4 pm, I start preparing dinner. After we finish our dinner, we all sit in our living room to watch TV and talk about our days. Once the children go to bed, my husband and I talk about our dreams and plans for the future. We both dream about our children getting a better education, renovating our house and living happily together. We go to bed at around 11 pm. The next day follows almost exactly the same pattern.*





Recently, for instance, she built a water-supply system to provide safe and clean water to her home. Nurzhan and her fellow village women now plan to extend their business further to the district level.

An economist by training, Nuzhan is 33 years old, married and has three children. She is extremely smart and very determined, and when she sets herself a goal, she has what it takes to achieve it. When she could not find a job as an economist in her village, she opened her own small sewing shop, where, along with three fellow residents, she produces clothes that are in demand locally. The shop was equipped with sewing machines thanks to the Rural Women's Economic Empowerment programme. In this way, she has increased her income considerably and is now in the process of renovating her house.







**Nuriya Temirbek kyzy**

28 March 2017, Ak-Zhar village, At-Bashy district



*I have always wanted to work and reach out to people who are in need. The Rural Women's Economic Empowerment Programme has given me this opportunity. Now I actively work with my fellow villagers on building a collaborative network for the common good, and I greatly enjoy it.*

*Each day is different for me. I usually wake up very early, and the first thing I do in the morning is to heat the house. On my days off from work, I help my husband to turn out the cattle and feed them. Then I prepare breakfast and awaken my children. We sit down to breakfast together. When the children leave for school, I start cleaning the house and cooking the next meal. As I finish work around the house, it gets dark and I start preparing dinner. After dinner, I sit with my children and help them with their homework. Afterwards, I bake bread. On my working days, I visit other villages where I provide consultations on various issues. I also often visit Naryn and Bishkek for work.*



## A day in the life of a rural woman



She believes that women's active participation in political life and public decision-making is important for advancing social change, and thus thinks that more women must be encouraged to step forward and be politically active.

Nuriya is 39 years old, married and has three children. She is very active and energetic, and ready to put everything into community work. As a result, she is enthusiastically involved in various community improvement activities aimed at benefiting her fellow villagers. She is also involved in a women's group that produces and sells household goods made from felt, thus improving the financial well-being of herself and those of other women involved in the enterprise. In addition, Nuriya is also very politically active and has impressive credentials. In the elections held on 11 December 2016, she was elected to the local council.





**Zhipariza Nurlanbek kyzy**

*29 March 2017, Kara-Tal village, At-Bashy district, Naryn oblast*



*Frankly speaking, I do not understand why apparently only men can repair cell phones? Why cannot women do it? I think it does not matter if you are a man or a woman; as long as you have the right skills and equipment, you can repair anything.*

*I live with my elder brother. After breakfast, I go to school. After school, I help my brother to look after the cattle. Then I do my homework.*

*Afterwards, I clean the house and milk the cows.*

*With the help of women activists, I learned to fix cell phones. Within the framework of the Rural Women's Economic Empowerment Programme, I received special equipment to repair broken cell phones. I have just recently set up my own small repair business. Today, for example, I've fixed two cell phones for my fellow villagers and they were very grateful. Villagers no longer need to travel to the district centre to get their phones repaired. Now I can do it, and I am so happy about it!*



## A day in the life of a rural woman



Zhipariza is 17 years old. Despite her young age, she possesses a great sense of responsibility, determination and perseverance.

She is a well-behaved and humble girl who works hard and does a thorough job, whatever it is she is doing. She diligently attended the training organised by UN Women. Thanks to her hard work and steely determination, she has now started her own small business. Sitting in her tiny office, she is further honing her skills. On the one hand, providing a cell phone repair service is a significant contribution to her community; on the other, she is improving her own livelihood. Both the RWEE programme experts and women activists have great faith in Zhipariza's future.





**Idris Itigulov**

*30 March 2017, Jerge-Tal village, Ak-Talaa district, Naryn oblast*



*Our village is very remote. The climate is harsh. Spring comes here only at the end of April. Consequently, it is really difficult to carry out household chores and to look after the cattle. Despite this situation, it is still women who bear the greater burden of household responsibilities.*

*Women make up 60% of our village population. During the crisis in the 1990s, it was women who shouldered the greater burden of financial responsibility within households. Fortunately, the situation has improved since then. As a village head, I do my best to support women in all their endeavours. Many young women in our village seek paid jobs, but unfortunately, there are not many employment opportunities here. Thus, I try to attract donors to support women's initiatives, and so provide them with some jobs. I greatly support women's active participation in political life and public decision-making. I believe that we can achieve true social and economic development changes only when the interests of every woman are taken into account.*





**Idris has a strong sense of responsibility and strives hard to do his best to improve livelihoods in his village. Despite his demanding formal duties as a village head, he manages to find time to oversee several community improvement activities that involve 15 women from his village.**

Idris lives in a remote village, situated 500 km from the town of Naryn. Poorly maintained roads make it particularly difficult to reach the village. The weak mobile signal is another problem that often troubles the residents of Jerge-Taal. When the RWEE programme film crew went to the village to take a photo of Idris, they failed to reach him by phone. Instead, they went into the centre of the village and asked people on the street if they could tell them Idris's home address. In response, they were told: "Oh, he's just been here. Keep walking along the street and you will certainly see him". The film crew found him talking to other villagers. After the photos had been taken, Idris walked with the film crew around the village to introduce them to every village resident.

He can be genuinely admired for his true dedication and commitment to promoting livelihood opportunities for everyone in his village, particularly those who are in most need. These are without a doubt the key qualities that every good village head should possess.





**Ainura Turdalieva**

*31 March 2017, Togolok-Moldo village, Ak-Talaa district, Naryn oblast*



*Through the «Women's Voice» newspaper, we make every effort to encourage women's active participation in political decision making. We also promote awareness of gender-based discrimination among women themselves. If we want to achieve true and sustainable social change, we need to increase the representation of women on decision-making bodies at all levels.*

*Without the equal representation of women in elected councils, the interests and concerns that arise from women's experiences will never be addressed.*

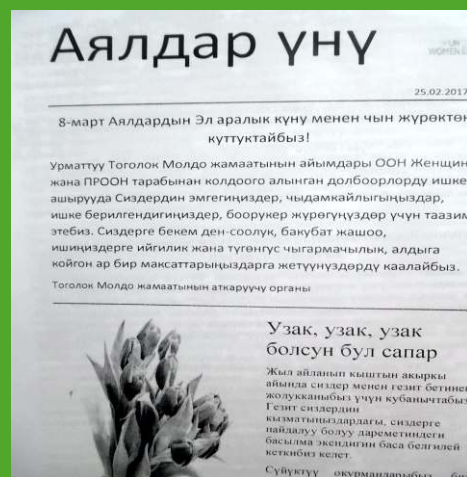
*It is my belief that, if we want changes, we need to bring about those changes ourselves. No one can do it for us. Unfortunately, many women don't realise this, and so don't always vote for those few women candidates who are standing! It's truly saddening that we women can, and often do, undermine our own empowerment. We need to stand together and empower and uplift one another! We seek out positive and helpful information on household and farming issues, and work to publicise them through "Women's Voice". For instance, in our next edition our readers will be introduced to various techniques of planting. For now, our newspaper is only distributed in our village. But we are working towards extending distribution to the district level.*

## A day in the life of a rural woman



Since 2014, she has been in charge of the “Togolok Moldo” women's association which incorporates a number of different sections, namely: bakery, sewing, cattle breeding, growing crops, kurut production, etc. Besides working with the 65 women who make up this association, Ainura also works as a GALS (Gender Action Learning System) champion and trainer for SWOT analysis and project proposal writing. When asked how she juggles family life and such active and intense community work, she says she tries to manage her energy well and make every minute count.

Ainura is 41 years old, married and has four children. Ainura is a woman of many talents and achievements, as well as limitless inspiration. She works as an English language teacher, and was one of the first from Kyrgyzstan to attend training in the US. On her return home, she set up a well-equipped 'English Corner' where children from her village can expand their English language skills as well as prepare to apply to university. Not only is she an experienced and highly dedicated teacher but she is also passionate about community improvement and engagement. She delights in seeing people, especially women, succeed and enjoy the benefits of their hard work without depending on anyone else.







**“Kyzgaldak” Self-Help Group (SHG)**

*4 April 2017, Eki-Naryn village, Naryn district, Naryn oblast*



Although it was the end of April, it was cold as mid-winter. By the time we reached the village, there was fresh snow everywhere and it was still falling, swirling in what seemed like a strong wind mixed with rain. It was slippery and muddy everywhere. However, after smelling the lovely aroma of freshly baked bread and seeing women working with warm smiles on their faces in the cosy little bakery, we quickly felt revived and full of energy.

Prior to the Rural Women's Economic Empowerment programme, the bakery did not exist, these women did not have full-time paid jobs, and it was hard for them to provide for their families. The climate conditions are harsh in Eki-Naryn village, few houses have running water and most people have to walk 1-2 km to fetch water, which they carry in heavy pots and buckets. On top of this, Eki-Naryn is located at about 40 km from Naryn, the roads leading to and within the village are in poor condition, and there is no public transport to/from Naryn. Residents of Eki-Naryn therefore have limited ability to get to the city. In this situation, the development of private entrepreneurship and small businesses here is essential.





**Ainura Osmonova**

4 April 2017, Eki-Naryn village, Naryn district, Naryn oblast



*We've learned a lot through participating in trainings and then working here. We come here to work once a day. People are buying our bread, and they are satisfied with it.*





**Jyldyzkan Jumashukurova**

4 April 2017, Eki-Naryn village, Naryn district, Naryn oblast



*At first, everyone was very curious about the bakery, asking «Who buys bread in a village?», but they don't ask anymore. We don't only bake bread, but also different kinds of pastry and muffins. These are very popular among school children. As prices are affordable, most children come and buy something before or after school. Sometimes, when they don't have money, we just lend to them, with their parents' permission. Kids are kids, they get hungry quickly. Before, such sweet pastry had to come from Naryn and was usually not fresh.*





**Baktygul Kasymakunova**

4 April 2017, Eki-Naryn village, Naryn district, Naryn oblast



*Everyone should have equal opportunities to find decent work and have economic security. I believe this is essential for improving rural livelihoods for everyone. We need to grasp every opportunity to improve our lives and to give all our children, both sons and daughters, a better education.*





**Boldukan Isaeva**

4 April 2017, Eki-Naryn village, Naryn district, Naryn oblast



*Just recently, my husband and I attended a local council meeting. In the course of the meeting my husband expressed his opinion on a certain issue and it was all fine. But when I wanted to say something, the speaker quickly stopped me, saying, «Only one family member is allowed to say something here. » This made me upset so I had to reply, «I know my rights, and I came here to voice my opinion. » It is upsetting that despite the long promulgation of equal rights, women are still considered inferior to men. Nonetheless, I believe we have to redouble our efforts to participate in the decision-making process at all levels.*

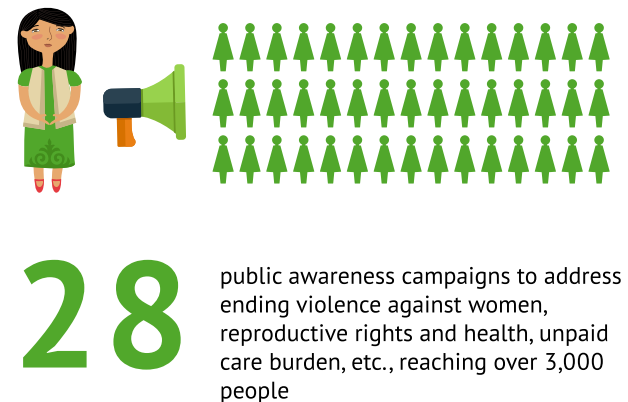
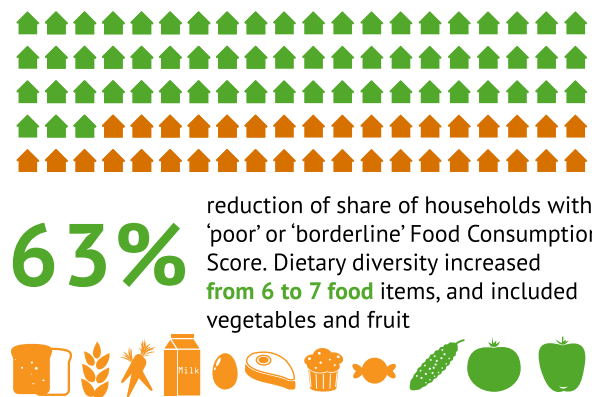
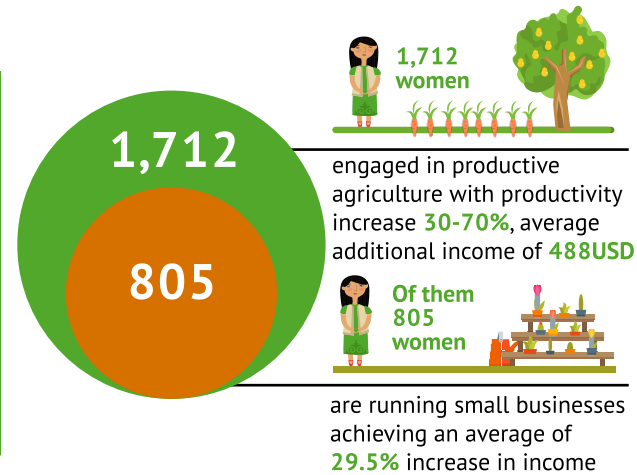


# Key Results

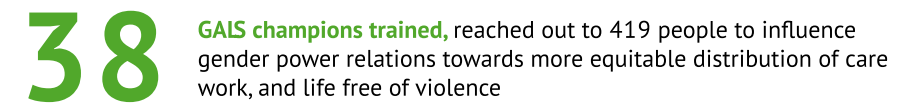
## Outcome 1: Rural women have increased income secured, better livelihoods and food security



provide services to 1,500 women-members: inputs, extension, revolving capital, information, joint marketing



## Outcome 2: Rural women have mastered leadership skills and actively participate in local development planning and service provision



## Outcome 3: A more gender-sensitive policy environment for economic empowerment of rural women

- 1 Improvements in the law on social insurance tariffs
- 2 Lobbying for changes in two laws to address domestic violence and child marriage



- 3 Gender analysis of national agricultural strategies
- 4 Gender and SDGs in agricultural sector



**Sanabar Karataeva**

24 April 2017, Apshyr-Ata village, Nookat district, Osh oblast



*I always try to encourage women. I am against those traditional norms and values that view women as domestic workers only. I am myself actively engaged in many public activities such as construction, organisation of cultural and sporting events, and other community improvement activities.*

*I get up early in order to be able to exercise a little bit and eat breakfast, and then leave for work at 7 am. I come to school much earlier than others to so that I can greet both teachers and children. I am very busy with teaching and managing general school issues until lunchtime. In the afternoon, I visit and oversee women's groups working on the farms. In the evening and during the weekends I am mostly busy at home.*



## A day in the life of a rural woman



Sanabar was elected to chair a cooperative, which unites all women in self-help groups supported by UN joint programme. There are 375 women – members of the cooperative. Sanabar is 48 years old, a mother of three children. She leads several community development initiatives involving more than 30 women in her village.

Currently, within the framework of the Rural Women's Economic Empowerment Programme, Sanabar leads over than 30 women in her village. Sanabar actively uses her public position to support women's interests at the local level. Apart from her work as a school director, Sanabar has been actively involved in various community improvement initiatives to support children and women in her village. She collaborates with international donor organizations, one of them is the ADB supported Early Childhood Development Project. With this project Sanabar has contributed to the launch and operation of several kindergartens. Sanabar works closely with the local self-government and promotes the priorities of rural women with them.







**Samargul Aidaralieva**

20 April 2017, Kyzyl-Ai Village, Bazar-Korgon District, Jalal-Abad Province



*Training courses organised within the UN joint programme have had a significant impact on women in our village. They have not only helped women to improve their knowledge, skills and professional capacity, but have also raised their self-esteem and confidence in their abilities. Women have become aware of their rights and their voices are now heard when they speak about them. As a result, they are better able to influence decision-making processes at all levels.*

*I myself attended all the training sessions. The knowledge we gained in those sessions helped to get our voice heard in the national parliament (Jogorku Kenesh). For instance, social security payments per one hectare of land last year stood at 469 KGS (equivalent to 7 US dollars). Before that, it was 428 KGS (6.4 US dollars). Through our active lobbying for change, it has been decreased to 414 KGS (6.2 US dollars) this year. I have also participated in public hearings on pension schemes and retirement benefits for rural women. In general, I have long been interested in politics, and the need to promote and fight for women's rights and interests. Unfortunately, rural women face greater constraints in participating in local elections and attaining decision-making positions. These include: lack of resources, harmful social norms and gender stereotypes that limit women's opportunities with regard to political decision-making. If we want to increase women's political participation and representation, I think we first need to address those invisible but powerful and pervasive values and attitudes which prevent women from achieving their full potential.*





Samargul is 52 years old and has three children and one grandchild. Samargul has worked for several regional newspapers for almost 25 years. Largely due to her professional background, she has been actively engaged in various public and social activities directed towards community improvement. One of the recent activities she has been in charge of was putting gravel down on village streets. Within the RWEE joint programme, Samargul leads the local women's association and two women's groups.

Samargul is a Gender Action Learning System (GALS) champion. Similarly to other GALS champions, she does not only train on GALS methodologies but also oversees how these methodologies are put into practice. Samargul notes that women who have participated in GALS training continue sharing their knowledge and experience with their husbands and other family members.

Samargul leads two women's groups: one is focused on handicraft production, and the other on commercial bread baking. Under Samargul's leadership both groups have been working successfully and providing group members with a stable income. While walking around the village, Samargul always finds time to explain to the people she meets in the streets the concept of the 'Income Increase Tree'.





**Mahabat Botasheva**

*23 April 2017, Blagoveshenka village, Suzak district, Jalal-Abad oblast*



*I believe it is wrong to build work relationships with people based on their age, ethnicity, gender and educational background. For me, the most important factor is a person's motivation as well as their attitude towards work. As long as someone is truly motivated to work hard and to make a productive contribution to self-development, family and community, it doesn't matter if that person is a woman or a man, old or young, or whether they have a university degree or not.*

*I get up at around 5 am, then go and take care of my flowers and walk around the kindergarten to ensure everything is fine there. Afterwards, I come home, write down my work and family related plans for the day, and then start preparing to go to work. There are so many things to do within a day. The work in the village is endless. I spend at least 1,5 hours taking care of the flowers alone. Nonetheless, I enjoy everything I do.*



## A day in the life of a rural woman



Mahabat is 51 years old, and a single mother of 7 children, the eldest of whom is 16 and the youngest just 2 years old. Despite her overwhelming family responsibilities, she is extremely positive, compassionate and always willing to lend a helping hand.

Mahabat is a well-respected and active member of her village. Within the framework of the Rural Women's Economic Empowerment Programme, she oversees the work of 30 women. Apart from this, Mahabat is responsible for the day-to-day operation of a kindergarten she founded herself a few years ago. Everything within and around the kindergarten, starting from the beautiful flowers around the building to the carefully picked toys and posters inside the rooms, radiates love for every child that attends it.





**Kenjagul Nurmamat kyzy**

22 April 2017, Jany-Dyikan village, Suzak district, Jalal-Abad oblast



*Within the framework of the Rural Women's Economic Empowerment Programme, we make and sell home-bottled fruits and vegetables. As all our products are homegrown and ecologically clean, they are very popular with local people and profitable as a result.*

*At around 7 am I give breakfast to my grandchildren and then send them to school. Afterwards, I work around the house and yard – cleaning inside, doing the laundry, baking bread, feeding and watering the cattle and chicken, and many other endless tasks. I also run a small grocery shop. When I get tired, my daughter-in-law does the work; and when she gets tired, I do the work. Even then the work around the house seems never ending. Nonetheless, I keep working as much as I can and never complain.*





She is very considerate, attentive and caring to every woman in her group, and does her best to help, motivate and guide all of them. This in turn encourages every member of the group to be proactive and committed to quality, and to strive for improvement in order to achieve the best possible results.

Kenjegul is 51 years old, with 3 children and 4 grandchildren. Within the framework of the Rural Women's Economic Empowerment Programme, she leads the women's canned food manufacturing business activity group.

The yard of Kenjegul's home feels like a crowded but well organised farm: on one side, there is a food processing unit and on the other side a kitchen, with flowers and trees planted in between them and chickens roaming free. These all keep Kenjegul and her daughter-in-law constantly busy.

When the programme crew arrived at her home she was very welcoming and excitedly showed them around her house and yard. While they were taking pictures of her holding glass jars of preserved food she was positively beaming with pleasure.





**Aiturgan Kochorova**

21 April 2017, Kyzyl Ai village, Bazar-Korgon district, Jalal-Abad oblast



*I am currently completing an article about women who work as cleaners. The title of the article is «2500 soms», as this is the exact salary these women get paid for their tough work. I think it is important to have a good and attractive title to get readers' attention.*

*My parents support my journalistic endeavours. Of course, I help my parents in doing work around the house and looking after my younger siblings; however, I don't like staying at home all the time. Instead, I like meeting people, talking with them, listening to their different stories, and then writing about them. In my articles, I usually write about various challenges faced by people living in rural areas. Thereby, I hope to attract more public attention and mobilise efforts to find solutions to those challenges. For now, we post all our articles on different social media networking sites. We are currently working on extending our reach to a broader audience of people across the country. The voices of rural areas often go unheard as the majority of public attention is focused on cities, and I think it is unfair, especially if we take into account the fact that the majority of the Kyrgyz population lives in rural areas. Through my articles, I want to make the voices of rural people heard, particularly on issues that affect the quality of their livelihoods.*

## A day in the life of a rural woman



Within the framework of the Rural Women's Economic Empowerment Programme, Aiturgan successfully completed training on gender sensitivity. Now, she is making her first small but steady steps into professional journalism.

Aiturgan is 17 years old. Despite her young age, she is exceptionally bright and talented, and seems poised to accomplish whatever she sets out to do. Aiturgan writes on a variety of subjects, including education, social inequality, the situation of elderly people and many other social issues. In one of her articles, for example, she has written about the growing problem of student racketeering in rural schools, thus raising public awareness of the issue. In all her writing, she demonstrates a refreshing professionalism combined with a deep understanding of the complex realities of rural life, resulting in work of a quality rarely found among more experienced journalists.







**Sairagul Akmatova**

22 April 2017, Birinchi Mai village, Kara-Kulja district, Osh oblast



*Women do much more domestic work than men, and this work is never ending. Nonetheless, I think women should not stay at home all the time doing endless domestic tasks but find ways to work outside the home and be proactive. We need to take charge of our lives, to own ourselves, as no one will do it for us. In order to do this, I believe, we need to stand together and empower one another.*

*Since there are not many job opportunities available in our village, we decided to create some ourselves. We set up a small-scale noodle manufacturing business where we produce high quality homemade noodles of many kinds. Our noodles have quickly become popular among local people, and our business is very profitable.*





Sairagul is 51 years old, with 6 children and 9 grandchildren. Within the framework of the Rural Women's Economic Empowerment Programme, she leads the women's noodle manufacturing business activity group which involves and benefits more than 20 women in her village.

In supporting the expansion of the women's noodle manufacturing business, the municipality has allocated them bigger premises and agreed to pay the electricity bill for the whole building. Together with other women from her group, Sairagul is currently in the process of arranging the layout of and furnishing the building.

In addition to leading the women's noodle manufacturing business activity group, Sairagul works as a director of the municipal concert hall in Birinchi Mai village. In this capacity, she oversees the development and implementation of all village-wide recreational and cultural activities. Although these activities keep her extremely busy, she still manages to find time to do craftwork, as well as the work around the house and to spend time with her children and grandchildren.





**Roza Orozmatova**

*Kenjekul Village, Kara-Suu District, Osh Province 24 April 2017*



*I have always been interested in sewing. However, I never had a chance to learn how to do it professionally as I was too busy caring for my ageing parents-in-laws. My life has changed since the UN joint programme arrived in our village: I have learnt how to sew properly and have found a job, and am now making slow but steady progress towards increasing my income.*

*Other women in our group are also now making progress with increasing their financial security. None of them had worked before. In the beginning, the husbands of some of the women were against their attending the training sessions. There were women who had to attend the training in great secrecy. Some had real fights with their husbands. Now that these women have started earning money, those angry husbands have become more supportive.*

*Having increased their personal income, women in our group have found their voice and have become more independent. In support of our women's group, municipality allocated two hectares of arable land to us. Last year we planted this land with cotton and had a good harvest.*



## A day in the life of a rural woman



Roza is 34 years old, married and has two children. She works in a women's group that produces different kinds of clothing, along with four other women. They sell their goods in the Kara-Suu market, where they have four stalls. In addition to off-the-shelf clothing items, they also take orders for custom-made clothing. Currently, they are working towards expanding their market reach.

When the RWEE programme film crew arrived in the village, they found Roza and other women in the group working hard: they were taking a delivery of fabric - one was carrying the material, another one was registering the bolts, and a third was in discussion with the delivery men. Afterwards, they immediately started sewing to ensure their clients receive their orders on time. Roza and her group members remarked that they have been working particularly intensely lately. This, according to Roza, just makes all group members more determined to work harder and succeed. She says that having an independent source of income to contribute to the family budget gives women a strong voice and confidence to follow their own interests.





**Manas Murataliev**

10 May 2017, Chui oblast



*Women's rights, particularly those in rural areas, are often neglected in Kyrgyzstan. Most rural women are not even aware of their legal rights. The roles available to rural women are often limited to childcare and domestic duties. All these factors severely limit the chance for women's voices to be heard and for their full potential to be realised. This, in turn, limits socio-economic development in our country; however, our society does not seem to acknowledge it.*

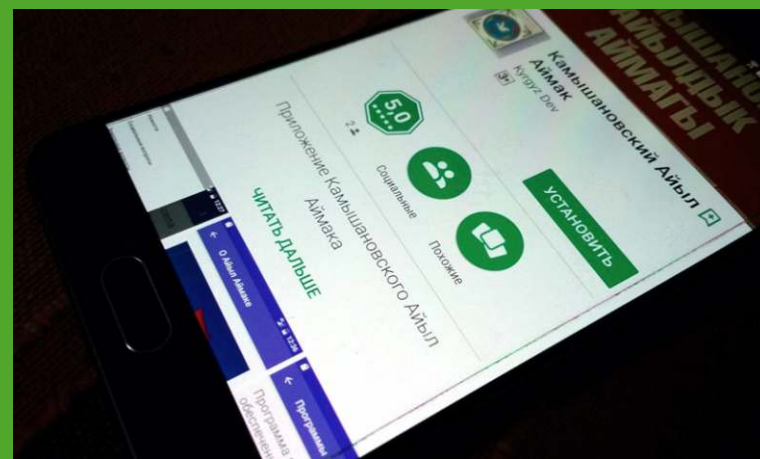
*Development of relevant and effective laws and putting them into practice requires a great deal of political will. As head of a municipality, I am involved in various activities to ensure the implementation of existing laws for the protection of women's rights and interests. I speak to different people about women's issues and try to explain to them about the role of women in the rural development process. I try to change social norms and attitudes which discriminate against women, although I can only do this on a small scale local level. I think it is important that we all step forward and speak openly about the challenges our society faces, including women's issues. I believe education is a powerful means to empower all to work for inclusive development. This particularly refers to education, where children - both boys and girls - should be taught to know and understand their rights, and to develop respect for the human rights of others. In this way, they will grow up to be good people and responsible citizens. Only then can we change our society in a positive direction.*

## A day in the life of a rural woman



Manas has over 12 years' experience working with different government agencies at the local level. During his professional activities, Manas has observed that, due to both religious and social norms and beliefs, women often fail to thrive or reach their full potential in public life. According to Manas, social and gender inequality and inequity adversely affect the country's overall economic and social development. He emphasises that equal participation of women in politics and government is integral to building a strong and sustainable society. In this regard, he makes every possible effort to enable and empower women to participate fully at all levels of community and public life.

In his capacity as a public official, Manas has introduced various innovative approaches to working with people in rural areas. One of them is the introduction of mobile device-based applications to access the website of the municipality for information. In his work, Manas always aims to advance equal opportunities for all to take action to improve their own lives. He firmly believes that achieving gender equality and empowering women is not only the right thing to do but is a fundamental aspect of a just, strong and democratic society. According to Manas, many still tend to misinterpret the value of women's empowerment, assuming that this may harm social relations and intra-household relationships. In this regard, in his meetings with different people, both men and women, he always tries to explain to them that, far from doing harm, women's empowerment actually leads to a better quality of life for each family member.





**Kerez Kadyrova**

*12 May 2017, Kara-Dobo Village, Zhayil District, Chui Province*



*Women in Kyrgyzstan are significantly under-represented in many areas of public and political life, and that's incredibly disappointing to me. If we look at any election processes, for instance, the majority of election organisers – chairmen, keepers of voters' registers, agitators, observers and even voters – are women; however, it is men who almost always get elected. Is that fair?*

*Of course, it is not! Women in rural areas work harder than men do. They carry a disproportionately greater burden of household responsibilities than men. Many women are involved in various income generating activities, thus earning income for their families. However, women's contribution to the family and society often remains undervalued and unrecognised both, by the government and the society. I have not witnessed any governmental effort to ensure women's true participation in the political decision-making process. While women continue to do hard work, men hold key decision-making positions, formulate laws and make political decisions affecting the lives of all citizens, including women. In most cases, those men remain isolated from the rest of the population. Consequently, they are often unaware of the challenges which people face in their daily lives. As a result, many of the political decisions they make are irrational.*

## A day in the life of a rural woman



Kerez is 42 years old and has four children. She is seen as one of the most proactive members in her village. She has been actively involved in the organisation of elections in her village as well as various community improvement activities, particularly those supporting women.

Extensive research has been conducted on the negative effects of gender disparity on socio-economic development and societies at large. Kerez has not read those research publications; however, her views, which are based on her own systematic observation and analysis of behaviours and practices on the ground, are very similar to the findings in much of such research.

Within the RWEE joint programme, Samargul leads the day-to-day activities of around 30 women. Additionally, she owns a small dumpling production business. Apart from these activities, Samargul works as an accountant on the village health and sanitation committee. Like thousands of women in Kyrgyzstan, Kerez manages to combine her family responsibilities with plentiful public service in a remarkable way.





# Multidimensional Approach to Economic Empowerment of Rural Women



## FAO

increasing agricultural productivity and climate resilience



## IFAD

household-level strategies to transform gender power relations



## WFP

food for training, improving nutrition, and linking rural women to value chains



## UN Women

Coordination of Joint Programme; women's participation and leadership of local decision-making; fostering gender-responsive policy environment



# Economically empowered rural woman lead way to prosperity of Kyrgyzstan

