



YEAR END REPORT 2023

*Livelihood Support to Vulnerable Families through
Agro-based Small Scale projects in various districts of
J&K*

(Sheep projects / Seeds & Tools)

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Executive Summary:

This Year-end report provides a comprehensive overview of sustained agricultural initiatives of HELP Foundation in collaboration with Mukul Madav Foundation and FInolex. The organizations have already implemented “Livelihood support project in the form of sheep units to vulnerable households in Kupwara district” initiated in 2022, aimed at empowering rural women. Throughout the fiscal year 2022-2023, we have made our best efforts to make this project a success and have achieved some milestones as well, while facing challenges in our mission to enhance the livelihoods of these families. The report presents the outcomes of our initiative to empower these 20 women-headed families in rural Kashmir by providing sheep units as a means to enhance their income. Also an overview of implementation of “small scale agro-based support” in the form of seeds and tools to vulnerable households in Pulwama and Budgam districts has been presented that was started towards the end of 2023. It can be assumed safely that projects are contributing to improved livelihoods and economic resilience in the target communities.

Background

HELP Foundation is at the fore-front of women-empowerment in J&K. It believes that women empowerment is possible when she is socio-economically independent and thus able to take decisions that make a positive impact on her life, family and community.

Over the years, HELP Foundation has designed livelihood and skill development programmes for women in J&K, that are suited to the place of their living (urban/rural), existing skills, resources, availability of raw-material, market etc. For women in urban clusters, HELP has set-up skill development centers, where women are trained to become ace artisans doing traditional embroidery, food processing, cutting & tailoring and digital empowerment. HELP has setup a huge skill development centre in Srinagar and also smaller ones at other places.

Similarly in rural settings and far-off villages, HELP has initiated several Agro-based skill development and livelihood support programmes for the vulnerable women in accordance with the UN SDG goals, besides also initiating education and vocational skills training programmes.

HELP Foundation J&K got associated with Mukul Madav Foundation during the covid-19 pandemic. The needs at the time were high but the resolve was firm. Both HELP and MMF had one stark similarity, i.e. led by women of strong and firm resolve. Processes are simple and easy. Priority is reaching the vulnerable, poor and needy.

HELP Foundation J&K which is a grass root organization and actively working since 1997 has experienced programme staff, good volunteer base in districts and a logistics structure. Therefore it had the capacity to identify and reach the vulnerable groups immediately on a larger scale, while as MMF has a pan-India experience of working for poor and marginalized groups in Maharashtra and other places. Thus MMF was ready to support the relief distribution efforts of HELP Foundation in the form of ration kits/food packs for the immediate relief of the affected vulnerable families on the verge of hunger.

Thus in 2021, MMF supported HELP to organize several food distribution camps for immediate relief to the vulnerable groups who had been affected by covid-19 induced lockdown.

Post Covid-19, both the Organizations wanted to support those vulnerable sections of the society, whose livelihoods had immensely suffered due to lockdown, so that the economic prospects of such families can be revived. Thus in 2022, both the organizations decided to engage in a long term and tangible economic activity that would be more beneficial for the vulnerable groups especially women.

HELP Foundation had already implemented some agro-based livelihood projects in the past and post-2014 floods in J&K. Therefore an agro-based project proposal was submitted to MMF, to support vulnerable women-headed-households living in rural areas.

Thus a pilot project was proposed to distribute sheep units (each unit consisting of five sheep) to the poor women headed households identified in Kupwara by volunteers associated with HELP Foundation. Thus Mukul Madav

Foundation and Finolex agreed and encouraged HELP Foundation to continue implementing agro-based projects for vulnerable women in rural communities through its generous financial support.

Livelihood support in the form of Sheep units for women headed families in Kupwara District in 2022-23



Orientation of volunteers in Kupwara at the start of the project

The sheep project was a first long term collaboration between HELP and Mukul Madav Foundation. As mentioned the beneficiary women were identified from a cluster of villages in Kupwara district through volunteers. Kupwara is the northernmost district of J&K and is one of the aspirational districts in India.

Sheep units were given as livelihood support as these villages have ample natural pastures nearby. It was thought that beneficiaries will not have to make large expenses for buying fodder. Also as sheep can multiply quickly, some breeds double to triple in a year, therefore quick income was expected from the projects.

It was also envisaged that these beneficiaries will be encouraged to rear the sheep for wool production as well for value addition. The beneficiaries will be hand-held for wool-shearing in a scientific way, for further wool-processing and product value enhancement and production into traditional woolen rugs. This will also help in increasing the output from the project and also link other workers and artisans in the chain to multiply the economic benefits for the rural economy.

Since distribution in mid 2022, several monitoring visits have been conducted to the beneficiary households from time to time to monitor the growth of these projects.



Key Findings / Achievements:

Financial stability in the households

- The provision of sheep units resulted in a sustainable source of income for these families, enabling them to cover basic needs and invest in education and healthcare.
- Income generated from the sale of sheep and wool contributed to the economic empowerment of these families.
- Most of the beneficiaries have made good income from the projects from sale of lambs particularly.
- While as out of 20 families, five families are jointly rearing the sheep and have made sales of lambs and earned profit. They are maintaining a flock of 33 sheep at present.
- The families have more self reliance as compared to before and are more confident and optimistic about future.
- Development of entrepreneurial mindset as a result of better financial Independence.

Livestock Health and Productivity:

- Veterinary support and training provided to the women ensured the health and well-being of the sheep.
- Improved breeding practices and nutrition management led to increased lambing rates and overall productivity of the sheep units.

Skill Development and Capacity Building:

- Training programs on animal husbandry, pasture management, and basic financial literacy empowered the women with the necessary skills to manage their sheep units effectively.
- Women gained confidence in decision-making related to their livestock and demonstrated a growing understanding of sustainable farming practices.

Community Collaboration:

- The initiative fostered a sense of community building among the beneficiaries, who shared knowledge and resources to collectively address challenges.
- Collaborative efforts, such as communal grazing arrangements, enhanced the overall success and sustainability of the project.
- Women were trained in sustainable pasture management practices to optimize grazing resources and ensure the well-being of the sheep.
- The implementation of rotational grazing techniques contributed to the regeneration of pasturelands.

Challenges:

Weather-Related Challenges:

- Unpredictable weather patterns, including extreme temperatures and irregular precipitation, posed challenges to pasture productivity and sheep health.

Market Access and Value Chain Strengthening:

- Limited market access for sheep and wool products in remote areas affected the overall profitability of the initiative.
- Future interventions should explore opportunities to strengthen market linkages and value chains for these products.

Infrastructure Constraints:

- Inadequate infrastructure, such as proper housing for sheep and storage facilities for fodder, hindered optimal livestock management.
- Investment in essential infrastructure is crucial to overcoming these challenges and ensuring the long-term success of the project.

Key Milestones reached

- Sustainable Income Generation:
 - The project achieved its primary goal of establishing a sustainable source of income for the women-headed families, reducing their vulnerability to economic shocks.
- Capacity Building and Empowerment:
 - Women demonstrated enhanced skills in sheep management, contributing to increased self-reliance and empowerment within the community.
- Positive Impact on Education and Health:
 - Increased income enabled families to invest in education and healthcare, positively impacting the overall well-being of children and family members.
- Community Resilience: The project contributed to building community resilience by fostering cooperation and collaborative solutions to common challenges.



Women farmers with their stock

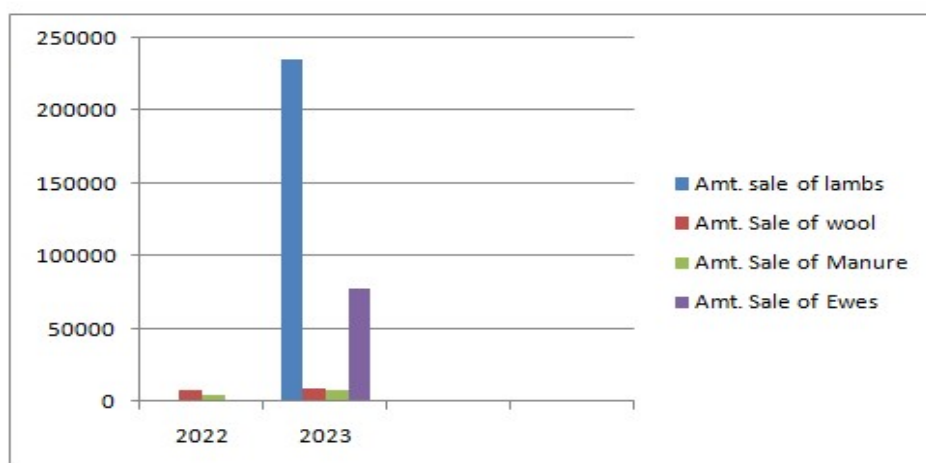


Sheep grazing in pastures

Outcome of Sheep-projects as Livelihood Support in Kupwara district in 2022-23

Earnings in INR from various components of Sheep projects in Kupwara district in 2022 and 2023

Year	Lamb Sales	Wool Sales	Value of manure	Sale of Ewes
2022	0	8300	4000	0
2023	235000	9000	7600	78000
2024	0	0	0	0
Incremental				
Cumulative				



Results concluded in the monitoring visit

- Out of 15 families visited in handwara block 12 have reported progress as the number of sheep in the unit have increased,
- 3 families have not made progress, they have lost some sheep to due to disease and extreme weather.

- 5 families have been supported with 25 sheep. They are rearing them together and have become part of a Farmers' Producer Organization. They have increased the number of sheep to 33 and have also made profit through sales of sheep.
 - The beneficiaries will have earned a profit of Rs.24000 to 36000 at an average by the sale of lambs, wool, manure and ewes since distribution.
 - The projects have started made gradual income in the second year 2023.
-



Beneficiaries watching over their flock during monitoring visit

Livelihood support to economically deprived households, capacity building and community building in Pulwama & Budgam districts 2023-2024

Taking the partnership further HELP Foundation and Mukul Madav Foundation again came together towards the year end for supporting the vulnerable population with garlic seeds to enhance their income. It was envisaged that the project will have a comprehensive strategy and result oriented approach for alleviating the rural and vulnerable communities from poverty traps in the communities. Almost 20 revenue villages comprising of 5148 HHs, with over 32289 living souls will be developed as model communities, with relatively enhanced income opportunities. Livelihood support for most affected households in the form of seed and tools and other input support have been proposed as tools of sustained development.

The project is also aimed to develop an Informal system for development of individual communities into cooperatives. This will enhance the capacities of people that will help the vulnerable population to come together and to strengthen their abilities. Capacity building of community workers/informal structures would be taken up to supplement the formal village based development structures like; Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs), so that a long lasting structure is available that shall function even after the exit from these areas and benefit the community.

The project envisages providing need-based and knowledge-based livelihood opportunities to the selected households. This initiative shall take huge loads off their shoulders to earn their wherewithal. The financial and technical support to the families will sharpen their skills and knowledge base and enable them to take informed decisions.

Specific Objectives

- To identify vulnerable households in rural areas who fall under the criteria of support and have experience and will to work on Agro-based projects.
- To support the identified vulnerable households with livelihood support in the shape of seeds and tools and other inputs for their small farms/ land holdings.
- To hand-hold the farmers to cultivate cash crops and involve Agri-experts in the process.
- To liaise with veterinarians/agronomists for timely vaccinations and care take of the sheep projects.

Who is Vulnerable

- Single mothers with minor children.
- Single women with younger siblings.
- Poor residents/farmers having small land-holding (backyard kitchen-garden, vegetable farm (<= 1 kanal))
- Verified by village community/ cross-checked by VLC.



Core Interventions for Economic Empowerment

Seeds for Cash Crops to identified families (Garlic, Shallot any other)

A

Mobilization of villagers through meetings and gatherings about latest farm techniques for increasing output.

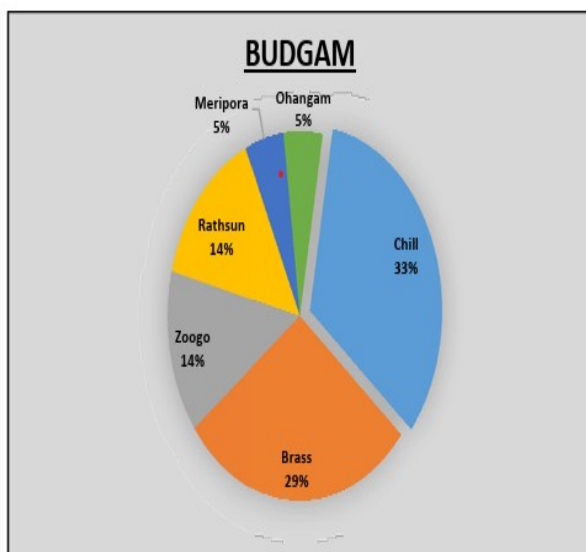
B

Development of wool processing unit.

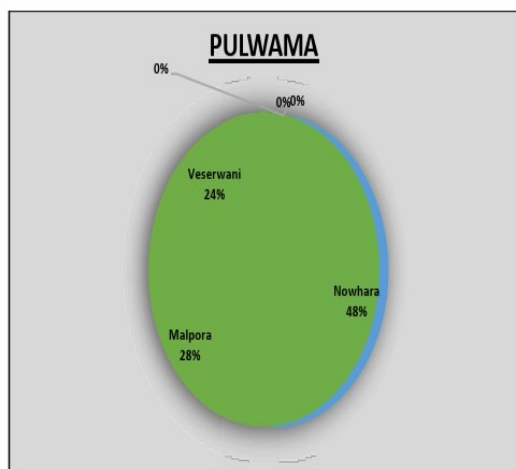
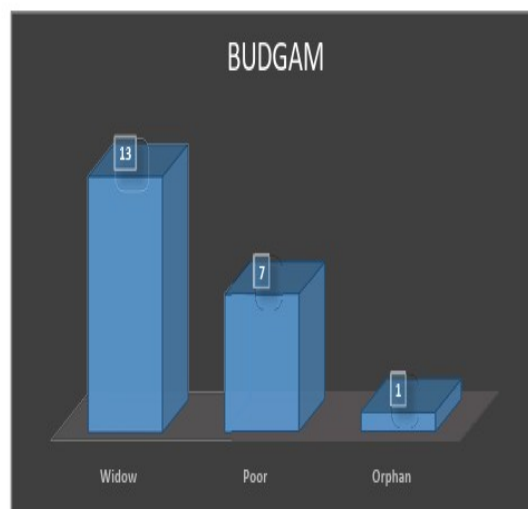
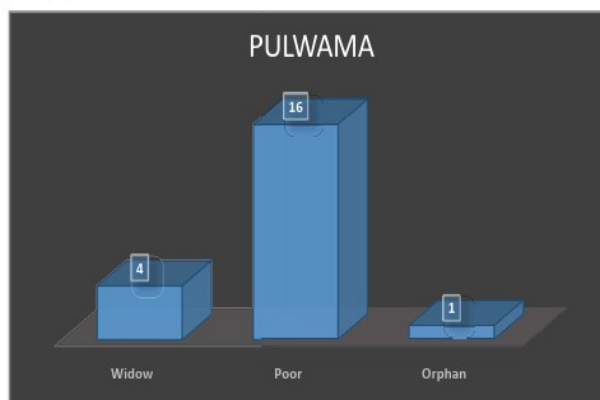
C

Augment the existing project of Sheep Farming already initiated by HELP

D

Village Wise Seed Distribution

In Budgam district following six villages were identified for Garlic Seed distribution

Category Wise Seed DistributionCategory Wise Seed Distribution

Distribution of Garlic Seed in December 2023



Recommendations

- Sheep projects can generate profits. HELP Foundation and Mukul Madav Foundation should continue the distribution, monitoring and linkages for value addition (wool-production etc) of sheep projects for at least two more years to see the change. However adjustments are needed while re-designing the programme. When re-designing the projects the following points need to be taken into account:
- Involvement of livestock specialist in order to design and monitor the progress in the best possible way. Define objectives broadly and with a way to monitor the project, and support the beneficiaries (e.g. monitor the deliveries and intervene early if problems become visible).
- During the re-evaluation, we should also check whether the sheep breed we distributed is suitable for the purpose. There might be more robust sheep breeds available if we can have high budget.
- During the re-evaluation of the project, the best size for a sheep project should be determined. According to the experts from Animal husbandry department, a beneficiary should receive at least 8 to 10 sheep to generate a yearly profit of Rs 20,000 to 25'000.
- With regard to the size of the project, it is important to note, that it might make more sense to assist less households with a larger number of sheep than many people with 5 sheep unit. Many projects have an economic logic that needs to be followed. For sheep breeding for example there may be a minimum size of herd below which the project is not profitable enough. If this is the case, we cannot just reduce the number of sheep in order to be able to target a larger number of people. Doing so would jeopardize the project. The size of the project should follow the economic logic and not a budget-logic. However, questions like this have to be evaluated by a livestock specialist who knows the local situation.
- When we want to address vulnerable people, we have to ease the financial burden of the project during the first phase of the project – i.e. we have to provide more feed. We should provide enough feed to motivate the beneficiary to fatten his lambs for the optimal amount of time and to increase his heard (this is closely related to the re-evaluation of the project).
- We have to think carefully about the beneficiary selection. As already mentioned we believe that careful discussions with the beneficiaries are necessary. One might think of incentive schemes that motivate the beneficiaries to run their projects well (e.g. one could start distributing a certain number of pregnant ewes and distribute more ewes once the project has been running successfully for a certain period of time).
- Provisions of trainings for the beneficiaries in the project, we should describe the financial potential of the project has when well run. Moreover, we should ask the beneficiaries to monitor their projects in a systematic way (e.g. when did the ewes give birth, how many lambs were born, how much was spent on feed, how much milk did the ewes give, what price the lambs were sold at etc.). This would give the beneficiaries and us a better understanding of the project. This understanding is necessary to measure the results, whether we should continue their implementation, and whether we should increase the number of projects.
- The inclusion of full-fledged livestock specialist in the project should be included if the budget does not increase too much. Monitoring activities and the respective reporting need to be improved. A detailed

monitoring has to be established as well as a tool (excel spreadsheet) to record and analyse the gathered information. Moreover, the exchange of the information with the people responsible for the projects has to be improved. The monitoring tool and the flow of information should guarantee, that eventual problems are realised and addressed as quickly as possible.

- As voiced by Mukul Madav Foundation that wool production should be integral part of the project outcome and not only meat purpose. Then merino breed should be considered, but for the purpose the budget cost will increase and the beneficiary need to be more skilled and well-supported so that project becomes successful.
- Besides one has to be sure that support system for wool production and marketing does exist, also wool-processing facilities are available and are viable and economical, and also if other factors for a successful wool production and marketing thereof is available.
- This should be always kept in mind that a beneficiary often needs skills (e.g. agricultural knowledge), a particular environment (e.g. grazing land), or some kind of infrastructure (e.g. shed), to start a sheep unit. We should only use livelihood support projects if the vulnerable people we want to assist have the potential to succeed with the projects.
- Climate-resilient farming practices should be adopted by involving local officials and experts.
- Develop and implement climate-resilient strategies to address weather-related challenges and ensure the sustainability of sheep farming.
- Market Linkages and Value Addition:
- Strengthen market linkages and explore opportunities for value addition to sheep and wool products to improve the economic viability of the initiative.
- Infrastructure Development: Invest in essential infrastructure, including proper housing and storage facilities, to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of sheep farming.
- Continued Training and Support: Continue providing training and support to build the capacity of women in livestock management, financial literacy and sustainable agricultural practices.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation system to track the impact of the initiative, identify areas for improvement, and ensure accountability.

Conclusion:

The Sheep Unit Initiative has made significant strides in empowering women-headed families in rural Kashmir. By addressing challenges and building on the achievements, future interventions can further enhance the resilience and prosperity of these communities.

The sheep projects have stabilized and the beneficiaries have made considerable income from the projects. In coming two years the projects can reach their full potential, when it is linked with wool production as well for value addition.

Pictorial View Of Project Activities in Pulwama District





Awareness session with agriculture experts in progress



Project staff interacting with the beneficiaries

Case Study 1



Aafeeda begum

Lt. Shabir Ahmad Bhat
Village Kahipora, District Kupwara
Ph. No. 7006791766

Aafeeda begum's household is a changed one since she received sheep unit from HELP Foundation/Mukul Madav Foundation initiative. Her sheep unit has grown as she is actively herself involved with the project. She has made sales of 2 lambs and also sold an ewe. Making a sale of Rs. 20000 from the project so far. She has been able to grow her flock to 8 after she received initial 5 sheep. She is very thankful to HELP Foundation and Mukul Madav Foundation for the support. With the extra income she has continued the education of her children and also been able to buy other essential household items necessary for winter

Case Study 2**Meema Begum w/o Lt. Mushtaq ahmad mir****R/o Chatipora, handwara****Ph no. 8082674702**

Meema has lost one of the sheep to disease. Meema says that as soon as her sheep arrived back from high pasture one of the ewe sheep was showing signs of illness and died within two days, after she received the sheep. But she is determined to make her project recover from the initial set back, one of the ewes is pregnant and rest of other three have also gained weight. She is slowly consolidating her sheep project.

Case Study 3

Gulshan begum

Lt. GH. Mohammad Lone

Kahipora handwara

Near masque

8082565304



Gulshan begum is quite happy for the progress of her sheep unit. She is also very proactive in taking care of the sheep, feeds them and ensures they return to the sheep shed before the evening. As she has the advantage of living close to an orchard the sheep are able to find lot of green foliage lying around in the orchard as their feed. The number of her sheep has increased to nine from the intial five she received. She has also made sale of 3 lambs and sale of manure and wool. Her earnings from the project has reached upto Rs. 17000. She is at present investing back in the project and making savings for the household. She is determined to continue with her project and grow it manifold. She is all thanks to HELP Foundation and MUKul Madav Foundation for the support received.