



# Programme Summary

## Zindagii Shoista, Tajikistan

### Programme at a glance

The Zindagii Shoista ('Living with Dignity') Programme in Tajikistan (2015-2018) aimed to prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG) in four rural villages. Utilising a family-centred approach, the programme worked with 80 families to transform attitudes and social norms, strengthen relationships and empower women economically with a view to reducing VAWG. At the end of the intervention, the proportion of women experiencing violence from their husbands and in-laws had fallen by 50%. **The programme demonstrates that a dual approach focused on social norms change and economic empowerment can have a gender transformative impact and significantly reduce VAWG.** It is also one of few interventions that addresses intimate partner violence (IPV) and violence from in-laws in a comprehensive way.

### Background

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Tajikistan stem from multiple sources. Young women typically move in with their husband's family after marriage, where they have a low status and are at risk of multiple forms of violence both from their partner and in-laws. Zindagii Shoista was developed to address the multiple power dynamics in Tajiki households by working with women and their extended family. The programme design was adapted from the *Stepping Stones and Creating Futures*<sup>1</sup> intervention in South Africa and adapted to the Tajik context, with especially the livelihoods component being largely developed for this intervention.

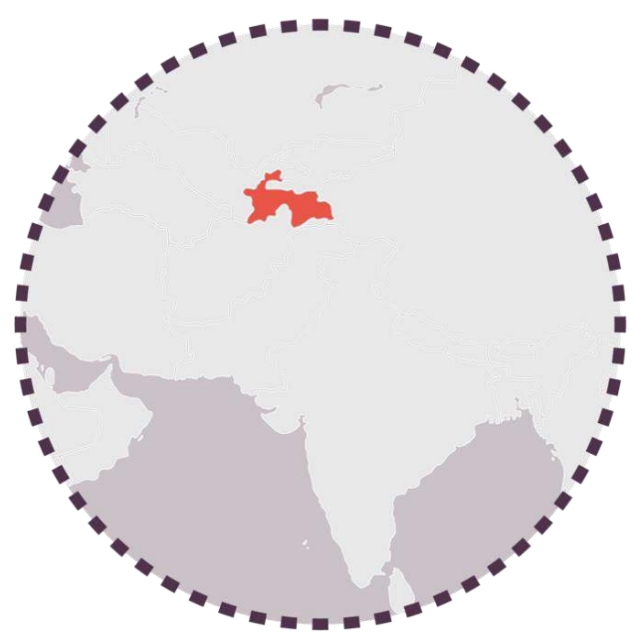
International Alert found that women and girls with disabilities in Tajikistan face alarming rates of violence by husbands, in-laws, other family members and men in the community.<sup>4</sup>

**Baseline research** for Zindagii Shoista in 2016 revealed that around 60% of women in the programme sites had experienced sexual, physical or emotional abuse in the last 12 months; a significantly higher prevalence than the national level data. Women aged 18-24 were most likely to experience various forms of violence. The research also found high levels of depression and suicidal thoughts among both women and men.

The ambition was to test whether a combined social and economic empowerment intervention could improve relationships and reduce both IPV and violence from in-laws. Zindagii Shoista was implemented by International Alert and Cesvi, with the local partners ATO, Farodis and Zanoni Sharq, as part of the DFID-funded *What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls* programme.

### Programme context

VAWG is widely prevalent in Tajikistan. It is driven by multiple factors, including patriarchal social norms, poverty and men's alcohol abuse.<sup>2</sup> The 2017 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) found that 31% of ever-married women had experienced some form of physical, sexual, or emotional violence by their current or most recent husband.<sup>3</sup> A study by

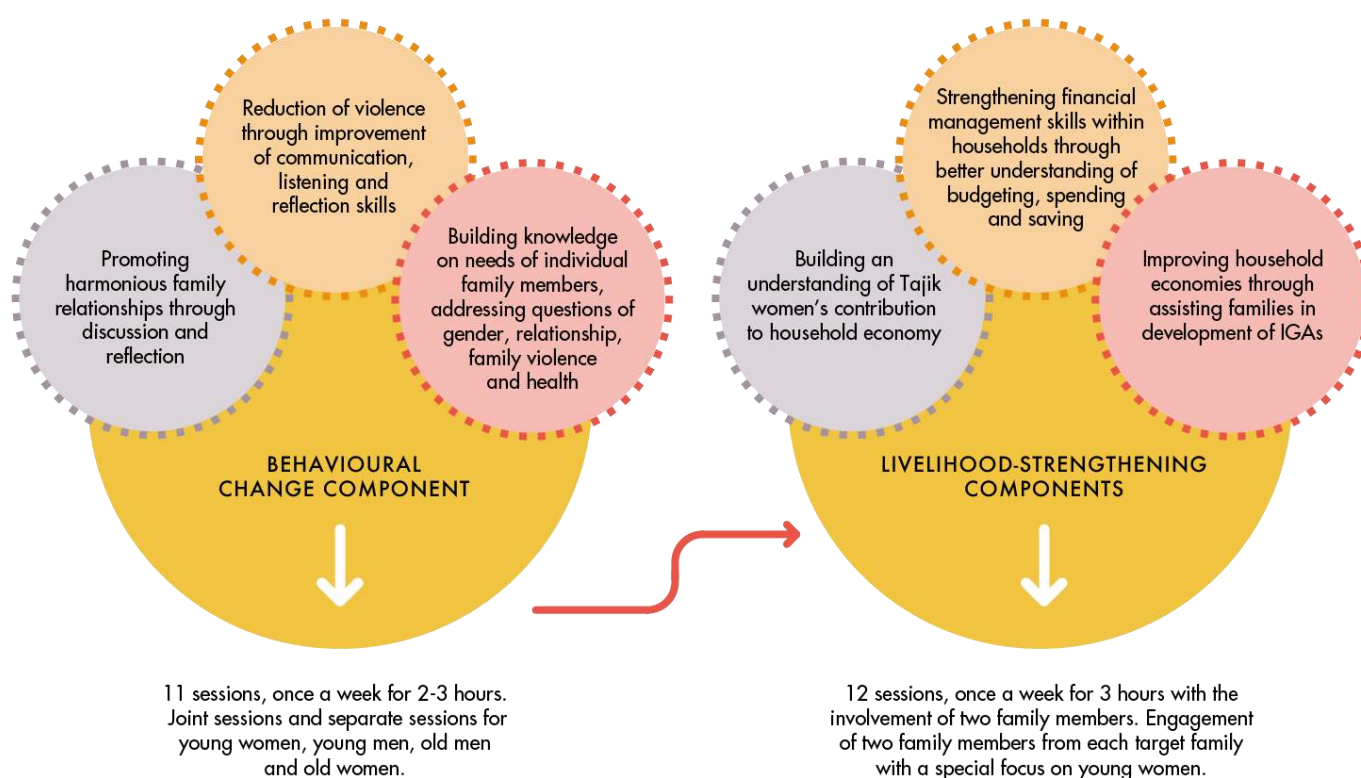


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### Programme description

The overall objective of Zindagii Shoista was to **reduce physical and sexual violence against women and girls** in four targeted villages: two in the northern district of Penjikent and two in the southern district of Jomi. The programme involved 80 families with a total of 270 people, 60% women and 40% men, over an 18-month intervention period. The entire programme spanned over three years, including formative research and adaptation of the programme prior to the implementation, and endline research after activities had ended.

**The programme had two pillars:** A social norms-behaviours change approach which was delivered through **social empowerment sessions**, and a livelihood-strengthening approach which was delivered through **economic empowerment sessions**. The combination aimed to address the overlapping issues of poverty and household economic stresses, patriarchal norms and practices, and VAWG from various perpetrators in the family.



### Theory of Change

Zindagii Shoista theory of change (ToC) is rooted in processes of **transforming gender and wider power relations**. Whilst many economic empowerment programmes that seek to reduce VAWG have worked to strengthen women's economic and social status without involving men, Zindagii Shoista involved women and men from different generations in the family.

The programme hypothesis was that to reduce VAWG and create lasting changes, the intervention needed to transform gender and power relations within the family. The programme ToC posits that an improved socio-economic environment where women and girls play active roles in income generating activities (IGA), combined with improved skills in communication, listening and reflection that will lead to improved family relationships, will create an environment where **women and girls will be respected and can live free from violence**.

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### Core components

The programme's activities with families were implemented over 18 months. There were also a number of essential preparatory steps before the intervention started.

#### Adapting the intervention to the local context:

The first step was to conduct formative research on gender, IPV and livelihoods to inform the adaptation of the *Stepping Stones and Creating Futures*<sup>5</sup> intervention to the Tajiki context. This was followed by an adaptation workshop<sup>6</sup> which gathered the *What Works* global team, implementing partners and local organisations to draft and pilot workshop manuals for the programme.

**Training facilitators:** Facilitators for the social and economic empowerment sessions were staff of the local implementing partners. They were selected based on experience of working with IPV prevention, having gender equitable attitudes, strong facilitation skills, and a good understanding of the local context. The economic empowerment intervention was also supported by business assistants, who were selected based on their technical expertise and understanding of the local business environment.

- **All facilitators of the social empowerment component** had to go through the sessions as if they were participants. Following this, they went through the sessions again, this time playing the role as facilitator whilst training colleagues on the manual.
- **The economic empowerment facilitators and business assistants** received a two-day gender training to ensure that they understood the gender transformative objectives of Zindagii Shoista and building their skills in a gender-sensitive facilitation. They furthermore received a 10-day training on livelihoods, economic empowerment, and business development.

### Social Empowerment Sessions

**All programme participants** from the target families - women and men, young and old people, were led through a process of critical reflection on gender relations, social norms, and the causes and impact of violence. This aimed to change behaviours in families, improve social relationships and reduce violence.

**The facilitators followed a manual** which employs participatory learning approaches, as opposed to classroom style teaching. It covered:

- Critical reflection, communication, negotiation, and cooperation skills.
- Exploring expectations and realities of the ideal man and woman, and the implications they have.
- Family relationships and marriage.
- Family and individual health through the lifecycle.
- Violence in relationships and sources of support and help.
- Exploring new skills to change behaviours.

**There are 11 sessions of 2-3 hours.** The manual includes a suggested structure for the sessions, and outlines the purpose, content, exercises and materials required for each session.

Participants were grouped into **groups of 15-20 people** who were people of similar age and the same gender: younger women, older women (those who have married children), younger men and older men. The aim was for as many family members as possible to participate in the sessions.

The peer-groups did the same session at approximately the same time and two sessions allowed all groups to meet to exchange ideas. The aim was for couples and families to put what they learnt into practice on an ongoing basis.

#### Social empowerment sessions (Part 1):

1. Let's communicate
2. Men and women – expectation vs. reality
3. Relationships
4. Peer group meeting
5. Family health – part 1
6. Family health – part 2
7. Violence in relationships
8. Supporting women experiencing violence in relationships
9. Changing behaviours
10. Being assertive and showing appreciation
11. Final peer group meeting

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### Economic Empowerment Sessions

Following the social empowerment sessions, these sessions focused on improving families' livelihood security through establishing income generating activities (IGA's) in which women had a central role.

The sessions followed a **manual** structured around two modules with a total of 12 sessions of 3 hours that ran weekly. The initial four sessions focus on households' **livelihoods strengthening with a gender focus**, aiming to facilitate understanding of Tajik women's contribution to household economics through paid and unpaid activities. These sessions maintained the same peer-groups from the social empowerment sessions. The peer-groups met in the fourth session to exchange ideas and to promote dialogue and collaboration.

The following eight sessions focused on **establishing Income Generating Activities (IGAs)**:

- **Participants left their peer groups and the whole family joined the first session.** Session two onwards involved two family members, one of whom had to be a young woman. The other family member was typically selected depending on the skills needed for the IGA.
- **One male and one female facilitator and a business assistant** worked with each family to establish a new IGA. The process included understanding the family's skills and priorities, and **women's current roles and contributions**. The facilitators together with families identified an appropriate IGA based on the situation analysis and informed by results from a local market survey.
- **The planning of the IGA was a participatory process** which included practical exercises and games to prepare families to manage the IGA and work as a team, and identifying active roles for the young women.

### Economic empowerment sessions (Part 2):

#### Module 1: Household focus

1. Understanding our household inputs and income
2. Our household budget and how we spend money
3. How we can save money and insure our future
4. Peer group meeting

#### Module 2: IGA focus

1. Opportunities for income generating activities (IGAs).
2. How to initiate IGAs
3. Assessing the market for IGAs
4. Planning and budgeting IGAs
5. Costing and pricing
6. Planning and budgeting IGAs game
7. Finalising IGA plans
8. Bookkeeping and marketing

- **Each family received in-kind support amounting to \$500**, for example raw materials, simple machinery and tools needed for the IGA. Families were also required to make their own contribution, whether financial, labour, or materials – following a cost-sharing approach that aimed to build a sense of ownership.

Over half of the families pursued cattle breeding. Other IGAs included tailoring, poultry, beekeeping, renting of plastic tables and kitchen utensils, greenhouse, and running a bakery.

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### Monitoring and evaluation

The programme was closely monitored by the local implementing partners. This included weekly visits to villages to observe families' management of IGAs and family dynamics, and weekly meetings with the business assistants who supported IGAs on the ground. The M&E framework included a participatory component: **everyday change indicators**. Participants developed their own indicators to track change in their villages and families.

#### Example everyday change indicators:

- Families having more savings.
- Men spending more time helping their wives with children.
- Improved mobility for women

The interventions were accompanied by robust research and evaluated using a modified interrupted time series. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected at four points: **baseline** data, **midline** data at 8 months into the implementation phase, **endline** data after 15 months of implementation, followed by a post-endline study.

### Lessons for programming

Zindagii Shoista shows that social norms and behaviour change interventions combined with economic empowerment can have a significant impact on reducing VAWG. In addition to its impact on IPV, the programme contributes to the scarce evidence base around what works to prevent VAWG IPV not only in couples but also by in-laws.

#### Adapting VAWG interventions to new contexts:

Zindagii Shoista was carefully designed to the Tajiki context, adapting the approach of a successful intervention used in South Africa and elsewhere. It shows that it is possible to adapt VAWG prevention interventions that worked in one part of the world to another geographical and cultural context, but it requires extensive formative research, in-depth understanding of the local context, and collaborating with local partners.

#### The evaluation found that after the intervention:

- The number of young women experiencing violence from both their husbands and in-laws had reduced by 50%.
- Women's reported past year physical IPV had decreased from 45% to 16.5%, and from 29% to 4% for sexual IPV.
- Women's earnings had increased 4-fold and the proportion of women with any savings had increased 10-fold.
- Depression rates and suicidal thoughts had significantly decreased among women and men.

**A post-endline study** 30 months after the programme start found that women's reported past year physical IPV had reduced further (15.7%) while women's reported sexual IPV had increased slightly since the endline (but was still lower than at the midline). Depression among women had continued to decrease, and women reported more equitable gender relations and attitudes. Women's earning and savings had regressed slightly but remained at better levels than before the intervention.

#### Working with women, men and extended family:

The formative research identified that a couples-approach would not be sufficient in Tajikistan as violence, especially against young women, is also perpetrated by in-laws. Hence, the programme employed a family-centred approach that addressed VAWG in a holistic way, which was recognised as a key factor behind the significant reductions in VAWG.

#### Addressing multiple root causes of VAWG:

The programme was based on the premise that for changes to be sustained, VAWG interventions need to address multiple drivers of violence, which in this context meant economic stress factors, patriarchal norms and behaviours, and mental health. The combined economic and social empowerment approach effectively addressed these overlapping root causes of VAWG.

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**Ensure sufficient time for social and gender transformation to take place:** The 18-month implementation period allowed family members to engage deeply with the social and economic empowerment sessions; learning, reflecting, and practicing new behaviours, knowledge and skills. This appeared to be sufficient time for young women's engagement in IGA's to translate into higher status in the families, and for changes in relationships and power dynamics to unfold. Women reported that improved self-esteem and economic skills gave them more bargaining power in the family, and in-laws showed more respect and care towards younger women.

**Training of facilitators:** The careful selection and training of staff from local implementing organisations as facilitators, followed up by ongoing back-stopping support from dedicated, trained staff who could assist in dealing with unexpected challenges, were crucial to the success of the programme.

The evaluation highlights that similar, scaled-up interventions could benefit from even more time dedicated to training.

**Violence against women with disabilities and mothers of children with disabilities need to be better addressed:** We know that women with disabilities face high rates of violence in Tajikistan and globally. Mothers with children with disabilities are also subject to stigma and may face additional barriers to participate in interventions due to caregiving responsibilities. VAWG interventions must consider- and address the intersecting inequalities faced by women with disabilities and mothers of children with disabilities, and remove barriers to their participation. A scaled-up version of Zindagii Shoista includes women with disabilities as well as families with children with disabilities, which holds potential to explore these issues.

### Source documents

[Evaluation of Zindagii Shoista \(Living with Dignity\), an intervention to prevent violence against women in Tajikistan: impact after 30 months](#), Mastonshoeva, S., Myrntinen, H., Chirwa, E., Shonasimova, S., Gulyamova, P., Shai, N. and Jewkes, R., *What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls*, 2020

[Zindagii Shoista - Living with Dignity: Mixed-methods evaluation of intervention to prevent violence against women in Tajikistan](#), Mastonshoeva, S., Shonasimova, S., Gulyamova, P., Jewkes, R., Shai, N., Chirwa, E. and Myrntinen, H., *What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls*, 2019

[Working with Families to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls in Tajikistan: Evidence Brief](#), *What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls*, 2018

### Links to further resources

- Online resources, articles and information about Zindagii Shoista are [available here](#).
- [Zindagii Shoista – Living with Dignity Workshop Manual Part 1: Social Empowerment](#)
- [Zindagii Shoista – Living with Dignity Workshop Manual Part 2: Economic Empowerment](#)

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> [Stepping Stones and Creating Futures](#) was another *What Works* programme that aimed to decrease the rate of intimate partner violence in urban informal settlements in South Africa through a combined social norms and livelihoods approach.

<sup>2</sup> Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan, and ICF (2018) [Tajikistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017](#).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Mastonshoeva, S. (2020) [Intersection of disabilities and violence against women and girls in Tajikistan](#), Research Summary, International Alert

<sup>5</sup> [Stepping Stones and Creating Futures](#) was another *What Works* programme that aimed to decrease the rate of intimate partner violence in urban informal settlements in South Africa through a combined social norms and livelihoods approach.

<sup>6</sup> [Can working with the whole family be effective in tackling violence against women and girls \(VAWG\) in Tajikistan?](#) *What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls*, blog post, November 20, 2017

*This document is part of the RESPECT Framework Implementation Guide, commissioned by UN Women and developed by Social Development Direct, which can be found [here](#).*

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