



Creating one-stop-shop for sustainable businesses

Organization: The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

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Country: Throughout the West Bank

Target: Women

Abstract

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is working to improve the livelihoods of Palestinian women by enhancing the capacities of women cooperatives and associations involved in food processing, supporting them to develop marketable and exportable products along with supporting the government to develop a regulatory environment for the protection of local production and the establishment of incentives for women cooperatives. FAO has facilitated the establishment of two business-shops in the North and South of the West Bank for assembling, testing, and packaging and selling women's cooperative products. Additionally,

the project focuses on creating local, regional and international marketing channels for these businesses to become self-sufficient, profitable and sustainable. FAO's intervention is one component of a joint UN project implemented in partnership with UN Women and the International Trade Centre (ITC) with the support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Fund.

Situational analysis

The oPt faces a significant gender challenge, reflected by enormous disparity in employment and asset ownership between women and men. Despite the slight increase of women's participation rates in the workforce, women's economic participation, which is just as shy by 20 percent, remains one of the lowest in the world. Palestinian women's cooperatives lack the knowledge, skills and confidence, to run their business efficiently and to be competitive on the local, regional and international markets. The "Creating a one-stop-shop for sustainable businesses" program is working to enhance the competitiveness of cooperatives and the capacities of female entrepreneurs by focusing on food production and processing as well as on manufacturing of traditional and cultural products. The program provides 20 cooperatives with agricultural services, and directly benefits 245 women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and ages (25 -65 years old) from both rural and urban areas across the West Bank (Nablus, Jenin, Jerico, Hebron, Bethlehem and Ramallah, among others). The project assumes that market access is possible but only requires facilitation to become available; that the political situation does not result in any significant increase in restrictions on movement; and that cooperatives are both interested and willing to join a collective marketing and selling process.

Project Background

Actions developed included:

- Creating and enhancing market linkages for 20 women associations/cooperatives (697 members) by enabling them to establish and run two business -shops (Al-Rozana and Althimar manage the two shops in the South and North of West Bank, respectively).

- Providing organizational and operational support to the targeted women's associations/cooperatives to enable them to develop and improve the quality of their food products as well as their alignment with market demand
- Providing coaching and follow up to the targeted women's associations/cooperatives in order to enable them effectively utilize the related national quality standards, and receive certification from the Palestine Standards Institutions for four products (Maftool, Frikah, Thyme, Makdous or Herbs)
- Provided coaching and follow up support to the targeted women's associations/cooperatives that enabled them to develop and roll out their business plans.

Methodology

- Community Mobilization, sensitization and guidance to form two business shops
- Capacity building services for the two business shops, cooperative members and management staff in governance, management and operations of the two business shops
- Provision of a grant and revolving funds to support the startup costs of business shops
- Provision of continuous supervision and capacity building services to the two business shops and cooperatives
- Provision of continuous coaching, training and follow up with the targeted cooperatives

The innovations in this methodology include the following;

- The relationship between cooperatives and the two business shops is governed by an MOU signed by the two partners.
- Emphasis is put on provision of technical support as opposed to funds.
- The two business shops:
 - Set incremental targets to guide and measure performance

- Are supported to operate jointly
- Have professionalized their governance and management
- All cooperatives and the two business shops employing best practices in management, operations, information processing and reporting.

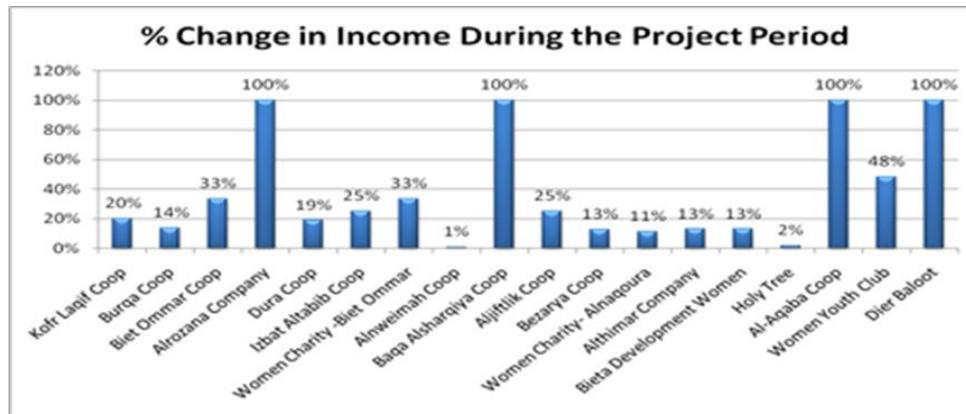
Outputs/Impact

Beneficiaries: a total of 20 women associations/cooperatives in the agriculture sector, with more than 245 women members directly benefitting from FAO's support.

Main results:

- Created and enhanced market linkages for 20 women's associations/cooperatives (697 members) by enabling them to establish and run two business-shops (through Al Thimar and Al Rozana)
 - 1- Two business shops are currently established and functioning. The 20 women cooperatives have created market linkages through the two shops. An additional 35 individual women and women cooperatives market their products through the shops.
 - 2- Successful linkages have been established between the shops and the cooperatives.
 - 3- A market study was conducted and completed and products catalogue was produced for use as a marketing tool
 - 4- Provided coaching and follow up support to the targeted women's associations/cooperatives that enabled them to develop and roll out their business plans

The impact of the implemented activities is seen clearly in the positive change in women's cooperatives income as shown in the table below.



The cooperatives generated an average net income of USD 1333 per member between September and December 2015.

The significant increase in the number of individual women and women's cooperatives providing agricultural products to sell in the two shops gives an indication of the success of the intervention and its sustainability in the future.

Sustainability

Sustainability of the results of this intervention are expected to be achieved at the following levels through the joint efforts of FAO and its UN implementing partners – UN Women and ITC:

Policy level:

In order to enhance the competitiveness of women owned/run MSMEs and cooperatives, the project contributes to the creation of an enabling economic environment to enhance the protection of local production of cultural and agricultural products and the establishment of incentives for women cooperatives working in agriculture and synergy creation. This is particularly important due to the lack of such legal frameworks that will increase economic activity in the production sector as a means to achieve sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the oPt. The sustainability of this specific result is based on the strong relations between the implementing UN agencies and all relevant national authorities, MoNE, MoWA and MoA that have been involved in the design phase of this JP and will play an essential role in the process of drafting the policies. Sustainability will also be achieved by the partnership established with the National Committee

on Women's Employment (NCWE), a leading women's economic empowerment advisory body of around 30 different organizations (NGOs, Ministries, civil society organizations, unions, etc.) established by a decree from the Cabinet and headed by the Ministry of Labour, and which will provide technical expertise and ensure an inclusive process for policy development of all relevant actors, including national authorities, international organizations and civil society organizations. This partnership will contribute to the achievement of some of its strategic goals by helping its operational plan transit into implementation.

Community level:

The Joint Project (JP) seeks to address the insufficient community support to such enterprises, products and services, which affects their local marketability and financial sustainability, by both enhancing the quality of the products in question and by implementing an effective Communications, Advocacy and Knowledge Management strategy (CAKM-s) that targets external audiences at the community level, using specific tools and conducting activities to maximize the project's impact.

Institutional level:

The JP enhances a One-Stop-Shop or Business Development services Hub (BDSH) with an incubation space for women entrepreneurs, MSME's and cooperatives that will provide the technical support and product development services. The BDSH simplifies the process of establishing a business, or strengthening an existing one, registering it, having the necessary skills to operate and run it, as well as the technical skills that will ensure the business' success. It will institutionalize the process and provide the space for similar women run business in the present and the future. Additionally, the JP establishes and strengthens two business-shops for assembling, testing, packaging and selling women's cooperative products in the northern and southern West Bank that will also be hosted by local counterparts with sound expertise in business marketing for agriculture and agro-business products. Beneficiaries are engaged through local partners.

Environmental level:

This JP circumvents the correlation between economic growth and environmental degradation through its promotion and adoption of recycling and use of natural materials. The JP will work on two dimensions: External and In-house. The external dimension focuses on environmental and

ecological issues by educating targeted women on the environmental impact of food processing activities and agricultural production; while the in-house dimension focuses on business practices that safeguard the health and safety of employees, business partners and clients. This will also be done through creating modern marketable products that are created from recycling Palestinian traditional raw natural materials. The application of standardization will require mandatory regulations aiming to ensure environmental and health protection that will include the improvement of production, consumption and waste treatment processes. The JP will also tackle the issue of environmental sustainability where cultural Palestinian products will be preserved, recycled and recreated into new modern marketable products.



Products prepared by women



Women selling their products