



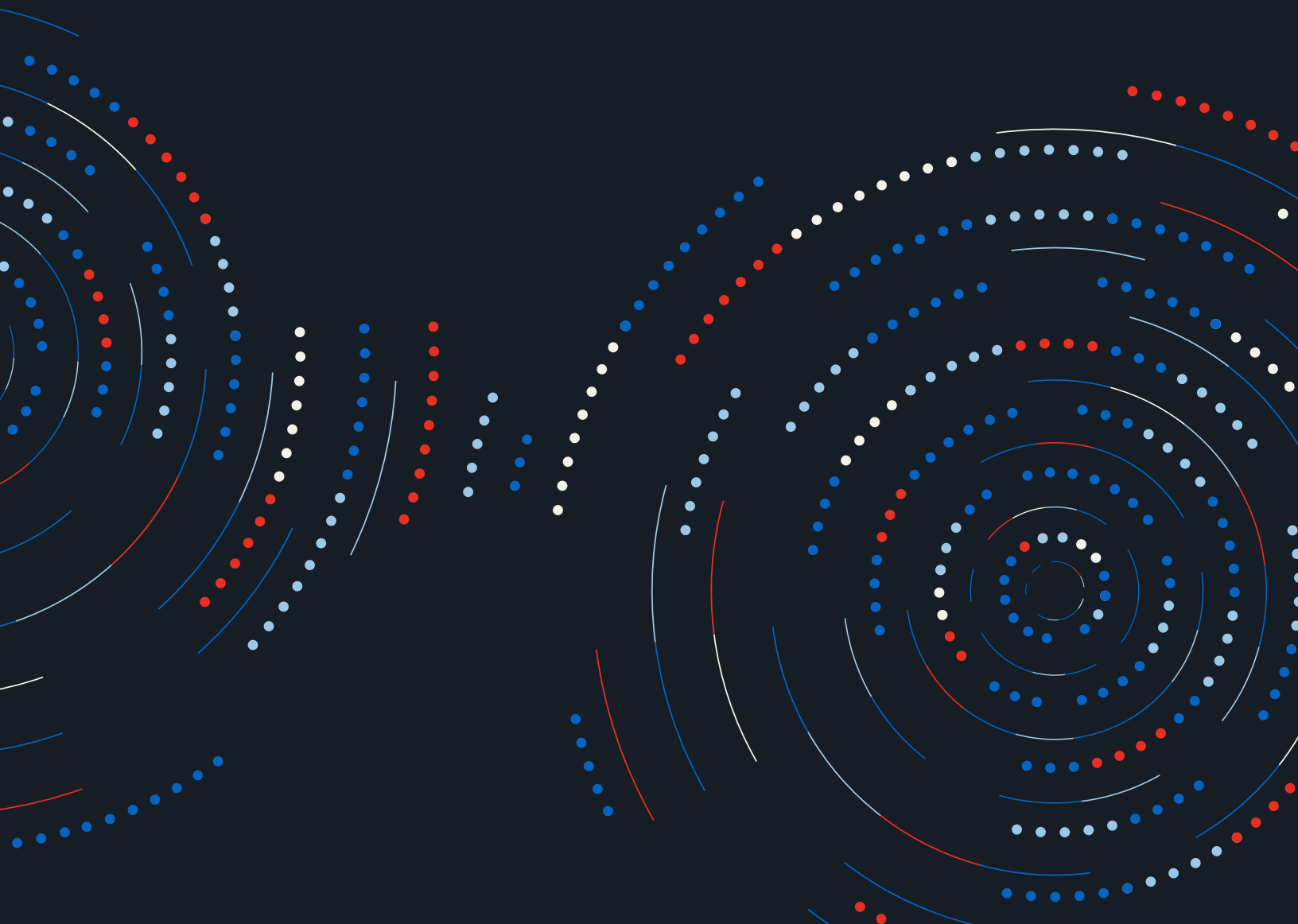
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# Enhancing Efforts to Prevent Violent Extremism by Leveraging Behavioural Insights

## Lessons Learned from Practical Experiments

Developed by the United Nations Development Programme,  
Nudge Lebanon and B4Development





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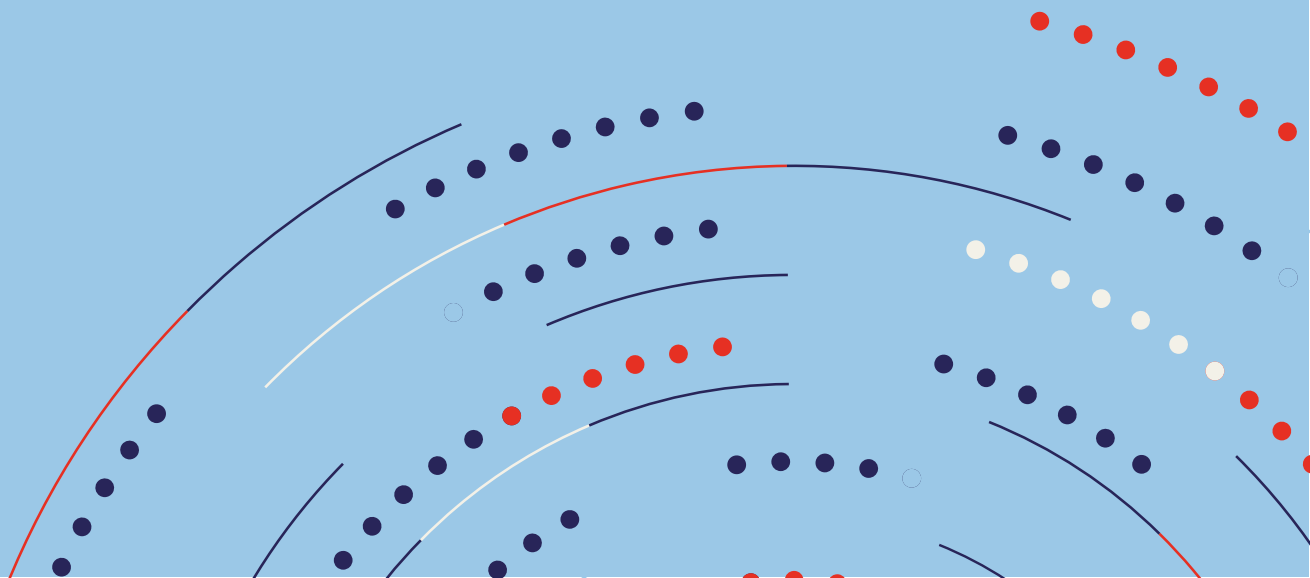
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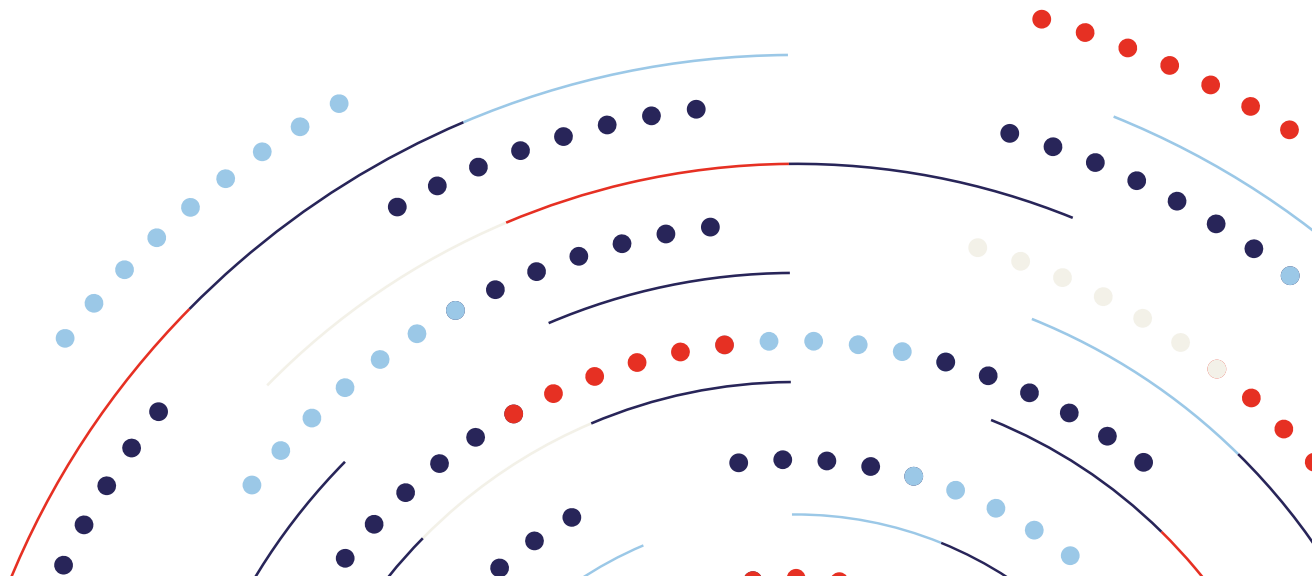


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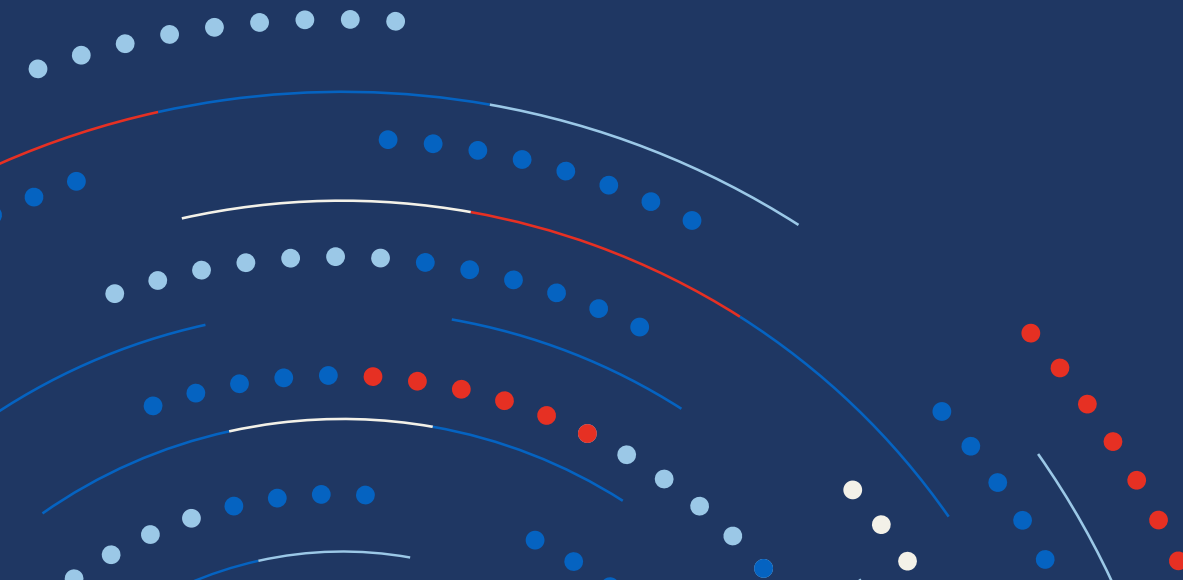
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# List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>BI</b>	Behavioural Insights
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>ECI</b>	Educational Correctional Institution
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>LLD&amp;R</b>	Local Level Disengagement and Rehabilitation
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>NEET</b>	Neither in Employment or in Education or Training
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>PBF</b>	Peacebuilding Fund
<b>PO</b>	Public Organization
<b>PVE</b>	Prevention of Violent Extremism
<b>SMS</b>	Short Message Service
<b>STRIVE</b>	Strengthening Resilience Against Violent Extremism
<b>UC</b>	Union Council
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UN WOMEN</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women



# Introduction: Behavioural Insights for Prevention of Violent Extremism

UNDP implements risk informed, conflict-sensitive and evidence-based development solutions for preventing violent extremism (PVE) at the global, regional and country levels to meet the priorities set out in the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.<sup>1</sup> With PVE programming in more than 40 countries, UNDP aims to meet the demand from government, civil society, and human rights experts for increased investment in research and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of PVE initiatives, and to promote an evidence-based and risk-sensitive approach that demonstrates measurable change in attitudes, behaviour and institutional functioning.

UNDP recognizes the great potential for behavioural insights (BI) as an important tool to be embedded in PVE programming, capable of enhancing the impact and measurement of programmes, increasing participation and inclusivity, and contributing to global discussions on effective approaches for PVE. BI is defined as an approach to policymaking that combines knowledge from psychology, and the cognitive and social sciences, with robust measurement approaches to understand how people make choices.<sup>2</sup> These insights are then used to design policies and initiatives that 'nudge' people's decision-making in a way that promotes positive social change while preserving freedom of choice. Experience shows that the application of BI to a diverse range of challenges, from health to recycling, has led to rapid and statistically significant increases in the cost-effectiveness and impact of policies and programmes.

BI has been applied to development practice at an accelerating pace in recent years, with more than 50 behavioural initiatives<sup>3</sup> identified within UNDP, catalysed in part by the in-house experimentation capability brought by UNDP's Accelerator Labs since 2019. The application of BI across the United Nations system is set to grow further with the Guidance Note on Behavioural Science,<sup>4</sup> released by the United Nations Secretary-General on 21 June 2021. BI has proven to be an essential tool for decision-making as well as strengthening evidence-based programming and M&E, enabling actors to shift from assumptions about what works in programming to deeper understandings of human

behaviour, experimentation, and faster feedback on what works and what does not. In this regard, BI is a 'state-of-the-art' addition to the toolbox for designing and measuring PVE interventions by promoting experimentation and learning mind-sets; building empathy and understanding of target beneficiaries and stakeholders; involving users and beneficiaries in design and behavioural mapping processes; and accounting for incorporating behaviour, not just in the design process, but also throughout M&E processes.

In recent years UNDP has carried out five BI experiments specifically targeting PVE programming in Sudan, Yemen, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan. The five experiments were recently referenced in a recent World Bank publication<sup>5</sup> mapping the use of behavioural science across 17 international organizations. Within UNDP, the experiences gained from these experiments have contributed to the development of the practitioner guidance, *Applying Behavioural Science to Support the Prevention of Violent Extremism: Experiences and lessons learned*,<sup>6</sup> which provides step-by-step support for practitioners to make use of the behavioural sciences to address violent extremism.

This report supplements the practitioner guidance by showcasing the detailed interventions, results and lessons learned from the three most recent experiments conducted in 2020–2021 in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Pakistan. As such, it aims to provide practical insights for practitioners on how to design and carry out BI experiments for PVE by providing insight into both the design process and the results of these three experiments.

## The Approach of the Experiments

Three BI experiments were carried out in Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan from 2020 to 2021, aiming to integrate BI into UNDP's PVE programming. Other United Nations entities in the participating countries were invited to participate in all stages of the process, which resulted in participation from UNICEF,



International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UN Women, enabling collaboration and learning throughout the United Nations system.

Each experiment was applied to ongoing PVE projects in the respective countries to test whether specific changes in the programmatic approach could enhance the impact or results of the designed activities. This approach was based on an assumption that the impact of the experiments would be three-fold: staff and partner capacities on BI would be enhanced through the implementation of the experiments; the impact on targeted beneficiaries would be enhanced through positive results of the experiments; and lessons learned and results would be transferred to similar programming and contexts, contributing to a more systemic integration of BI across the PVE practice.

The experiment process, led by UNDP in partnership with Nudge Lebanon and B4Development, included four main phases:

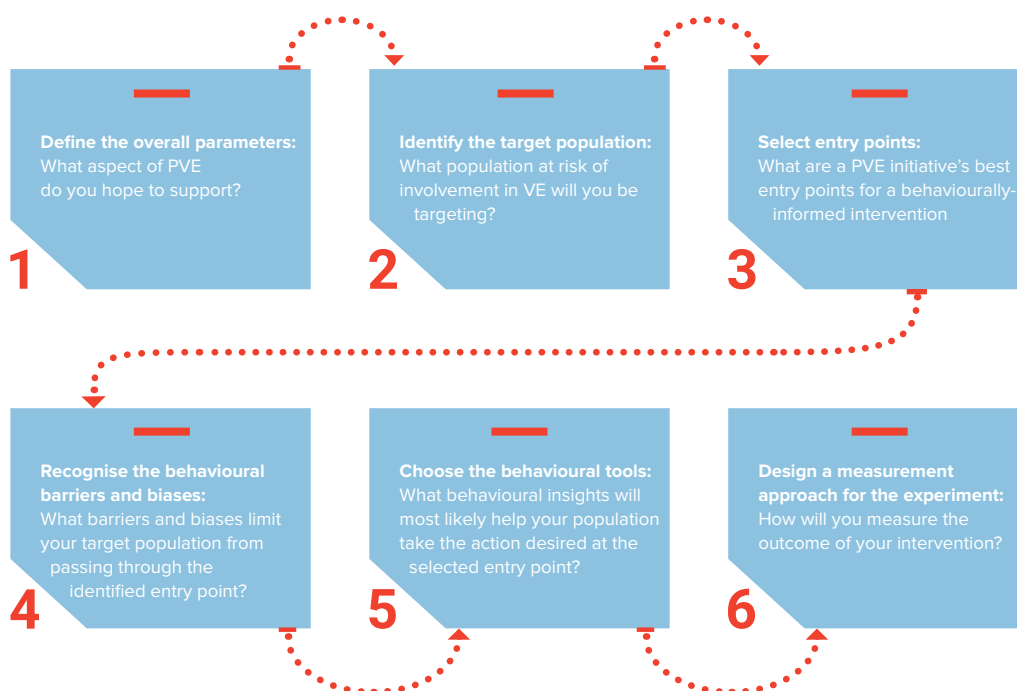
1. Initial capacity building of staff through a series of online workshops aiming to strengthen the knowledge and skills on core BI concepts and to provide an opportunity to practice using behavioural science tools through designing and conducting their own experiments;
2. Design of interventions based on contextualised analysis in each country;

3. Implementation of interventions with local implementing partners in each country, including collection of data and results;
4. Debrief and documentation of results and lessons learnt in country intervention briefs.

The design of the experiments followed the process outlined in the UNDP practitioner guidance,<sup>7</sup> through which staff were supported to analyse and identify the main parameters of the experiments. This involves the six key stages of identifying, designing and testing behaviourally informed interventions that support the goals of PVE-related projects (Figure 1).

The experiments applied the main framework and tools described in the guidance, including the SHAPE DIFFERENCE framework developed by Nudge Lebanon to develop nudges and plan behavioural interventions in experiments.

To safeguard beneficiaries, all experiments underwent ethical reviews before initiation to ensure the protection of beneficiary groups, manage risks and adhere to the do no harm approach. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, implementation modalities had to be adjusted to adhere to health advice in countries, and several aspects of the experiments were implemented online, including advisory support from Nudge Lebanon and workshops provided to beneficiaries.



**Figure 1: Stages for applying behaviourally informed interventions in PVE**  
Source: UNDP, 2021.





# Experiments At a Glance

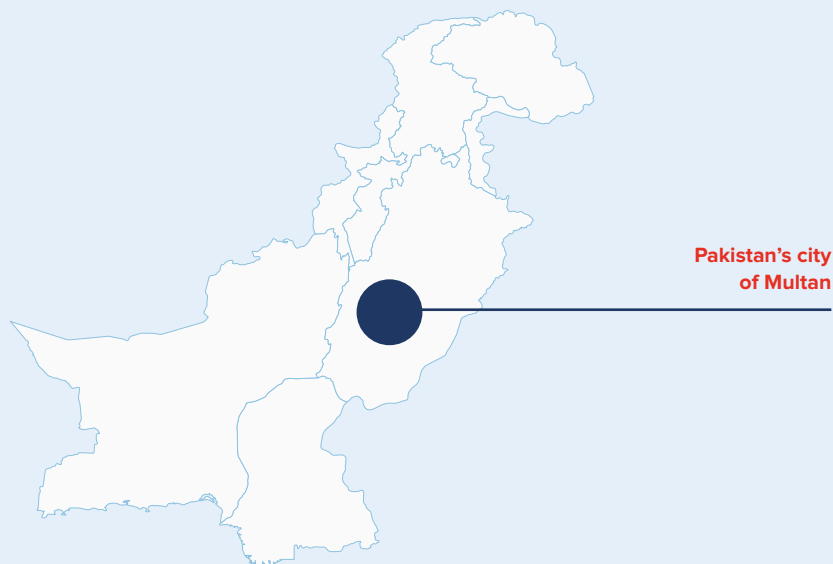


Figure 2:  
Multan, Pakistan

## 1. Pakistan: Reporting of Grievances to the Gender Desk in Multan

### INTERVENTION:

In Pakistan, a behavioural intervention was designed with the aim of increasing the use of established Gender Desks, implemented under a UNDP project supported by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). These Desks provide women with access to services related to education, health, mental health, legal support, disability services, support with official documentation, and support in cases of domestic and gender-based violence (GBV). In 2019, a Gender Desk was included in UNDP's PVE project in Karachi as a stabilization measure to increase protections and inclusion of vulnerable at-risk women. The Desk created strong ownership among the targeted at-risk communities. Moreover, the key government partner institution, Social Welfare Department Sindh, agreed to continue Gender Desk activities beyond UNDP project timelines. Following the success of the first Gender Desk in Karachi, UNDP Pakistan established another Gender Desk in Multan (Figure 2) in October 2020 as part of PVE programming, which became the target of the experiment.

The BI intervention was designed to enhance the ability of women in remote areas to access the services of the Desk by addressing some of the identified behavioural bottlenecks. These include: lack of awareness about the Desk and the full range of its services; lack of knowledge on how to access it; and forgetfulness in submitting grievances when under high cognitive load that hinders decision-making. The intervention consisted of two elements: (i) a commitment card listing the Desk's services

together with a calendar where participants can select the date and time of their preferred visit, a checklist of the steps required to report a grievance, and the contact details of the Desk Officer; and (ii) a behaviourally informed reminder that reinforced the most important information provided earlier in the commitment card (e.g. list of services, address and contact information).

### RESULTS:

The 100 participants in the programme were randomized into either a control group, which received the typical programme materials, or a treatment group, which received the commitment card and the reminder in addition to the programme materials. The results demonstrate that the intervention led to a statistically significant 105 percent increase (by 46 percentage points) in the number of participants reporting grievances from the treatment group compared to the control group. The intervention also led to an increase in the total number of grievances reported. These results are now being integrated in new programming by UNDP Pakistan.

### LESSONS LEARNT:

The commitment card and reminder were designed to be visual and simple enough to be understood by both illiterate individuals and those who did not speak Urdu. The delivery of the materials relied on face-to-face interactions and hard copies of both the commitment card and the reminder, due to the low technology penetration rate in the community, which must be considered when working in rural communities in Pakistan.



Figure 3:  
Fergana Valley, Uzbekistan

## 2. Uzbekistan: Youth for Social Harmony in the Fergana Valley

### INTERVENTION:

In Uzbekistan, two behavioural interventions were designed with the objective of increasing the enrolment rate and effective participation in a UNDP project. The project included the JUST START TEAM acceleration programme, which aims at reintegrating vulnerable youth who have been released from detention centres into society and the labour market. The BI intervention was designed to increase both the enrolment and engagement of the youth in the programme, carried out in the fragile region of Fergana Valley (Figure 3). Following low participation rates in the first intervention, which focused on increasing general enrolment rates, an alternative approach was used in the second intervention, whereby ten youth ambassadors served as messengers on the Telegram messaging platform, sending periodic messages to pre-defined groups to increase the motivation and engagement of participants in the weekly training sessions.

### RESULTS:

A randomized evaluation featured 67 youth assigned to a control group, who received generic communication from the programme coordinator, and 75 assigned to a treatment group, who received communication from youth ambassadors. The evaluation revealed that the engagement of youth ambassadors did not serve as a stimulus to improve the attendance as expected. Participants in the treatment group were 7.4 percentage points less likely to attend the training sessions than participants in the control group.

### LESSONS LEARNT:

Contrary to the hypothesis, the intervention did not bring about positive changes in attendance. The results suggest youth ambassadors should have been engaged for a longer timeframe, as the two-week duration of the intervention was insufficient for youth ambassadors to establish themselves as group leaders. This factor along with possible complications with internet connection in rural areas must be given further consideration when designing future capacity-building interventions with youth.

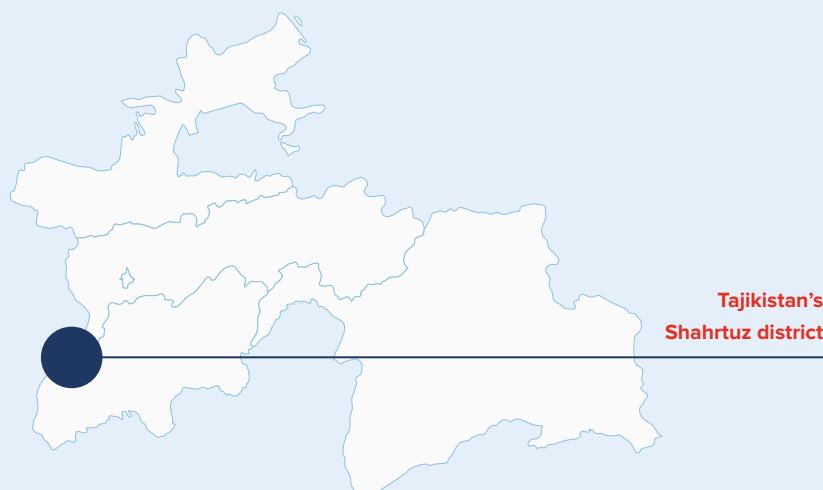


Figure 4:  
Shahrtuz District, Tajikistan

### 3. Tajikistan: Female Applicants to Entrepreneurship and Employability Workshops

#### INTERVENTION:

The behavioural intervention implemented in the district of Shahrtuz in Tajikistan (Figure 4) aimed at increasing the number of young women applying to entrepreneurship and employability workshops, with an aim to enhance their employability and reduce vulnerability to violent extremism. The BI intervention focused specifically on increasing women's participation in these workshops and consisted of phone calls made to the heads of targeted households, urging them to encourage eligible women to apply to an entrepreneurship workshop, and arranging a pre-workshop registration session. The call outlined the nature and benefits of attending the workshop, emphasized a positive self-image of the decision-maker and the eligible women, and ended with an encouragement to those eligible to register for the workshop. All households also received an SMS message inviting eligible women to register.

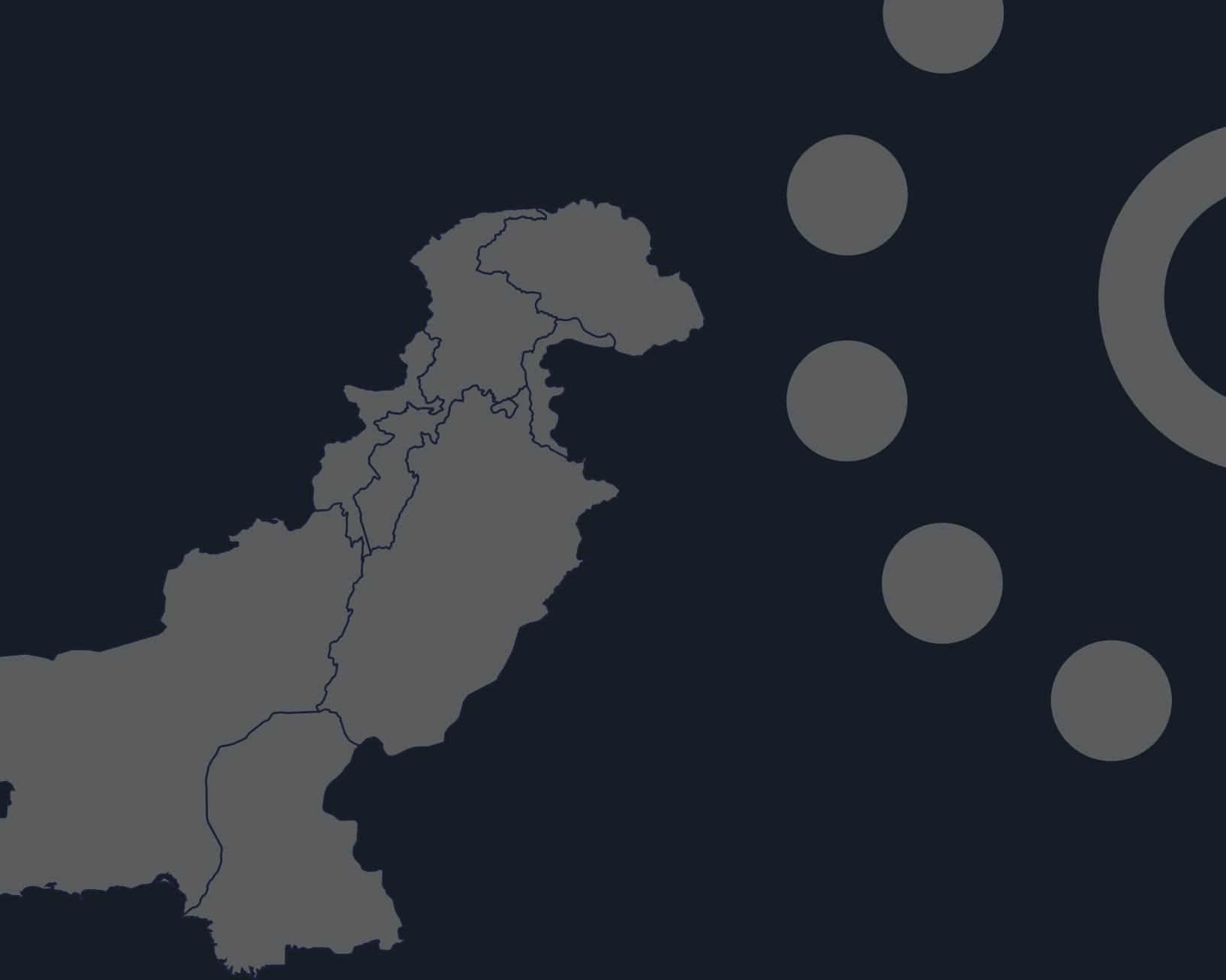
#### RESULTS:

The intervention was successfully delivered to 93 households in the treatment group who were reachable by phone. A total of 49 households (61 eligible females) out of 280 households (17.5 percent) stated their interest in attending the pre-workshop session. Results revealed a statistically *significant* difference between the control group (SMS only) and the treatment group (SMS + phone call), where treated households were (53 percent)

more likely (by 10.3 percent) to state their interest in participating in the workshop. Of these 27 women (6 from the control group and 21 from the treatment group) who attended the pre-workshop session, 23 were selected for the entrepreneurship workshop and completed it. Of the latter, 5 were from the control group and 18 from the treated group, i.e. a 260 percent increase with the treatment applied.

#### LESSONS LEARNT:

The results suggest that eligible females from treated households were more likely to declare their interest in attending the workshop, attend the pre-workshop registration session, and participate in the workshop. However, there is still room for enhancing the number of women participating in the workshops. The workshop took place during the cotton harvest season, which may have affected the ability of many women to attend the workshop since it is traditionally women who engage in this activity. Furthermore, due to prolonged and frequent power outages in the district, many households were unable to receive the SMS messages and/or phone calls in time (e.g. depleted phone batteries). Finally, in light of the cultural barriers regarding the enrolment of women in entrepreneurship workshops, it is unlikely that an SMS and/or phone call would be sufficient to convince parents or husbands of the importance of enrolling into the training programme the women and girls in their lives.



# Pakistan:

Reporting of Grievances  
to the Gender Desk in  
Multan

## Context

Recent human development trends indicate an uneven distribution of human resources between women and men in Pakistan. For example, in 2019, participation in the labour force is 24.9 percent for women, compared to 82.7 percent for men.<sup>8</sup> Women also struggle with low levels of education and lack access to health services. Moreover, they are vastly underrepresented in most areas of social sector development.<sup>9</sup> In addition, 69.5 percent of men and only 45.8 percent of women aged 15 and older are literate.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, Pakistan is yearly ranked significantly lower than most other lower middle-income developing countries in the Gender Inequality Index. In addition, Pakistan was ranked by the Global Gender Gap Index 2018 as the sixth most dangerous country in the world for women, with high cases of sexual crimes and domestic violence, and the second worst in the world in terms of gender equality, due to, inter alia, the country's widespread patriarchal attitudes.

The connection between women's rights and PVE was outlined in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2242.<sup>11</sup> More recently, the pivotal role of women's leadership in PVE and resolving conflict was highlighted in a 2020 global digital consultation by UN Women, where civil society organizations emphasized that among the many factors driving violent extremism, gender inequalities and sexual and gender-based violence are both pull and push factors for women to either engage in acts of violent extremism or to resist them. To support gender-sensitive local governance, encourage the participation of women as local economic actors, and promote peace, tolerance and non-violence, UNDP Pakistan established a Gender Desk in 2019 in Karachi at the Union Council in Metroville, as part of the *Local Level Disengagement & Rehabilitation Project* (LLD&R Project), aiming to prevent the threat of violent extremism in communities. The Desk acts as a key mechanism for addressing gender-related issues at the grassroots level in the area and functions as a referral centre for submitted grievance cases to local organizations with specialized thematic areas for further processing. As a result, women and girls have better access to the facilitation and provision of specialized services, to local government authorities and Social Welfare Department representatives, and to information on safeguarding human rights. The Gender Desk offers a number of services that address a range of challenges including official documentation, physical and mental health,

education, legal services, domestic and gender-based violence, and disability, as well as other challenges related to capacity building and female empowerment, e.g. lack of computer skills (see the full list of services in Figure 5). In Karachi, over a period of few months, the Desk referred 288 women for different specialized services through its partners. More than 80 percent of the services offered related to psycho-social services (all of which are considered resolved) followed by services related to civil documents. In general, the Gender Desk had a very high response rate, with 87 percent of all cases resolved; 13 percent of the cases remained unsolved mostly because some women petitioners decided to pull back and became disinterested in further pursuing their claims.

Following this success in Karachi, UNDP Pakistan established another Gender Desk in Multan in October 2020, offering women an outlet to report grievances and receive assistance (Figure 5). The Desk is available for women who have taken part of UNDP training programmes in Multan as well as other women in the wider community.

Service	Description
<b>Official Documentation</b>	Obtaining official documents (e.g. birth registration certificate)
<b>Physical and Mental Health</b>	Accessing physical and mental health services
<b>Education</b>	Accessing education services for skills development
<b>Legal Services</b>	Receiving support on legal matters
<b>Domestic and Gender-based violence</b>	Receiving support for abuse or domestic violence
<b>Disability</b>	Providing support for anyone suffering from a disability

Figure 5: Services Offered by the Gender Desk

## Challenges and Behavioural Barriers identified

Although the Gender Desk provides free-of-charge services and facilitates access for women in remote areas through a mobile unit, the beneficiaries might be reluctant to approach and report their grievances for various reasons. As part of the experiment, the following challenges and behavioural barriers were identified (Figure 6).



## Intervention

Upon review of these barriers, the BI intervention was designed to address aspects relating to increasing women's awareness about the Gender Desk services, when and how they can use them, as well as having key, readily available information when needed. These aspects were considered the most feasible to address within the scope of the project through clear interventions.

A behavioural intervention targeting 100 women was designed to increase the number of grievances reported to the new Gender Desk in Multan. The intervention consisted of two elements:

- a commitment card listing the Desk services together with a calendar on which participants can select the date and time of their preferred visit, a checklist of the steps required to report a grievance, and the address and contact details of the Desk Officer (Figure 7);
- a behaviourally informed reminder that reinforced the most important information provided earlier in the commitment card, e.g. list of services, address and contact information (Figure 8).

The target group was selected from the women who were already vetted to take part in the ongoing UNDP programming because the already planned training sessions created an advantageous contact point with the women to distribute the commitment cards. The 100 participants in the programme were randomized into either a control group, which received the typical programme materials, or a treatment group, which received the commitment card (Figure 7) and the reminder (Figure 8) in addition to the programme materials. Both the treatment and control groups attended this session, yet the intervention only applied to the treatment group.

Figure 6: Cultural challenges and behavioural barriers identified when referring cases to the Gender Desk

**خواتین سہولت ڈیسک**

ملتان میں خواتین سہولت ڈیسک کا آغاز ہو چکا ہے۔

**خدمات کی مفت فراہمی**

- سرکاری دستاویزات
- قانونی خدمات
- صحت اور نفسیاتی صحت
- تعلیم

کیا آپ کو سہولت ڈیسک کی ضرورت ہے؟

کیا آپ کو سہولت ڈیسک کی ضرورت ہے؟

0309-888 13 22

Figure 7: Commitment card

**خواتین سہولت ڈیسک**

ملتان میں خواتین سہولت ڈیسک کا آغاز ہو چکا ہے۔

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کیا آپ کو سہولت ڈیسک کی ضرورت ہے؟

کیا آپ کو سہولت ڈیسک کی ضرورت ہے؟

0309-888 13 22

Figure 8: Behaviourally informed reminder flyer

## Results

Of the 50 participants in the treatment group, 45 (90 percent) submitted at least one grievance during the data collection period, in comparison to only 22 (44 percent) from the control group. Statistical analysis suggests that this 105 percent increase (46 percentage points – see Figure 9) in the number of individuals reporting grievances is statistically significant, at 1 percent.

Analysing the number of grievances reported (Figure 10), it is evident that women in the treatment group were 91 percent (increase by 44 percentage points<sup>12</sup>) more likely to submit a grievance than those in the control group, a statistically significant result at the 1 percent. The analysis also investigated the impact of the intervention on the likelihood that an individual would report more than one grievance. Results of this analysis reveal that the women in the treatment group were 34 percent (6 percentage points<sup>13</sup>) more likely to submit two or more grievances than those women in the control group; however, this increase is not statistically significant.

### Grievance Reporting Rates by Unique Individuals

Number of unique individuals from each group; N=100

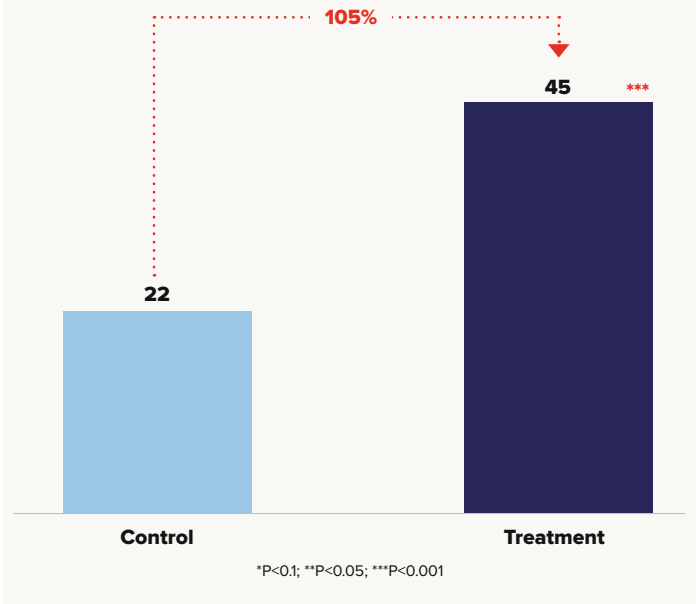


Figure 9: Impact of the intervention on the grievance reporting behaviour



### Breakdown of Reported Grievance According to Type of Service

Number of grievance reported by group

■ Control ■ Treatment

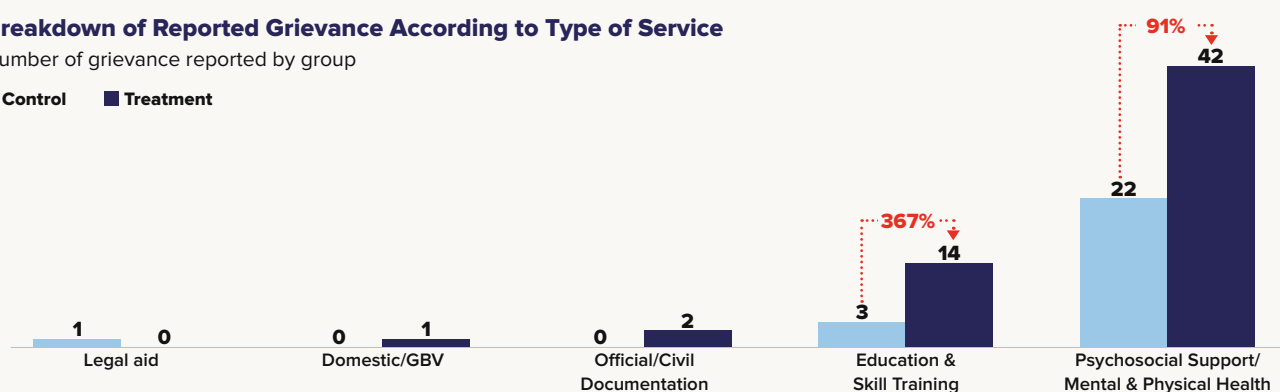


Figure 10: Breakdown of grievances according to the Gender Desk services

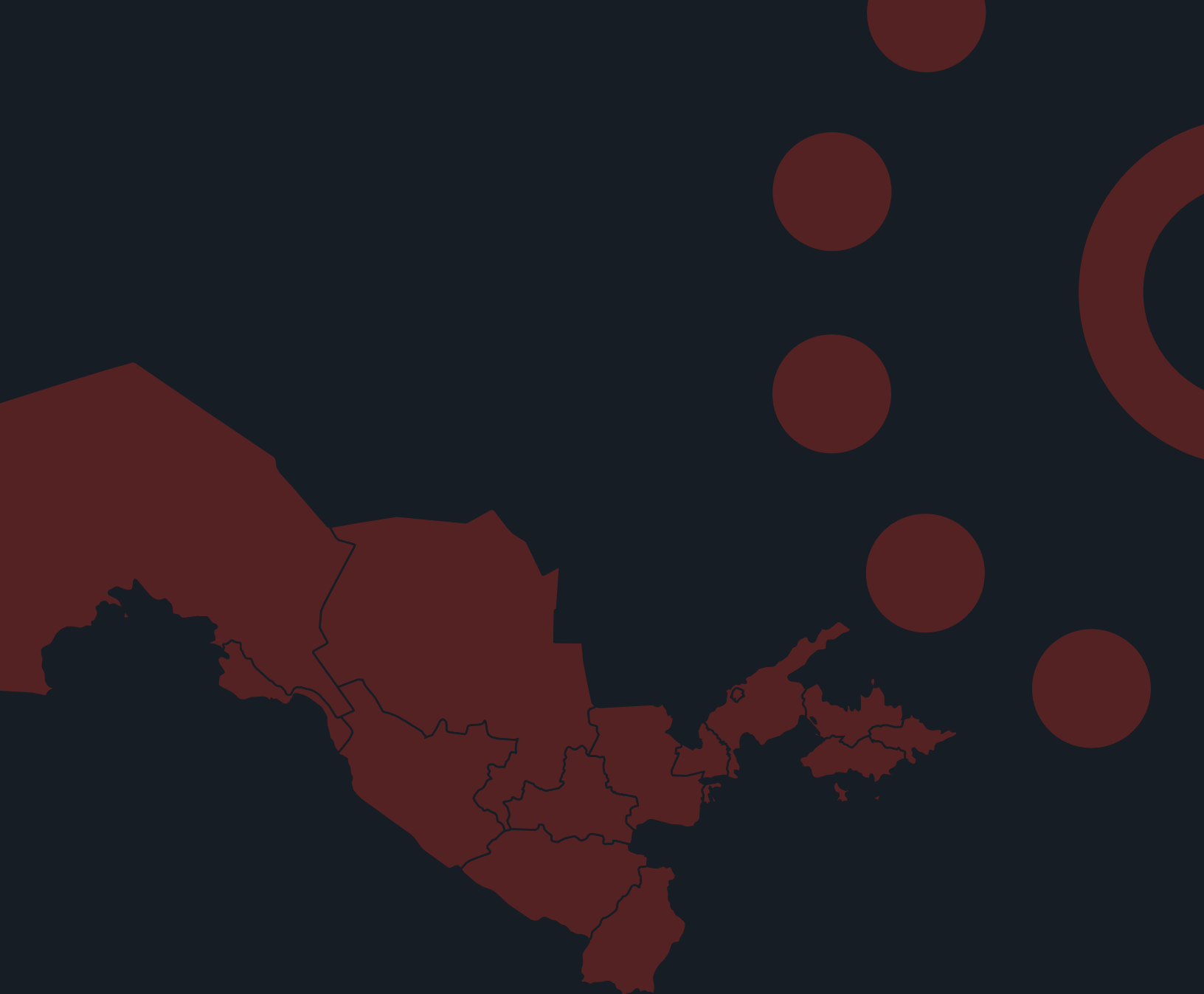
## Lessons Learnt

Important lessons learned can be drawn from the success of this intervention, which are important for future replication and scale up. Evidence from data analysis suggests that the intervention was successful in increasing the likelihood of participants in the treatment group to report at least one grievance to the Desk. Following this major success, a number of lessons learned can be drawn:

- Low literacy rate** among participants and the wider communities: With a literacy rate of less than 40 percent among participants and around 60 percent who spoke Urdu, the language used in the intervention, was a challenging task. To overcome these obstacles, the commitment card and the reminder contained images and visuals to portray important messages such as women's right to report, the Gender Desk being a safe space for women, etc.
- Lack of means of transportation for women:** Women in the target sample lacked access to transportation to attend the training and sensitization sessions. As a result, on multiple occasions, men also attended since they are responsible for providing transportation for their women family members. This ultimately led to some complications, including that men felt threatened that the women were trained to report grievances related to GBV. These incidents were mediated by either the lead psychologist or the local project partner who could engage with local authorities; in one case a group of men raised a complaint about this, which resulted in the local authorities vouching for the programme.

- Low technology-penetration rate** among the target population: Most of the women in the sample group did not own a cell phone nor have access to the internet. As a result, the mode of delivering the interventions was restricted to tangible media. However, the reminder was revised so that participants would receive it as a hard copy during their second set of sessions. In this way, the experiment depended largely on face-to-face interactions and hard copies of the commitment card and the reminder due to the low technology penetration rate in the community.
- The importance of having a **strong implementing partner in the field**: A key lesson learned is the pivotal role of a strong partner on the ground who deeply understands the context and background of the sample population and can respond as new challenges requiring immediate attention arise. The partner must be capable of taking important decisions during implementation to mitigate challenges without jeopardizing the scientific integrity of the experiment. This requires a certain understanding of the principles of BI and the capacity to apply them.

The evidence from this experiment is important for future replication and scale-up in other projects from UNDP Pakistan to optimize the use of the Gender Desk under their prevention of violent extremism interventions. A new, two-year UNDP project planned for Balochistan is an opportunity to replicate the use of the commitment card and reminder materials in a second experiment. This will establish evidence for the external validity of the pilot by applying its conclusions outside the context of Multan.



# Uzbekistan:

**Youth for Social Harmony  
in the Fergana Valley**

## Context

The results from a recent national household survey undertaken by the World Bank and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) suggest that an estimated 42 percent (3.6 million) of Uzbekistan's 8.5 million youth (aged 15–30) are not enrolled in employment, education, or training (NEET).<sup>14</sup> Additionally, many reside in the Fergana Valley – a densely populated and multi-ethnic region shared between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The young women and men in the Fergana Valley face distinct political, social and economic challenges that may be exacerbated by the ongoing economic transformation and market reforms in Uzbekistan. Compared to the country's average, the Valley's three regions (Fergana, Andijan, and Namangan) are among the lowest performing in terms of average income. Residents also experience the lowest growth rate in terms of nominal wages, suggesting that the wealth gap with the rest of the country will continue to widen if this trend continues. Moreover, in addition to having a high rate of juvenile criminal offences, the valley has witnessed disputes between communities as well as countries.<sup>15</sup> It has also faced challenges from violent extremist groups that emerged in the immediate post-independence period.<sup>16</sup>

In Uzbekistan, the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund- (PBF) funded project 'Youth for Social Harmony in the Fergana Valley' aims to support community resilience in the Fergana Valley and to sustain peace by empowering youth as actors of positive change, increasing their opportunities for self-fulfilment. Specifically, the project equips youth – in particular young women – residing in the Fergana Valley with the skills and opportunities to plan their own career paths, extending beyond the immediate confines of the current job market. As part of this project, the acceleration programme, JUST START TEAM, trains youth in management, innovation, business and budget planning, loan applications, and sustainable investments to help them launch local viable commercial start-ups in the Fergana Valley.

## Challenges and Behavioural Barriers Identified

The experiment expanded the recruitment strategy for the JUST START TEAM programme to include marginalised youth aged 15+ who have been detained in specialized educational correctional institutions (ECI), as well as youth repatriated from conflict areas, including Syria and Iraq who might also be considered more at risk

from radicalization processes. Although the training programme was planned to be delivered in person, it was moved to online delivery due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Repatriated youth and youth released from specialized ECIs are often marginalized and stigmatized by their communities. Consequentially, many feel that they lack the skills to reintegrate into society, become entrepreneurs, and start their own businesses. They often lack the confidence, self-esteem and determination required to enrol in professional training programmes. Moreover, they may not believe that they can successfully complete the training, or do not see the point or benefit in doing so.

**Traditional mind-sets**, parents may prefer to have their daughters get married, as opposed to having them gain skills that would help them seek employment or become entrepreneurs

**Fear of hidden costs**, e.g., the belief that once a participant enrolls into the programme, a payment may be required to complete the programme and get certified

**Fear that the young participant will seek independence from the family**, and that they would move out of the house and not take care of the parents

**Lack of guarantee of stable earnings following the completion of the programme**, and a lack of monetary rewards to compensate participants for attending training sessions (e.g. stipends and prizes)

**Lack of faith in justice** and the rule of law, thereby youth are less interested in the benefits of such a programme

**Stigma and perception such as being a failure**, and fear of not being good enough or not having the skills to be successful in the programme

Figure 11: Cultural challenges and behavioural barriers identified when enrolling in employment courses

Despite the numerous benefits of the JUST START TEAM acceleration programme, youth, especially those coming from marginalized backgrounds, might be reluctant to enrol in such a programme for various reasons. The following challenges and behavioural barriers were identified as part of the design phase of the BI experiment (Figure 11).

Youth who enrol might find it difficult to commit to attending all of the training sessions and completing the programme, especially since it was planned to run between three to six months, with several sessions each week. Accordingly, enrolled participants, especially those from marginalized backgrounds — might fail to attend enough sessions and eventually drop out for several reasons, including but not limited to the reasons described in Figure 12.

In addition to the above, the fact that the training programme had to be delivered online added another layer of barriers to effective participation, including limited personal interaction, lack of experience using online technology, and limited or unstable internet connection.

## Intervention

To address some of the identified barriers, focusing on the feelings of failure, lack of motivation and confidence, the BI experiment was designed to increase enrolment of youth and their engagement during training sessions. By partnering with UNICEF Uzbekistan, it was possible to focus the experiment on vulnerable groups, thus aiming to: (i) increase the enrolment of repatriated youth and youth released from ECIs into the JUST START TEAM acceleration programme; and (ii) increase the engagement (e.g. attendance and participation) of enrolled youth in the training sessions.

Two interventions were designed:

### **Intervention 1: Increasing enrolment of repatriated youth and youth released from ECIs into the training programme**

The first intervention consisted of a short inspirational video recorded by a selected youth role model well known in Uzbekistan, explaining the benefits of the JUST START TEAM acceleration programme and aimed to increase the enrolment of repatriated youth and youth released from specialized ECIs. However, since many of the targeted youth had limited internet access, it was difficult to share the videos; hence the intervention could not be implemented.



**Figure 12: Most common reasons identified for participants to drop out of the employment courses**

### **Intervention 2: Increasing the engagement of enrolled youth with the training programme**

Committing to a long-term entrepreneurship training programme can be challenging, especially when it is delivered virtually through a video conferencing platform. In addition, further restrictions and limitations to everyday life were present due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure that enrolled participants remain engaged and motivated throughout online sessions, they were pre-assigned to Telegram groups with ‘youth ambassadors’. These ten selected ambassadors’ responsibilities included regularly communicating with participants through the Telegram messaging platform, which is widely used in Uzbekistan, assessing their needs/challenges, and notifying and reminding them of upcoming sessions. The main objective of using youth ambassadors was to support and encourage youth attendance, participation and engagement in the training sessions as well as to complete the programme.

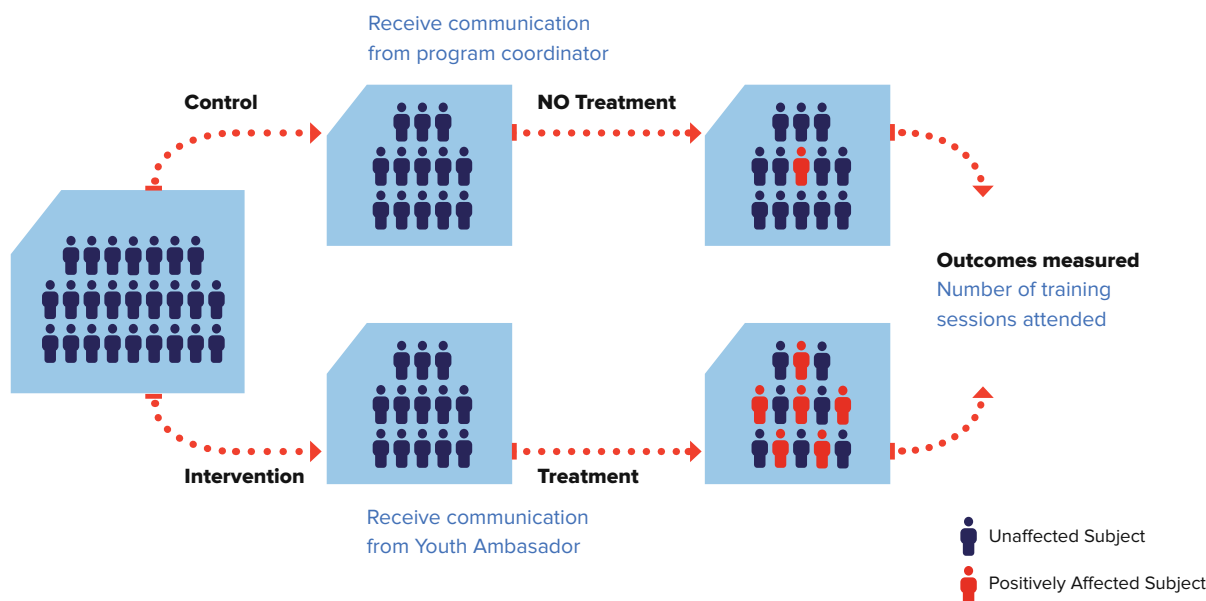


Figure 13: Illustrative sample randomization between the control and treatment groups

For the experiment, 67 youth were assigned to a control group (e.g. received generic communication from the programme coordinator) and 75 to a treatment group (e.g. received communication from youth ambassadors, see Figure 13).

7.4 percentage points less likely to attend the training sessions than participants in the control group (Figure 14). Women as well as participants who registered as part of a team were 18 percent and 10 percent respectively more likely to attend than men and those who took part of the training programme individually.

## Results

The intervention was conducted over two weeks, during which ten training sessions were conducted. The attendance rates between the control and treatment groups were compared to evaluate the impact of assigning youth ambassadors to Telegram groups on youth participation. Attendance at each session was tracked by the programme coordinator.

A total of 263 participants enrolled in the JUST START TEAM acceleration programme, including 70 youth from the target groups (repatriated youth and those released from specialized educational correctional facilities). However, only 142 participants and 10 youth ambassadors joined the programme's Telegram group (e.g. participated in the second intervention). A randomized evaluation with 67 youth assigned to a control group, who received generic communication from the programme coordinator, and 75 assigned to a treatment group, who received communication from youth ambassadors, revealed that the use of youth ambassadors did not play a positive role in influencing attendance. Participants in the treatment group were

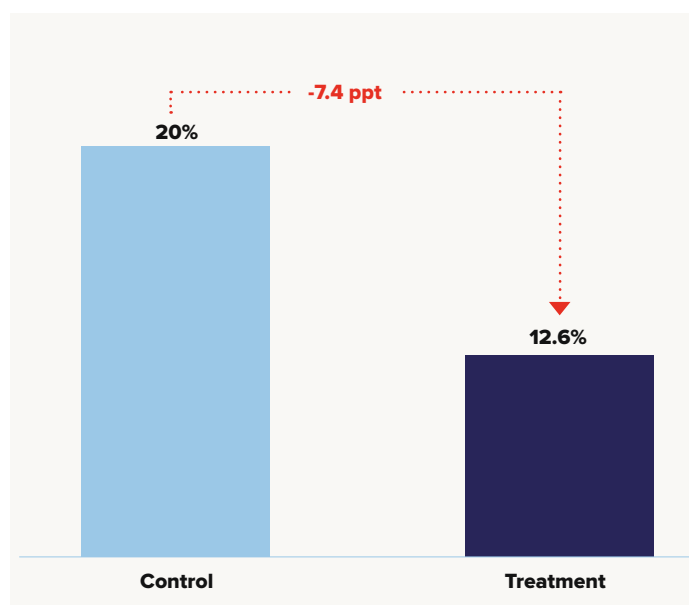


Figure 14: Impact of the treatment on attendance rates (n= 142)

## Lessons Learnt

The first intervention was well designed, and the outcome of the video production utilized was positive, but it was not possible to share the video according to plan. This could have been prevented by better analysis of the context, including the access of the target beneficiaries to the internet.

Contrary to the hypothesis, the results suggest that the use of youth ambassadors did not improve attendance. These results, however, are inconclusive, and therefore it is not possible to determine from this experiment the effectiveness of youth ambassadors as drivers of improved attendance in such programmes. Three potential explanations for the observed effects are offered:

1. **Short intervention period:** Given the relatively short intervention period (around 2 weeks) and the online mode of communication, possibly, the youth ambassadors were unable to establish themselves as group leaders and therefore did not make the necessary impression on the other participants.
2. **Lack of motivation or the necessary skills to act as an ambassador:** Possibly, some of the selected youth ambassadors did not play their assigned role properly, either because they lacked the motivation or the necessary leadership skills. Indeed, five out of the ten youth ambassadors missed at least half the training sessions during the intervention period and did not actively communicate with the other participants. The ambassador's role was performed inconsistently: some ambassadors were inactive or performed poorly, whereas others did an outstanding job, taking initiative.

### 3. Presence of an “admin-like” account in the control

**groups:** The name of the generic Telegram account (“JUST START TEAM ADMIN”) that was used to monitor the control groups might have indirectly led members to perceive it as a source of authority. They might have even assumed that the person monitoring the group through this account had the authority to affect their current standing within the programme or other outcomes related to them.

Future replications of this experiment should invest more effort into recruiting, training and supporting youth ambassadors in their role, standardizing their engagement with participants, considering other behavioural barriers such as the length of the programme, and addressing structural issues such as internet connectivity.



# Tajikistan:

**Increase Female Applicants  
to Entrepreneurship and  
Employability Workshops**

## Context

Tajikistan grapples with several ongoing challenges such as social fragility, economic inequality and a rise in violent extremist ideologies, especially in the southern districts along the border with Afghanistan, including Shahrtuz, the target district for this project. Those most affected by these complications are the young men and women who represent approximately 70 percent of Tajikistan's population of nearly nine million, with the majority living in rural areas.<sup>17</sup> Despite being a large demographic, 29.3 percent of youth are unemployed and uneducated.<sup>18</sup> For young females, this is even worse; approximately 50 percent of women in Tajikistan are NEET, compared to only 7 percent of men. Moreover, 1 in 10 women in the country are discouraged from getting a job.<sup>19</sup>

The dire situation for youth in Tajikistan has triggered a huge wave of emigration, leading half a million Tajikistani men to seek better opportunities abroad. The country now largely relies on remittances, which further reduces the productive capabilities among youth. For women in particular, the high rates of emigration places a disproportionate burden of household responsibilities on them and further decreases their participation in the workforce. These vulnerabilities together with marriage demands, financial insecurities, societal pressure and other factors have led to an increase in the radicalization of women, making them the third most cited vulnerable group to radicalization following youth and emigrants.

The UNDP project 'Strengthening Community Resilience and Regional Cooperation for Prevention of Violent Extremism in Central Asia' seeks to prevent violent extremism by promoting counter-extremist narratives and improving the employability of economically disadvantaged youth. The project hosts a series of workshops throughout the country aimed at improving the employability and entrepreneurship skills of young people. More specifically, participants are equipped with enhanced skills in business planning, developing business ideas, and budgeting, among other things. In addition to fostering youth economic empowerment, these workshops also aim to contribute to the reduction of the gender gap in employment, which can serve as a push factor for radicalization and violent extremism among young women.

**Figure 15: Contributing factors to the low enrolment rates of women in the workshops**

## Challenges and behavioural barriers identified

Following the roll-out of previous programmes with similar objectives, it was observed that workshops on topics such as baking or sewing were attended mostly by female participants, whereas, the enrolment rates for women in employability workshops ranged from only 25 to 30 percent. Several possible contributing factors to the relatively low enrolment rates of women in these workshops were identified as part of the BI experiment design process (see Figure 15).

### **Social influence and norms:**

female participation in social events (such as the workshops) is discouraged within the communities of interest by parents, parents-in-law, and spouses.

### **Perceived cost and benefits:**

as women are traditionally seen as childbearers, families of female applicants see little benefit in them engaging with these entrepreneurship workshops.

### **Present bias:**

some parents privilege payoffs that are closer to the present time, preferring their daughters enrol in female-specific workshops with immediate benefits.

### **Lack of self-efficacy:**

some females are unsure if they are good enough to apply for such workshops, and whether they are able to complete the workshop successfully.

### **Lack of role models:**

particularly in rural and conservative areas, females may lack influential peers (social referents) who can champion the cause of female economic security.

### **Hassle & inconvenience:**

some applicants may perceive the process of applying and attending the workshops a hassle, especially for women who may require a male family member to accompany them.



## Intervention

Against this background, a behavioural intervention was designed to increase applications by young women to entrepreneurship and employability workshops, focusing on the barriers relating to perceived cost and benefits as well as the social influences of the family and community. In particular, the intervention consisted of personal phone calls made to the heads of households, urging them to encourage eligible women in the house to apply to an entrepreneurship workshop. The call outlined the nature and benefits of attending the workshop, emphasized a positive self-image of the decision-maker and the eligible women, and ended with a prompt to encourage those eligible to register for the workshop. Moreover, households in both the control group and treatment group received a basic SMS from the implementing partner informing them about the workshop message inviting eligible women to declare their interest in enrolling.

A total of 280 households (361 eligible females) with unique phone numbers were assigned to the control (n = 123) and treatment (n = 157) groups.

## Results

The intervention was successfully delivered to 93 households (Figure 16) in the treatment group who were reachable by phone. A total of 49 households (61 eligible females) out of 280 households (17.5 percent) stated their interest in attending the workshop. The results of a randomized evaluation (Figure 16) revealed a statistically significant difference between the control group (SMS only) and

### Households with at least one eligible female confirming her interest in attending the training sessions

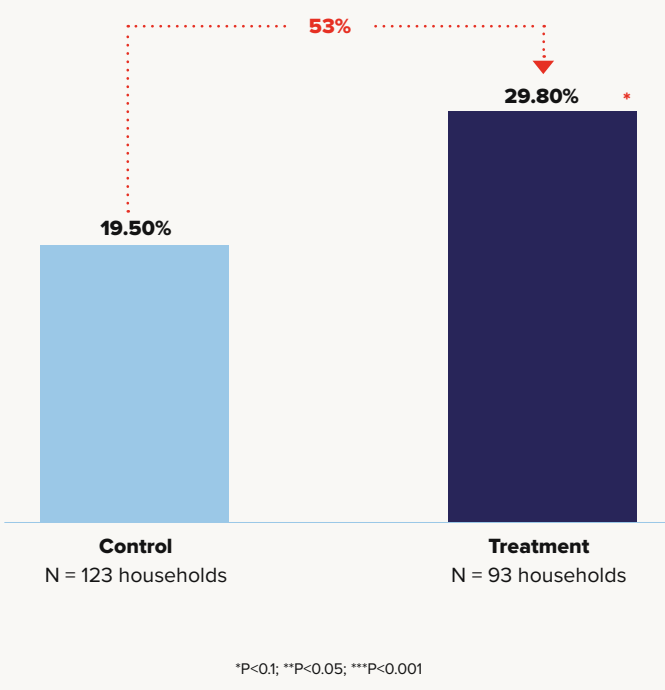
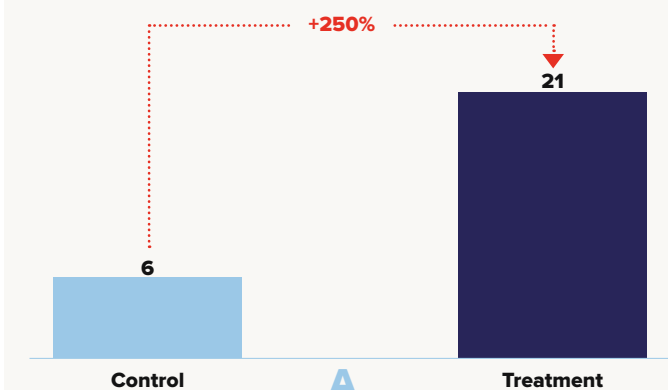


Figure 16: Breakdown of the intervention results by control and treatment groups

the treatment group (SMS + phone call), whereby the treated households were 53 percent more likely to declare their interest in the workshop (treatment = 29.8 percent vs. control = 19.5 percent). In addition, a larger number of eligible females from treated households attended and completed the workshop sessions (n = 18 females) than from the control group (n = 5 females – see Figure 17).

### Females who attended the pre-workshop registration session (N = 27)



### Females who attended and completed the workshop (N = 23)

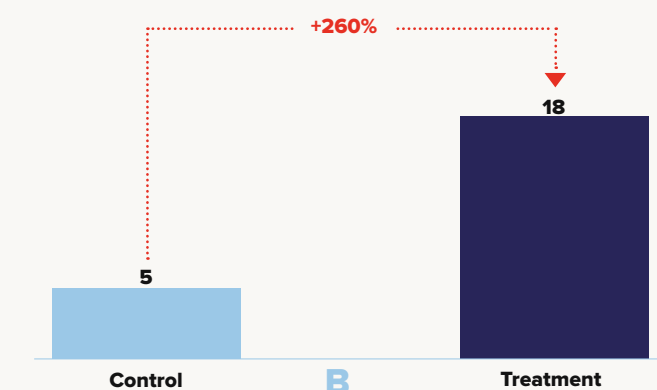


Figure 17: Breakdown of attendance by control and treatment groups

## Lessons Learnt

The results suggest that eligible females from treated households were more likely to declare their interest in attending the workshop, attend the pre-workshop registration session, and participate in the workshop. Several lessons learned were identified during the experiment process:

- a. The importance of having a **local partner** on the ground for robust data collection: Having a capable local partner on the ground is important to facilitate building a database of beneficiaries, typically populated using door-to-door household surveys to aggregate information about eligible individuals.
- b. The inability to have access to the full sample of beneficiaries due to **technical issues**: Many households were unable to receive phone calls or SMS messages during the intervention period due to a prolonged electricity problem in the region that prevented many households from charging their mobile phones. This was evidenced by the multiple text messages and phone calls that the implementing partner received from households up to three weeks after the completion of the workshop. The initial idea was to rely on WhatsApp groups and online dissemination, but the design had to be re-adapted for paper cards and tokens to be disseminated during the sessions, due to the low penetration of both smartphones and internet usage among the target population.
- c. Suboptimal outreach due to **logistic or education related considerations**: Many of the heads of households who typically had primary access to the phone were away from their homes when they received the SMS message or phone call from the implementing partner. Therefore, they were unable to inform eligible women in their home about the workshop in time. Moreover, anecdotal evidence suggests that in some instances recipients did not understand the content and/or purpose of the messages.

- d. The effects of **external factors** on workshop attendance: The weather conditions, workshop distant location (even though the travel expenses were covered by the programme) and the timing of the workshop during the cotton-picking season may have deterred many eligible women from participating. Indeed, some nominated relatives to attend the training sessions (e.g. husband, brother or sister), since they were busy harvesting cotton before weather conditions worsened.

Going forward, both communication channels (SMS and personal phone calls) should be used in order to maximize the opportunity to reach the target participants, and their content pre-tested to ensure that it can easily be understood by members of this target group. Moreover, prospective workshops in rural districts such as Shahrtuz should be planned during the summer when women are not engaged in agricultural work. Workshops should also be organized in convenient locations within walking distance from the homes of the eligible women to eliminate the need for commuting.

Finally, considering the cultural barriers regarding the enrolment of women in entrepreneurship workshops, it is unlikely that an SMS and/or phone call is enough to convince parents or husbands about the importance of enrolling their daughters or wives into the training program. To overcome this, it is recommended that future workshops experiment with bundling entrepreneurship skills training with vocational workshops that typically target women living in rural areas (e.g. sewing and cooking) to decrease the barriers for participation. The project could also experiment with engaging successful female entrepreneurs from their community/district who share a similar background to the target female participants as messengers and role models during the community outreach process.



## Final Conclusions

This brief has summarized interventions carried out in three Central and South Asian countries, and has demonstrated practical ways in which BI have the potential to strengthen efforts in the PVE. Showing the diverse opportunities for applying BI to PVE, the experiments in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Pakistan focused on different aspects of PVE, namely on reintegrating youth who have been released from enclosed institutions in society and the labour market, increasing the enrolment of young women in professional training programs, and increasing the quantity and quality of grievances reported by young women to the Gender Desk, respectively. The three interventions were implemented with the aim of promoting a PVE practice rooted in learning and evidence, as opposed to basing PVE programming and project development on assumptions about what works and what does not, and ignoring the complexity of human behaviour.

For each experiment, lessons learned have been documented and suggestions for future interventions and adaptations suggested. Generally, the barriers to participation were often sought to be resolved by applying digital technologies with a view to increase communication with groups that are otherwise often left behind. However, it is clear from all the experiments that poor access to hardware and low internet penetration still present large bottlenecks for such interventions when implemented in rural or remote communities. Throughout the experiments' implementation phase, there were several design ideas that had to be adjusted due to unforeseen changes, most of which included challenges in accessing the chosen digital communication channels. This underscores the importance of engaging beneficiaries in the design phase of projects and keeping a dynamic approach throughout implementation. Clearly, there is still a long way to go until such interventions can be scaled up and mainstreamed in PVE programming, and until then, they require contextualised analysis of the target groups and the infrastructure available to them.

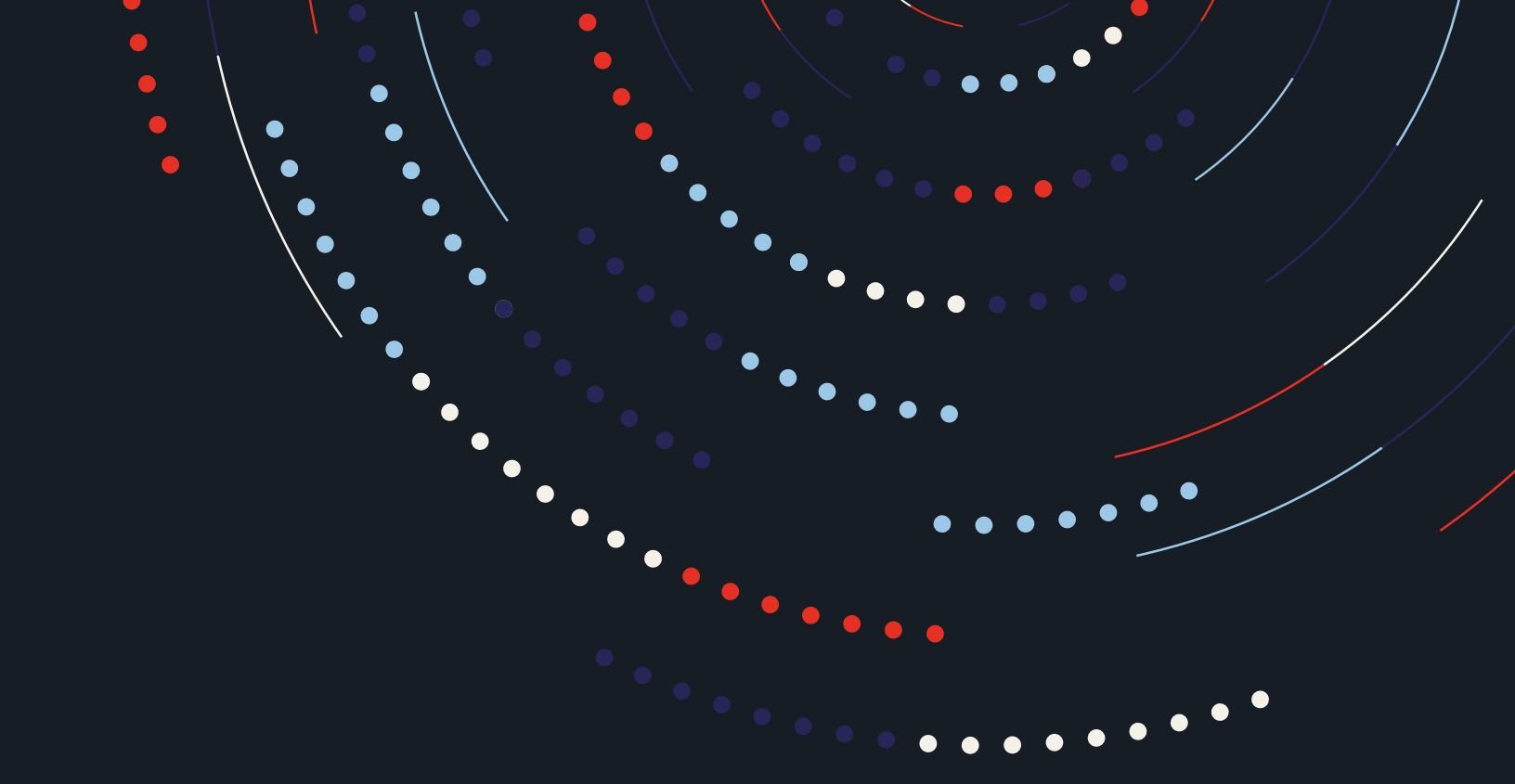
It is also interesting to note from the experiments that when addressing behavioural barriers related to traditional gender norms, the interventions not only addressed women, but also their communities. This was observed through the Tajikistan experiment, which directed calls to the heads of households rather than the women themselves, and in Pakistan, where the gender desks approached women directly but were able to engage with their husbands when issues were raised. These findings underline how there is no 'quick fix' to address these types of barriers, and how several layers of interventions must be implemented and adapted over sustained periods of time to find the best solutions.

The three experiments were implemented to enhance the PVE programming of the specific localities in which they took place, and also to develop the skills of staff and UNDP as a whole to apply BI in PVE programming. Reviewing the three experiments, it is clear that this capacity building requires dedicated resources in terms of staff time, external BI expertise and additional time for project implementation. Experiments require careful planning and implementation in order to produce reliable results. It was also found that ongoing mentoring of staff throughout the process by the BI experts was essential. For future replication, it is worth considering the best modality for both building capacity and mentoring the implementing staff of the BI experiments in order to ensure the sustainability and value for money of the investments in BI for PVE.

A few stand-alone BI experiments will not lead to a shift in how an entire organization approaches programming, but it is clear from the feedback collected from participating staff in the three countries that it does change the mind-set of individuals involved. With this in mind, these lessons will serve as a basis for the systematic integration of BI in design, monitoring and evaluation of UNDP's PVE programming at the global, national and local levels.

## Endnotes

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