

Women's Economic Empowerment in Afghanistan

Key Figures



7 artisan **value chains** mapped across 8 provinces



1,200 individuals (**77% women**) received 9-month vocational training in 19 Business Development Centres in 6 provinces



1,000 most vulnerable women engaged in 20 Women's Artisan Networks



2,500+ MSMEs (**79% women owned**) supported with grants and literacy training



560+ MSMEs received technical capacity-building training to link with international market



1 Design Centre launched in Kabul as a national hub for innovation, MSME support and international market linkage



24 national and international fairs facilitate sustainable market access

Implementation Overview

4

projects

9

Provinces

15.2M€

Budget

124,000

Beneficiaries



Trainee in Embroidery class in Faryab, Oct 2024

The **SCALE-UP AFGHANS** project, funded by the **European Union** and implemented by Acted as a pilot initiative since 2022, aims to safeguard and create sustainable livelihoods across Afghanistan, with a strong emphasis on **women's economic empowerment**. The project provides vocational training, in-kind toolkits, and raw material support, while also delivering business development grants to over **2,500 MSMEs** and technical capacity-building to an additional **540 MSMEs**. By strengthening market linkages and enhancing the visibility of Afghan artisan products both nationally and internationally, Acted is contributing to more resilient and inclusive local economies.

Two years into implementation, an *independent midterm assessment* highlights substantial improvements in the livelihoods and resilience of participants:

- **Crisis-level livelihood coping strategies**, such as selling income-generating assets, decreasing health or education expenditures or withdrawing children from school, **dropped from 30.7% to 11%**, indicating significant improvement in household livelihoods.
- Emergency-level coping strategies, including begging, high-risk income activities, or early marriage of daughters, declined sharply from **8.66% to just 0.7%**, reflecting improved household resilience.
- **75%** of supported households reported **sustained net income** over the past six months, significantly exceeding project targets.
- **20% growth in household income** among participating artisans and craftsmen following the intervention.

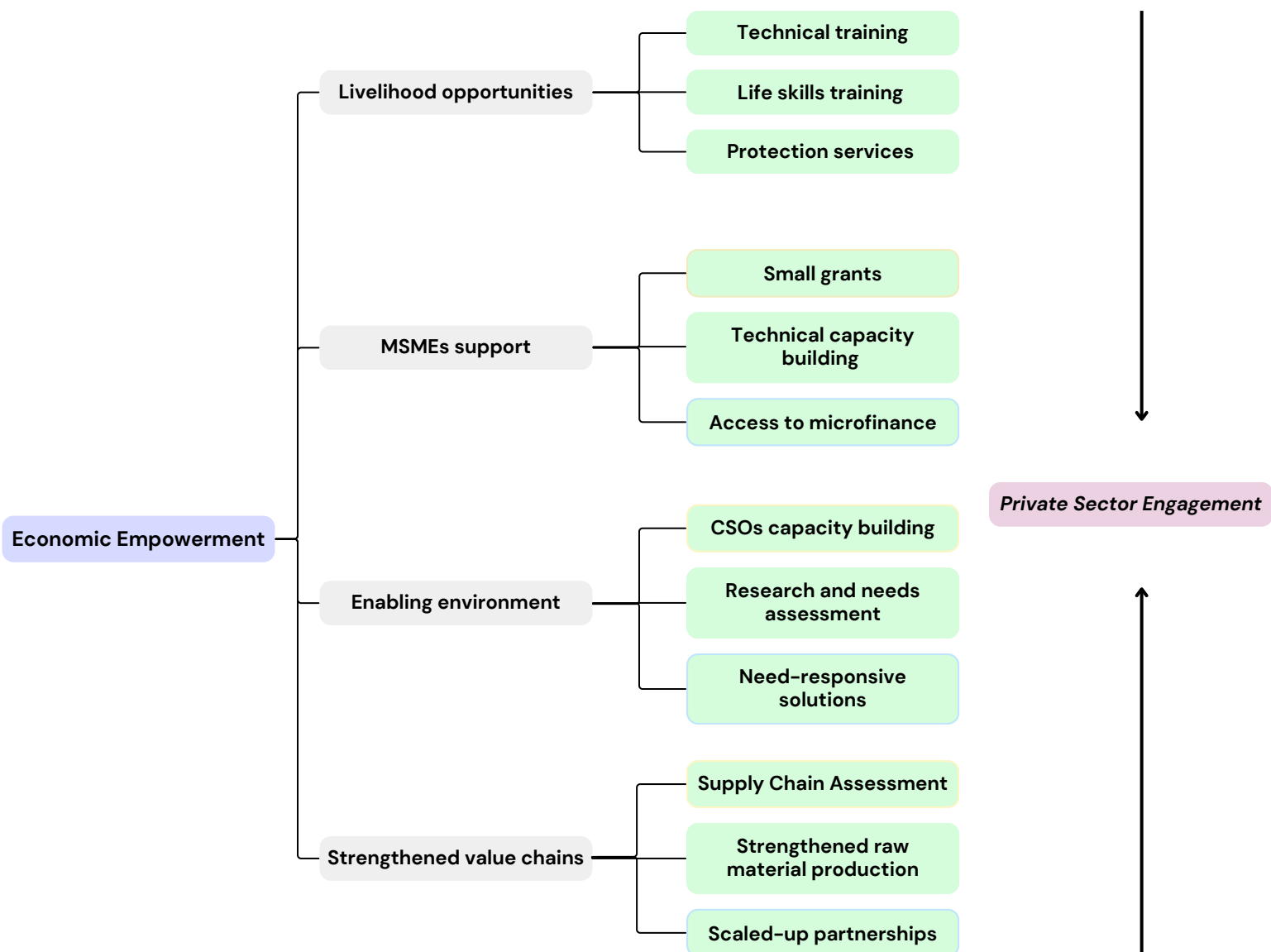
ACTED'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY IN AFGHANISTAN

Acted's strategy on inclusive economic opportunity programming aims at fostering **socio-economic empowerment** and **sustainable development** in Afghanistan, operate on four core pillars:

1. Enhancing livelihood and **income-generating opportunities** through multi-purpose centres (MPCs).
2. Supporting **Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises** (MSMEs) to contribute to sustainable job creation and social and environmental resilience.
3. Reinforcing an **enabling environment** for the growth and resilience of businesses and CSOs
4. Fostering market growth through **strengthened value chains** and increased products demand

The strategy also encompasses a cross-cutting pillar: **private sector engagement**.

Conceptual Diagram of Acted's Economic Empowerment Strategy in Afghanistan



PILOTING THE DESIGN CENTRE AND MOVING FORWARD

As a central pillar of Acted's SCALE-UP project, Acted has established a **Design Centre** in Darulaman (PD7, Kabul). The Centre is envisioned as **a key market linkage hub** for Afghan artisan products, connecting MSMEs to both national and international markets. It offers services in design and quality control, logistics and export, marketing and sales, and broader business support, including business management and environmentally sustainable production practices, all aimed at ensuring long-term sustainability. Linked to Acted's **provincial multi-purpose centres**, the Design Centre strengthens the sustainability of livelihoods interventions across Afghanistan.

Currently, skilled artisans are producing multiple batches of orders for European luxury brands in the Design Centre. The Centre is transitioning into **a service hub by the end of 2025**, offering a physical and online platform for artisan collaboration, a professional photo lab, cataloguing, and prototype design for MSMEs.

Next Phase Priorities for the Design Centre:

- **Access to quality raw materials:** Supply raw materials at a premium price
- **Micro-finance support:** Offer Sharia-compliant loans from OXUS, with Acted as collateral.
- **Export opportunities:** Facilitate certifications and access to international markets.
- **MSME skills and trade:** Scale up training, including e-commerce and digital market readiness.
- **Policy advocacy:** Engage at national and EU levels on transport and export taxes to support market access.

Moving forward: Scaling up Afghan MSMEs and Strengthening Livelihoods and Resilience

- **Tiered Grants and Capacity-Building for MSMEs** including access to market, solar panel installment, business license support.
- **Upscaling financial literacy training and improved access to microfinance.** Support with business licenses, renewable energy/solar panels, and address administrative barriers to cross-border trade.
- **Strengthening Production Capacity of raw material providers** across priority value chains to ensure consistent quality and supply.
- **Scaling Up Food Processing MSMEs** across key food value chains – olive oil, orange and rose water, tea, honey, and saffron, based on detailed market mapping and value chain analysis.
- **Sustainable operation of Design Centre in Kabul**, linking production to international markets. The centre provides MSMEs with design services, quality assurance, branding and digital marketing, logistics and export facilitation, and business management.
- **Diversification of International Market Partnerships** particularly for high-end value chains, including embroidery, silk weaving, and glass-blowing.
- **Holistic Protection support** for women entrepreneurs through psychosocial support (PSS) and peer-to-peer networking within Women and Girls' Safe Spaces (WGSS).



Carpet weavers in Balkh province, April 2025