

The role of Self-Help Groups in empowering rural women

One of the most regularly applied gender-oriented activities of DCA is to create Self-Help Groups (SHGs) comprising of local women. SHGs are small voluntary associations of rural women from the same socio-economic background, who work together for the purpose of solving their problems, and setting up a small business. They do so through self-help and mutual help, supported during the process by DCA.

Such SHGs are encouraged to develop a group saving and lending system, e.g. each participating woman saves 100 AFG per month to a common fund. This money can be used to meet emergency needs of one or more women of the group, but also to fund a small business the women want to develop. Depending on the preferences of the SHG, DCA will guide the women to start their own business. This might be for instance making of pickles, jams or soaps, but more related to DCA's expertise are livestock (product) businesses, like lamb fattening, milk processing, animal fibre processing, poultry farming etc.

The SHGs offer the women, who often are not allowed to have a job out of home, an opportunity to become self-employed and develop their own income generating enterprise. By working together in such an SHG, and contributing themselves to the family income, the self-esteem, self-reliance, and self-confidence of the women involved significantly increase.

