



Evaluation Summary



International
Labour
Office

Evaluation Unit

Palestinian Women's Economic Empowerment Project – Final Evaluation

Quick Facts

Geographic Covered: *Occupied Palestinian Territory*

Final Evaluation: *September 2013*

Mode of Evaluation: *Independent*

ILO Office: *DWT/CO-Beirut*

ILO Technical Backstopping Office: *GENDER*

Evaluation Manager: *Guy Summers*

Evaluation Consultant: *Nasser Yassin and Dalia Mikdashi*

Project Code: *LEB/10/03/SDC*

Donor & Project Budget: *Swiss Development Cooperation (US\$ 479,007)*

Keywords: *Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality*

Background & Context

The Palestinian Women's Economic Empowerment Project focuses on promoting economic recovery and decent work conditions for Palestinian women in two refugee camps in Lebanon: Nahr el Bared and Ain el Helwe. In specific, the project aims to increase income and improve decent work conditions for women entrepreneurs through developing the capacities of local service providers to provide business development services to the community, and supporting the establishment and strengthening of business groups among local women entrepreneurs to enhance their cooperation and maximize on their shared resources. This evaluation is summative

aiming to assess the project after the completion of all its phases. In addition to evaluating the project in its various phases, the results of this evaluation aim to guide discussion over implementing a second phase for the project.

The evaluation relied on a qualitative research approach. It employed three methods: desk review and content analysis of project-related documents, in-depth interviews with key informants who had a role in the project, focus group discussions (FGDs) with women who took part in the project whether as trainees or beneficiaries. The different tools were applied flexibly in order to achieve their adaptation to the working conditions. Fieldwork was undertaken in Nahr El Bared and Ain El Helwe between March 28th and April 9th.

Relevance: the results of the evaluation show that notwithstanding the fact that Business Group Formation (BGF) is a new concept among the targeted local women entrepreneurs and its potential success was subject to some legitimate questions, the economic development and decent work aspects of the project fall very well in the line of work of the partner organizations. Moreover, the evaluation shows that the main activities of the project, and in particular the capacity building and trainings on business management, respond to the needs of the Palestinian women local entrepreneurs.

Validity of Design: the evaluation shows that the use of the BGF as the driving theory for the Project was well accepted by all the stakeholders as logical and innovative, albeit as mentioned earlier received with some scepticism by local women entrepreneurs. Moreover, the relationship between achieving outputs with the attainment of the project's two outcomes indicates internal cohesiveness in the design of the project. In the same line of thought, all indicators, with the exception of one, were logically associated with outputs. Of particular importance, the pre-implementation preparatory ground work through the mapping and baseline exercise proved to be very useful in contextualizing the design of the project and adapting its activities to better respond to the local needs.

Resource Efficiency: the analysis showed that the recurring delays in project implementation, some of which were beyond the hands of the project management, significantly affected the various aspects of the project, specifically the level of interest of the beneficiaries. Moreover, the financial analysis of the spending showed that more than 65 % of the budget went to administrative and project personnel cost¹, a factor that significantly affects cost-efficiency.

Management and Governance Arrangements: the evaluation showed that project was coordinated in a participatory manner between three main groups: 1) the ILO national project coordinator, technical experts, technical committee, and stakeholders committee, 2) the local partner NGOs, and 3) the group of consultants. The analysis showed that the decision-making process had some gaps, namely lack of involvement of the local partners in the technical committee, and the nominal role of the advisory committee. Although local partners have opted not to be part of the technical committee, their involvement could have helped at a number of junctures make project implementation smoother.

Achieving stated objectives: the evaluation shows that the set of outputs were attained; the analysis of the delivery of outputs shows that the project was successful in delivering all of its planned outputs. Hence the project was successful in steadily moving towards achieving its stated objectives, namely “enhancing the capacity of women entrepreneurs to work collectively to address common work deficits” and “increasing the institutional capacity of local service providers to provide business development services to the community”.

Development Effectiveness: Assessing the effectiveness of the project in terms of increasing income of the local Palestinian women entrepreneurs and enhancing their decent work conditions cannot be concluded at this stage of evaluation where it was undertaken at the time of forming groups and when funds had not been disbursed. The effectiveness of the process especially related to capacity enhancement was assessed through two angles: 1) capacity building of women and 2) capacity building of trainers/local providers. The training of women beneficiaries was very well received by the women entrepreneurs and it proved to be effective in sensitizing the women on the importance of working as groups and in enhancing their entrepreneurial skills. On the other hand, training of the trainers to provide the GET Ahead and BGF training to local women entrepreneurs was commendable and well-received by the trainers in terms of content and delivery. It was, however, a first step that provided a basic package for those trainers who ultimately would need further training and coaching.

Looking at the process of forming Business Groups, it was clear that the formed groups did not “firmly” follow the ideals of BGsF. For instance, the wedding planner group was composed of different women entrepreneurs who continued to manage their own business. While this example does not strictly fit in the criteria of BGF, it shows one of the many ways of collaboration that women entrepreneurs can adopt to fulfil their needs

¹ This does not include consultants fees

and to take in considerations the specificity of the community.

Moreover, the participation in Souk el Tayeb events and at Tawlet was an effective step towards opening new markets to women. This is especially the case as the women's participation provided a much needed publicity and media coverage. Furthermore, the participating women generated additional income through their participation in the Tawlet events albeit small and limited to a small number of women. More significantly, the brand "Atayeb Falasteen" was a successful move in the direction of "opening" new markets as well as the sustainability of such intervention.

Further, the evaluation shows that selecting to implement through local partners was a commendable step in empowering local NGOs. This model, however, had few challenges that affected at some junctures the smooth flow of the project to attain its full results. Finally, the added value of ILO was channelled through three aspects: The intellectual capital, organizational capital and social/networking capital.

Partnerships: the project was successful in enhancing ILO's partnership at two levels: with other UN organizations namely UNRWA, and with local Palestinian NGOs. The partnership with UNRWA, albeit "lite" and remained at coordination and facilitation level, was significantly positive for both organizations. UNRWA provided the local knowledge and facilitated the work of the project while ILO brought the idea of Business Groups with all the intellectual weight of the organization. At the local level, the partnership built with local NGOs was of great value to make the project flow in a smooth manner. However, as highlighted above, the local NGOs at a number of critical instances were not fully aware of the intricacies of the project methods and that could have affected the quality of implementation.

Sustainability: the sustainability of business groups after the project ends is planned to continue through the establishment of partnerships with the local NGOs and through the technical support of local trainers. The idea of having a revolving fund where participating women pay back 50% of the amount they received to fund their group project to the local NGO would ensure some elements of the sustainability where funds would, ideally, be given to additional groups. A 5% of the amount would theoretically cover some of the management and coordination cost that the local NGOs would carry. Furthermore, partnerships with *Souk el Tayyeb* and with *Torath Bladna* are planned to offer support to local groups in opening markets. The "lite" partnership with UNRWA is also significant to facilitate the work of the business groups, technically and logistically (e.g. UNRWA field coordinators being coaches, using the Women's' Centers etc.). However, some aspects of the project would still require the close involvement of the ILO or similar organization. Should the ILO withdraw at this stage, the sustainability of the project would be at stake especially in respect to the opening of new markets as well as continuous coaching of focal points that would still require that the ILO be involved.

Good Practice: The partnership with Souk El Tayeb. This partnership is one of the most notable good practice in this project. It addressed more than one dimension of the project. First, it proved to be an effective way of introducing Palestinian women to new markets, unthought-of or considered before. Second the partnership attracted considerable attention by the media with more than news outlet (in print and electronic) covering the story². Third, and commendable, was the creation of the brand "Atayeb Falasteen". Such a brand, albeit only used by Souk el Tayeb during the course of the partnership with the

²

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Culture/Lifestyle/2012/Dec-03/196917-bringing-the-deliciousness-of-palestine-to-beirut.ashx#axzz2YKiEZmkp>

Project, is an effective step in promoting the produce of local Palestinian women and at same time enhancing women's knowledge of the importance of branding and the benefit of adhering to it.

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

1. Think global and (continuously support to) act local: the project introduced an innovative idea that has been tested elsewhere and was implemented through local partners. Acting locally, however, needs continuous following and sustained coaching of local partners to make project achieve its desired results. It is recommended that partnering local NGOs be affiliated with an established national NGO or institution that work in entrepreneurship development and that would provide regular coaching sessions such as monthly sessions in addition to remote follow-up such as through emails or skype.

2. Maintain flexibility in group formation: the spectrum of group formation should be wide to range from strong forms of full partnership among the women into lighter options such as cooperating on a single aspect such as marketing or transportation, something that the project executed in its first phase. Including groups that are formed based on family businesses, as the evaluation showed, should not be seen as a drawback but as a way to adapt to the local practices. It is recommended that for any forthcoming phases, flexibility of group formation is continued and announced from the beginning among local partners and potential women beneficiaries.

3. Build trust: the issue of trust is crucial for the success of business groups. This was brought up time and again by women especially those who were concerned about partnering with other women whom they have not worked before. It is recommended that trust-building training and exercises constitute a considerable component in the second phase of the project.

4. Transparency and open communication especially with women beneficiaries should be applied in relation to all stages and aspects of the project. A case of point here is informing the women beneficiaries about the size of loans/grants and selection mechanisms even if that would mean increased workload on local partner NGOs. It is recommended that such clear articulation of the project criteria be applied early on of any project life cycle and indeed during the initiation of a second phase. It is also recommended that for an ILO focal point or field officer is appointed to work closely with local partners and with beneficiaries.

5. Enhance the mechanisms for participatory decision-making: make advisory and technical committees more inclusive and active with clear TORs. The technical committee needs to include representatives of local NGO partners, local trainers and at a later stage the local women beneficiaries. ILO should encourage those stakeholders to join such committee as a way of sharing the governance of the project and in ensuring that project decisions are communicated at all levels.

6. Capitalize further on ILO's capitals: the project should continue and enhance the utilization of ILO's intellectual, organizational and social/networking capitals. Looking at lessons-learned from other ILO interventions elsewhere and sharing the knowledge produced through this project would distinguish, among others, ILO's interventions. It is recommended that the lessons generated from this project be shared and discussed with personnel in charge of similar projects in the region and beyond.