



# In remote Tajikistan, aspiring women launch their own businesses

by Molly Shapiro



## Imagine

living in one of the most remote places in the world, in a village nestled among some of the tallest peaks on earth. It's a place where jobs are scarce, the economy is weak, and most everyone struggles to put food on the table. And if you're a woman, it's a place with many obstacles and few opportunities.

This is the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) region of Tajikistan, one of the poorest parts of the second poorest country in Central Asia. The villages of GBAO are isolated and hard to reach, particularly in the long winter months. And even though almost 40% of the region's people live in poverty, the central government provides them with little help.

In GBAO and throughout Tajikistan, it's common for men to go abroad to find work, mostly to Russia. Roughly 20% of Tajik men leave their families to work abroad, sending a portion of their earnings back home. This means that women are left alone to manage the household, take care of the children, and provide for the family's basic needs. Sometimes, their husbands send back little, or worse, some never return home at all, choosing instead to build a new life for themselves in their adopted country.

Photo: Courtney Gerard