



International
Labour
Organization

Technical Brief 2016

Livelihood interventions for women in Gaza



In July 2014, Israel launched an intense seven-week military operation in the Gaza Strip codenamed “Protective Edge”. The assault took a devastating toll on civilian lives and resulted in significant damage and destruction of the social and economic infrastructure at a level unprecedented since the start of the Israeli occupation in 1967. Following the assault, labour market conditions in Gaza have continued to deteriorate due to the ongoing blockade and access restrictions that have long prevented meaningful economic activities. The military operation resulted in hefty job

losses in the private sector, exacerbating already critical unemployment and poverty rates¹. According to the Palestinian Federation of Industries, 419 businesses and workplaces were damaged, including 128 completely destroyed. 17,200 people lost their jobs due to the destruction of productive assets such as land, structures, capital, equipment and tools. Between July and August 2014, unemployment increased dramatically by 4.3 per cent to an estimated 36.9 per cent². The military offense caused an approximate GDP loss of around US\$ 508,000 for every working day in which the destroyed means of production were not rebuilt or restored.



Activities in the agriculture and fisheries sectors were almost paralysed during the military operation, with substantial damage to croplands and infrastructure. Access to the sea was prohibited for most of the 50-day hostilities. This exacerbated the already high levels of food insecurity and contributed to a further deterioration in the nutritional status of local communities, particularly among women and children.





Women have been highly affected

by the conflict and opportunities for women to participate in the labour market continue to be very limited. The employment rate for women in Gaza remains low at 16 per cent (compared to 66 per cent for men), with young women disproportionately impacted. Despite improved educational attainments for women in recent years, livelihood activities in Gaza typically target men. Without interventions that assure women's independent access to and control over assets, post-conflict rehabilitation efforts are unlikely to translate into economically advantageous and just gender arrangements.

In response to the devastating situation in Gaza caused by the 2014 Israeli military attacks and the continued deterioration following the aftermath of the operation, the ILO implemented a response program in 2015 to support the most vulnerable communities suffering from extreme poverty and food insecurity due to the loss of income sources and livelihoods. The aim of the ILO's intervention was to provide immediate access to private sector employment opportunities, income support and skills training, with a particular focus on women, youth and people with disabilities. To ensure the intervention responded appropriately to people's needs, a series of small-scale pilot initiatives were designed and implemented in close consultation with communities and with the strong involvement of civil society organisations.

¹ Ajluni, S. *The 'Disemployment' Impact of the 2014 Conflict in Gaza: an ILO Damage Assessment and Recovery Strategy*. 2015, International Labour Organization.

² The overall unemployment rate may be higher as this conservative estimate does not take into consideration the impact on public-sector workers.

Five livelihood initiatives comprise the gender component of ILO's response program:

1 Skills and on-the-job training for unemployed female graduates



In partnership with the Women's Affairs Centre, 50 female university graduates from various disciplines received training in technical, professional and personal skills development, with the aim of enhancing decent employment and income opportunities. The project targeted young women, aged 23 -32, from low-income households living in marginalised areas of the Gaza Strip. The graduates participated in a 55-hour training course followed by a three-month temporary job placement program, in the private sector or with a community-based organisation, for which they were paid a monthly salary.

Following completion of the course, the majority of the graduates indicated that their participation in the program had increased their hope of finding longer-term employment. Around 25 -30% of graduates reported finding paid work at the same place they had received job training or at new organisations and companies.

Lessons learned from the pilot demonstrate that it would be beneficial to extend the paid on-the-job training from 3 months to 6 months and to advocate within the private sector for the absorption of female graduates.

2 Skills training and cash-for-work program for women sheep breeders



In collaboration with the Ahaliya Association for Development of Palm and Dates, 50 women sheep breeders living in rural areas of Gaza received technical and farm management skills training with the goal to improve their productivity and business outcomes. In addition to skills training, the women received agricultural inputs including manufactured sheep fodder, equipment and seeds to grow fresh green feed, veterinary services, medication bags, as well as 500 days of cash-for-work payments for women's sons, in order to rehabilitate destroyed animal shelters and grow and manufacture the fodder.

The technical and physical assistance provided through the initiative successfully enabled the women to improve or restart their businesses. 85% of the beneficiaries expressed a high level of satisfaction with the project, reporting improved capacity to manage their farms, improved health of livestock, and reduced operational costs largely on account of the sustainable source of green fodder.

Efforts are now underway to establish the first women-only cooperative for sheep breeders in Gaza, based on the findings of a feasibility study supported by ILO. A number of the women who received skills training additionally participated in training on the principles of cooperatives and cooperative group formation.

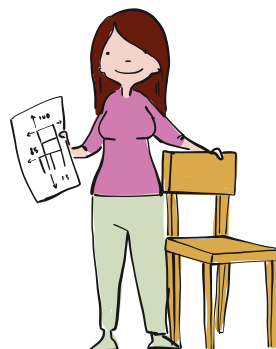
3 Training workshops on the principles and values of cooperatives



The ILO delivered a number of training modules aiming to improve the overall performance of cooperatives in the Gaza Strip. A diverse range of organizations attended training workshops, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the General Directorate of the Ministry of Labour, as well as various civil society groups. A number of organisations with a specific focus on organising women and youth, such as Ahaliya Association of the Development of Palms and Dates, Women's Affairs Centre and the Zakher Association also attended the workshops.

On the basis of discussions with the organisations involved in the various workshops, a series of recommendations and an action plan were formulated to map out the direction of ILO's future support to cooperatives in Gaza. Proposed activities include the delivery of a specialised training course in preparing feasibility studies and business plans, the provision of technical support to formulate cooperatives' institutional structures, and guidance in conducting assessments to ascertain the need and satisfaction of members with regards to cooperative services. The ILO is now carrying out these activities in accordance with the Action Plan.

4 Upgrading skills of female architects to work in the area of furniture design



With support from the ILO, the Islamic University of Gaza provided a five-month furniture design training for 20 young female architects experiencing difficulty in finding employment in their sector. The training enhanced their technical, practical and entrepreneurial competencies required to work in furniture manufacturing firms or to start and promote their own small businesses through online platforms. The initiative included modules developed to enhance women's awareness of their rights at work, including the negotiation of fair wages. By the end of the course, participants were able to demonstrate a sound understanding of core business concepts and had developed a viable plan for their proposed business start-ups.

5 Inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in vocational training programs



The IRADA program of the Islamic University of Gaza is a dedicated service that provides technical training to students with disabilities. The program identified the need to include persons with intellectual disabilities, girls and women especially, as a priority of its vocational programs and requested technical support from the ILO on how to build its capacity in this area. In light of this request, the ILO commissioned a consultant to prepare and deliver a training package for IRADA management and technical teams. The consultant then engaged these stakeholders in a participatory process to develop a strategy and Implementation Plan with the view to effectively include students with intellectual disabilities in IRADA's programs and services.