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**“Sustaining Livelihoods
Affected by
the Aral Sea Disaster”**



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UN in Uzbekistan is implementing a joint programme “Sustaining Livelihoods Affected by the Aral Sea Disaster” in the autonomous republic of Karakalpakstan together with the government of Uzbekistan. The aim of the programme is to improve the economic, food, health and environmental security of the most vulnerable groups in the Aral Sea ecological crisis.



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The health component of the programme consists of 3 UN agencies UNV, WHO and UNFPA that work as a joint team helping the local authorities to address the health consequences of the environmental disaster and economic insecurity enhanced in the target districts with a specific focus on addressing the needs women and young people. The healthcare specialists of the rural healthcare facilities and relevant institutions were trained and their capacities enhanced on the topics of reproductive health, contraceptive use, maternal health care services, and deployment of PAL (Practical Approach to Lung Health) strategy.



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Respiratory diseases have increased remarkably in the Aral Sea region and now form the biggest share of all diseases in the area, 36,7% of all registered diseases. UNV provided 8 spirometers and training for their usage for medical professionals. The apparatus is important in order to identify the form of cough and exclude the possibility of tuberculosis at its early stage to prevent development of drug-resistant tuberculosis and to reduce unnecessary and inappropriate use of antibiotics.



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During 2014 the health component trained 1,730 community volunteers in five rural districts of Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan to become health messengers in the battle against tuberculosis in the area. 86% of the volunteers were women. The campaign reached 32,000 households (approximately 247,000 inhabitants) of Karakalpakstan. .



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The project set a strong input to co-operation with various partners, especially with the local communities' female elderly, that resulted to a successful campaign. The women of the local communities and organizations like Women's Committee and Nurses' Association participated from the very beginning in the planning of the disease control project.



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To ensure maximum visibility of a large-scale TB awareness-raising campaign, the project created hundreds of informative leaflets, 140 banners, 32,000 calendars, 1,600 flipbooks, news articles in three local languages and organized informative events in rural schools and medical points, and cooperated with the Ministry of Health, local media and educational institutions.



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The certificated community volunteers spread the word about tuberculosis, its symptoms and cure in the rural areas of Karakalpakstan. The volunteers underline the importance of getting fast and right diagnosis and treatment when treating respiratory diseases. They remind the people that tuberculosis is curable and that no patient should be stigmatized due to the disease. UNV provided 110 bicycles for the most active volunteers and nurses in the rural areas to continue their work.



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More than 2,000 young people participated in awareness-raising campaigns on HIV/AIDS, TB and reproductive health, where around 12,000 information and educational materials were spread out. With the assistance of the Youth Center under the Women's Committee, 300 young youth (54.1% girls) have increased their capacity as mentors in training their peers on HIV/AIDS, STDs, and TB.



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UNFPA trained 1,245 people (95% women) of the target areas, increasing their capacity in addressing legal issues of women about reproductive health, family planning, and issues associated with developing a family budget as a mechanism of a healthy lifestyle. The trained active locals were taught about the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).



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To strengthen women's reproductive health, mother and child care and increasing the quality of using contraceptives UNFPA conducted trainings and purchased medical equipment, providing 18 maternity clinics with 9834 medical devices of 22 varieties, gynecological equipment among other.



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219 rural health units participated in the process of monitoring the implementation of the strategy PAL (Practical approach to lung health) and received practical recommendations from WHO. UNV provided 250 peakflowmeters for asthma patients in the rural areas . A survey showed that the UNV trainings of volunteers as well as simultaneous WHO's trainings of medical workers on PAL strategy during 2013-2015 brought wanted results. In 2013 only 23.3% of the respondents in rural districts had heard of COPD, in 2015 82.74%.



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WHO organized PAL strategy trainings for medical personnel and asthma schools for people in rural areas with difficulties to breath. The asthma patients were taught breathing techniques and UNV provided 140 banners for rural healthcare points about breathing techniques and usage of peakflowmeters.



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Events "We are for healthy lifestyle" were organized in five rural communities to promote lung health among the population. The people gathered outside a local school to enjoy musical and dance performances and to listen to local authorities' advice on health issues. After the event the audience was offered a possibility to undergo a medical examination at the rural medical point.



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UNV provided 89 UV lamps to the Ministry of Health of Karakalpakstan to support protecting medical personnel working with TB patients. Ultraviolet radiation is used for disinfecting workspaces in medical facilities. The radiation of UV lamps at certain germicidal wavelength kills microorganisms like *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* that causes tuberculosis.



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In partnership with the Ministry of Health of Karakalpakstan, UNV organized training for valeology teachers in Karakalpak State University. UN Volunteers told about volunteers' and media's role in disease control work , about legal aspects of volunteerism, benefits of volunteerism and encouraged teachers to support their students in volunteering. Volunteerism and community-based disease control were accepted as a subject in the curricula of State University of Karakalpakstan, Medical Institute and Pedagogical Institute.



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The UNV together with the Ministry of Health of Karakalpakstan conducted two surveys (in 2013 and 2015) at five target districts and two control districts to see the results of the campaigning. A group of 14 people from the Ministry of Health of Karakalpakstan and UNV interviewed 1,104 randomly selected people in the rural areas of Karakalpakstan about their knowledge on tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases.



The comparison of the two survey results revealed that after the campaign people were clearly more aware on how to protect themselves from tuberculosis, as nearly all respondents in the target districts knew at least one way to protect themselves. In 2015 the general knowledge of respiratory diseases had increased from 79.6% to 99.5%, i.e. with 19.9%. The knowledge of tuberculosis increased from 80% to 94.8%, asthma from 78% to 96.26%, COPD from 23% to 82.74% and MDR-TB from 24% to 90% in the five target districts.



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Legalizing the status of volunteers, continued integration of free willing volunteerism within the governmental scheme and solving the question of modalities and procedures for introducing amendments to existing legislation was seen as an important part of the future steps. It is important to clarify the role and status of volunteers in relation to certain legislations like law “on Charity”, tax code and civil code and make necessary amendments to them in order to guarantee the rights of volunteers.

“Sustaining Livelihoods Affected by the Aral Sea Disaster” is a joint UN Programme of five UN Agencies (UNDP, WHO, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNV) and local authorities of Uzbekistan to improve the welfare of the most vulnerable groups due to Aral Sea ecological crisis in the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan within Uzbekistan. The health component of the UN Joint Program targets at enhancing the capacity of primary health care workers to meet the health consequences of the Aral Sea environmental disaster with a specific focus on addressing the needs of women and the youth. UN Joint Programme is implemented by UN Uzbekistan. The project is funded by United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security.

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