

UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME



# **Women's Economic Empowerment: Lessons Learned on Women's Entrepreneurship and Micro and Small Enterprises (MSE's) from Select Arab Countries**

SYNTHESIS REPORT

# FOREWORD

The economic and social landscape for women's economic participation in the Arab region is complex. Women face various individual, structural and sociocultural challenges in accessing the economy, perpetuated by resources, services and security challenges in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Women's labour force participation in the region on average does not exceed one in five, and the gender gap in female entrepreneurship and business ownership is notable.

Notwithstanding these challenges, women entrepreneurs and business owners in the region are making their mark, contributing to breaking stereotypes and paving the way for future generations. The need to effectively support and invest in initiatives to support them cannot be overstated. As we implement our Global Gender Equality Strategy, UNDP in the Arab region is firmly committed to women's economic empowerment as a key entry point for accelerating economic and social progress and achieving gender equality.

I am therefore delighted to present this report, "Women's Economic Empowerment: Lessons Learned on Women's Entrepreneurship and Micro and Small Enterprises (MSE's) from Select Arab Countries". Grounded in the context of the Arab region and drawing upon selected endeavours by UNDP and its partners, it emerges as a valuable guide that meticulously uncovers valuable lessons, insights and successful strategies for women's entrepreneurship and micro and small-sized enterprise programming in the Arab region, particularly in fragile and conflict settings.

The report recommends long-term support and engagement to achieve effective and sustainable change. Silos are no longer an option and collaboration with key stakeholders is underscored for efficiency, resource-sharing, and establishing crucial linkages. The report stresses the importance of addressing women's economic empowerment at individual, organizational, and policy levels. It calls for systematic gender analysis and gender-responsive approaches, that incorporate prevention of gender-based violence, addressing unpaid care work and the importance of engaging men as critical for the success of these endeavors. In addition, it calls for monitoring and evaluation systems that capture changes in social norms and agency. Furthermore, a market systems approach is recommended, emphasizing gender-responsive market assessments, supply-demand dynamics, and the formalization of informal women enterprises. The report urges for the integration of environmental sustainability, recognizing the crucial role of affordable and sustainable access to natural resources, water and energy for women's economic empowerment.

This report is thus not merely a compilation of case studies; it is a call to action for UNDP and fellow development practitioners. It beckons us to refine and enhance our approaches to women's economic empowerment, armed with the knowledge gleaned from real-world experiences. By learning from these successes and challenges, we can collectively shape more effective and targeted programs that uplift women and propel them towards economic independence.

May this report inspire and inform, and serve as a catalyst for transformative actions, fostering a future where women in the Arab region not only contribute to the economy but where they can thrive, be effective agents of change and achieve their own aspirations.



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# ACRONYMS

<b>AEISD</b>	Arab Economic Integration for Sustainable Development	<b>MPTF</b>	Multi-Partner Trust Fund
<b>AfDB</b>	African Development Bank	<b>MSME</b>	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
<b>CO</b>	Country Offices	<b>ODS</b>	Office de Développement du Sud
<b>EfD</b>	Entrepreneurship for Development	<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>EGYGW</b>	Employment Generation for Young Gazan Women	<b>PAPP</b>	Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People
<b>EOI</b>	Expression of Interest	<b>PEF</b>	Palestinian Employment Fund
<b>ERRY</b>	Supporting Resilient Livelihoods and Food Security in Yemen Joint Programme	<b>PSDP</b>	Productive Sectors Development Programme
<b>ESCWA</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia	<b>PTC</b>	Project Technical Committee
<b>EU</b>	European Union	<b>RBAS</b>	Regional Bureau for Arab States
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	<b>RCO</b>	Resident Coordinator's Office
<b>FDA</b>	Food and Drug Administration	<b>RFF</b>	Rapid Financing Facility
<b>FDG</b>	Focused Discussion Group	<b>SHG</b>	Self-Help Group
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-Based Violence	<b>SSE</b>	Social and Solidarity Economy
<b>GCC</b>	Gulf Cooperation Council	<b>UAE</b>	United Arab Emirates
<b>GDI</b>	Gender Development Index	<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>GEWE</b>	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment	<b>WEF</b>	World Economic Forum
<b>GII</b>	Gender Inequality Index	<b>TOR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>HDI</b>	Human Development Index	<b>TVET</b>	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
<b>HIC</b>	High Income Country	<b>UMIC</b>	Upper Middle-Income Country
<b>HMIC</b>	Higher Middle-Income Country	<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization	<b>UN WOMEN</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>IP</b>	Implementing Partners	<b>VC</b>	Value Chain
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interviews	<b>WEE</b>	Women's Economic Empowerment
<b>LFPR</b>	Labor Force Participation Rate	<b>WEP</b>	Women's Economic Participation
<b>LIC</b>	Low Income Country	<b>WTA</b>	Enhancing the Participation of Women in Trade Activities in the Argan Oil Sector in Morocco
<b>LMIC</b>	Lower Middle-Income Country		
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa		
<b>MEVT</b>	Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training		
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding		



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## Employment generation for young Gazan women, PAPP.

Women's economic empowerment (WEE) is a critical entry point for advancing gender equality in the Arab region, a priority underscored by UNDP within its programmes. This synthesis report: "Women's Economic Empowerment: Lessons Learned on Women's Entrepreneurship and Micro and Small Enterprises (MSE's) from Select Arab Countries" is the output of an assessment commissioned by the UNDP Amman Hub, Regional Bureau for the Arab States (RBAS). This report synthesizes the findings of case studies of nine projects implemented by UNDP in seven countries in the region: Djibouti, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen, with a focus on fragile and conflict countries. It identifies lessons learned based on case studies and accordingly provides recommendations for WEE programming.

While definitions of women's economic empowerment vary, they all bring elements connected to women's improved access to and control over economic resources and their increased economic opportunities, together with higher agency and ability to influence and exercise decision-making. For the purposes of this review, the OECD definition of economic empowerment was predominantly used while selecting projects, by looking at activities that increased women's access to economic resources and opportunities. However, other elements in the wider definition of women's economic empowerment that include addressing norms and institutions, were also analyzed when they were included in the projects.

The methodology for carrying out this report followed a bottom-up approach in close consultation with, and drawing upon inputs from the County Offices (COs), UNDP partners and projects' stakeholders. A case study for each project was produced, thoroughly discussed, and finalized with each CO. Lessons learned were drawn from each case study and included in a regional

synthesis report. These lessons are listed under several sections. Some are specific to women's economic empowerment, while others are more general and may apply to other interventions.

## PROJECT DESIGN

In general, when designing projects aimed at empowering women economically, it is necessary to implement gender assessments during the design phase or the very early stages of implementation. Gender assessments are necessary to guide project activities and ensure that the gender specific barriers and entry points in the projects are identified and should, therefore, be systematically applied in all projects.

It is important to assess what can realistically be achieved through **pilot interventions** as well as through **emergency programmes and early recovery activities**. In particular, there is a need to find an **equilibrium between breadth versus depth** in early recovery programmes given the importance of accompanying women over a longer period of time and providing different types of training/coaching covering the entire value chain.

Establishing **partnerships** with different types of entities allows for greater ownership and sustainability.

## PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Involving **gender expertise** within UNDP COs, IPs and Project Technical Committees contributes to improving project design and implementation.

**Collaborating with other UNDP projects** can achieve greater efficiencies, better results and allow for the tackling of issues not foreseen in project design. For projects implemented by several United Nations agencies, **greater vertical and horizontal integration** would lead to better results.

## PROCESSES TO STRENGTHEN WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT

include strengthening resources and capacities at the *individual, organizational and institutional/policy levels*.

At the individual level, conducting an **initial assessment** to better understand the project participants' capabilities would allow the training offered to be tailored to respond to their needs. **Business development** training should be accompanied with **technical/professional** training, coaching and "soft skills" training. Grants amounts should be **determined based on the business proposals** developed by the women participants.

Addressing the organizational capacities, such as **governance and financial management** of the entities supported (e.g., cooperatives, MSMEs) contributes to ensuring their sustainability.

Addressing policy/institutional level issues related to women's economic empowerment and building institutional capacities are necessary to ensure long-term sustainability.

## GENDER EQUALITY APPROACHES

Strengthening women's economic empowerment also requires addressing informal gender norms and stereotypical roles that place barriers to women's economic advancement and participation in public life, which are highly contextual, through gender equality approaches. Key insights include the value of engaging men, addressing unpaid care work, ensuring a budget line for gender mainstreaming and creating safe spaces for women's participation and leadership.

## MARKET ACCESS

Strengthening women's economic empowerment occurs within the market system and thus requires a market systems approach. **Market assessments** - looking at both supply and demand within the market is necessary to ensure that the capacity building provided to women addresses, both the interest of women, as well as the needs of the market. There is a need to **map all key components of a particular value chain** to support the involved actors and lead to higher value creation for women. Finally, exploring ways of formalizing women micro-entrepreneurs would lead to greater income predictability and ability to access the national social security system.

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION AND LEARNING

Carrying out **baseline studies** allows an assessment of the impacts the projects had. Setting up a monitoring system that captures **sex-disaggregated output-level information** is also necessary to obtain information on the number of women/men reached. Furthermore, **outcome level data** collected through **qualitative and gender-responsive methods** would help understand the impact the project had on gender equality and empowerment of women. One specific outcome: **change in social norms**, needs to be better monitored and documented, since it is related to the Do No Harm principle.

## SUSTAINABILITY

**Institutional and financial sustainability** is closely linked to the extent to which the project partnered with government institutions and engaged at the policy/institutional level. In particular, the ministry responsible for women's affairs would be a natural partner. **Economic sustainability** of the projects is a function of the extent to which the different micro-enterprises which were supported are economically sustainable and a follow up beyond the life of the project is necessary to ensure this sustainability. **Social sustainability** was likely achieved in the communities where the projects succeeded in changing social norms and increasing women's participation. Finally, environmental sustainability and addressing water and energy needs and costs, especially in the case of activities supported in the agriculture sector, is crucial not only for environmental concerns but equally for economic ones.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Women's economic empowerment requires interventions that tackle individual and community resources and rules, and institutions. As such, it is necessary that interventions move beyond access to economic resources, where the focus is on skills and training, financial resources and economic assets. They should pay equal attention to social resources and networks and address norms and institutions: including both formal (national policies, gender discriminatory laws and the market system) and informal social norms.

Achieving women's economic empowerment requires long term support, ownership, engagement and collaboration by key stakeholders to be effective and sustainable. Partners are also essential for the success of gender equality and market system approaches.

Integration among different UNDP projects, and with UN agencies and partners on the ground is critical for establishing linkages, enhancing efficiencies, and sharing resources and experiences. This is particularly useful when the project duration is short and/or the budgets are small, and in FCV contexts, where an equilibrium between breadth versus depth needs to be reached.

Women's economic advancement should address the specific training and business needs at the individual level in a gender-responsive manner. In addition, addressing the organizational capacities of the supported businesses or cooperatives is critical for their sustainability. Furthermore, addressing policy/institutional level issues related to WEE and building institutional capacities is necessary to ensure long-term sustainability.



It is important to avoid ad-hoc gender equality approaches to address gender-specific barriers and social norms. Instead, gender equality approaches should be included explicitly in the design of the projects, based on a gender analysis, and with sufficient resources. This will help ensure effective access to, and control over, resources, build women's agency and alignment with the Do No Harm principle. Monitoring and evaluation systems should also be strengthened to include qualitative elements that measure changes in social norms and women's agency. As such gender expertise among project stakeholders must be provided.

Utilizing a market systems approach is critical for women's economic empowerment. As such gender-responsive market assessments examining supply and demand, and mapping key actors across the value chain are necessary to identify effective strategies that create higher value for products designed, created and sold by women. Improvement to the monitoring and evaluation system to capture the various aspects of women's economic empowerment is recommended. This would utilize baseline, gender disaggregated quantitative and qualitative data to measure outputs and outcome level changes.

Several of the above recommendations, if implemented, would contribute to achieving higher institutional, financial, economic and social sustainability. It is essential to consider efforts towards environmental sustainability as integral and complementary to WEE efforts, given that affordable and sustainable access to water and energy is critical for businesses, especially in the agriculture sector.

# 1. INTRODUCTION



**A woman from Syria. Self-help groups pilot project.**

The UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2025,<sup>1</sup> identifies the area of inclusive economies and women's economic empowerment as a main focus area to accelerate the achievement of gender equality. This goal constitutes signature solution six of the UNDP Strategic Plan 2022-2023 and connects to goals one and three on poverty, inequality reduction and building resilience.

Women's economic empowerment (WEE) is a critical entry point for advancing gender equality in the Arab region. Women in the region have low economic participation, which stands at 20 percent and lags behind that of men and of women in other regions in the world. Despite the fact that WEE programming is essential in the region, there remains a large gap in funding WEE

interventions. Globally, only one percent of official development assistance in economic and productive sectors targets gender equality and women's empowerment.<sup>2</sup> UNDP's projects that focus specifically on women's economic empowerment as a key objective are also scarce and do not exceed 2 percent of RBAS projects, and most of the work is delivered through gender mainstreaming. The UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States is prioritizing women's economic empowerment and is planning to expand its programming in this area. With this objective, documentation of UNDP WEE approaches in the Arab region is essential in order to identify lessons learned for future programmes.

This synthesis report: "Women's Economic Empowerment: Lessons Learned on Women's Entrepreneurship and Micro and Small Enterprises (MSE's) from Select Arab Countries" is the output of an assessment commissioned by the UNDP Amman Hub, Regional Bureau for the Arab States (RBAS). The report synthesizes the findings of case studies of nine projects implemented by UNDP in seven countries in the region,<sup>3</sup> with a focus on fragile and conflict countries. It identifies lessons learned based on the case studies and accordingly provides recommendations for WEE programming.

The report is organized in sections as follows:

- (2) purpose and objectives of the study,
- (3) definitions and scope,
- (4) intended use,
- (5) methodology,
- (6) characteristics of the projects included in the case studies, and
- (7) main lessons learned, including good practices,
- (8) recommendations.



## 2. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES



Enhancing the participation of women in trade activities in the argan oil sector project, Morocco.

The assessment aims to document successful approaches, good practices and lessons learned from UNDP Country Offices' work on WEE in the region. It will be used to inform UNDP's WEE programming at country and regional levels. In addition, it may be useful for any organization supporting WEE in the region and beyond. Specifically, the assessment used country case studies for this purpose. The case studies included a description of the actions that took place, in which context and the way they contributed to a positive change in the lives of women and girls. The process also captured lessons by identifying challenges, risks and mitigation measures. To the extent possible and where information was available, the assessment reflected on technical approaches related to entrepreneurship and business support, as well as the suitability and effectiveness of the gender approaches utilized in the projects. The latter included if, and how, the project contributed to addressing the following:

- (I) unpaid care work and time poverty of women;
- (II) movement restrictions;
- (III) social norms;
- (IV) mainstreaming gender-based violence (GBV) and do no harm approaches; and
- (V) engaging with men.

The assessment contributes to the body of knowledge concerning evaluations of women's economic empowerment. Previous UNDP reports that assess women's livelihoods projects in crisis contexts recommend that interventions that target women should be transformative in structure and not just inclusive of women: gender analysis should be used to inform employment creation and livelihood activities in order to avoid gender stereotyping and ensure that livelihood interventions are meaningful. When livelihood interventions are too small, or gender dynamics and cultural appropriateness of interventions are missed, no meaningful impact on women's lives can be achieved.<sup>4</sup> Gender evaluations also found that interventions must address discrimination and social/cultural norms that often prevent women from fully benefiting from results beyond participation, and that partnerships are key to integrating multidimensional approaches.<sup>5</sup> The findings of the assessment reinforce the above, but go a step further in providing lessons and insights into the practices that projects can utilize to achieve women's economic empowerment.

### 3. DEFINITION AND SCOPE



Entrepreneurship for development project in Tunisia.

Women's economic empowerment has been defined as the set of processes through which women acquire access to, and control over, economic resources and opportunities, which will enable them to make strategic and autonomous choices, that may improve and enrich their lives. This approach recognizes three distinct aspects of economic empowerment: resources, agency, and achievements.<sup>6</sup> To contribute to women's economic empowerment UNDP recommends a focus on three key dimensions (i) expanding women's economic opportunities by providing better jobs, (ii) a supportive business climate, (iii) access to financial services and products suited to their needs and livelihood security in vulnerable environments.<sup>7</sup> The International Center for research on Women (ICRW) defines women's economic empowerment as having "both the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions".<sup>8</sup> This definition recognizes that WEE is comprised of two interrelated components: economic advancement and power and agency.<sup>9</sup> For this purpose, interventions should address individual and economic resources, such as human, financial, social and physical capitals, and address the norms and institutions, both formal: legal and policy structures, economic systems, market systems, inheritance and education systems, and informal: gender norms and roles that restrict women's role from the public sphere (Figure 1).



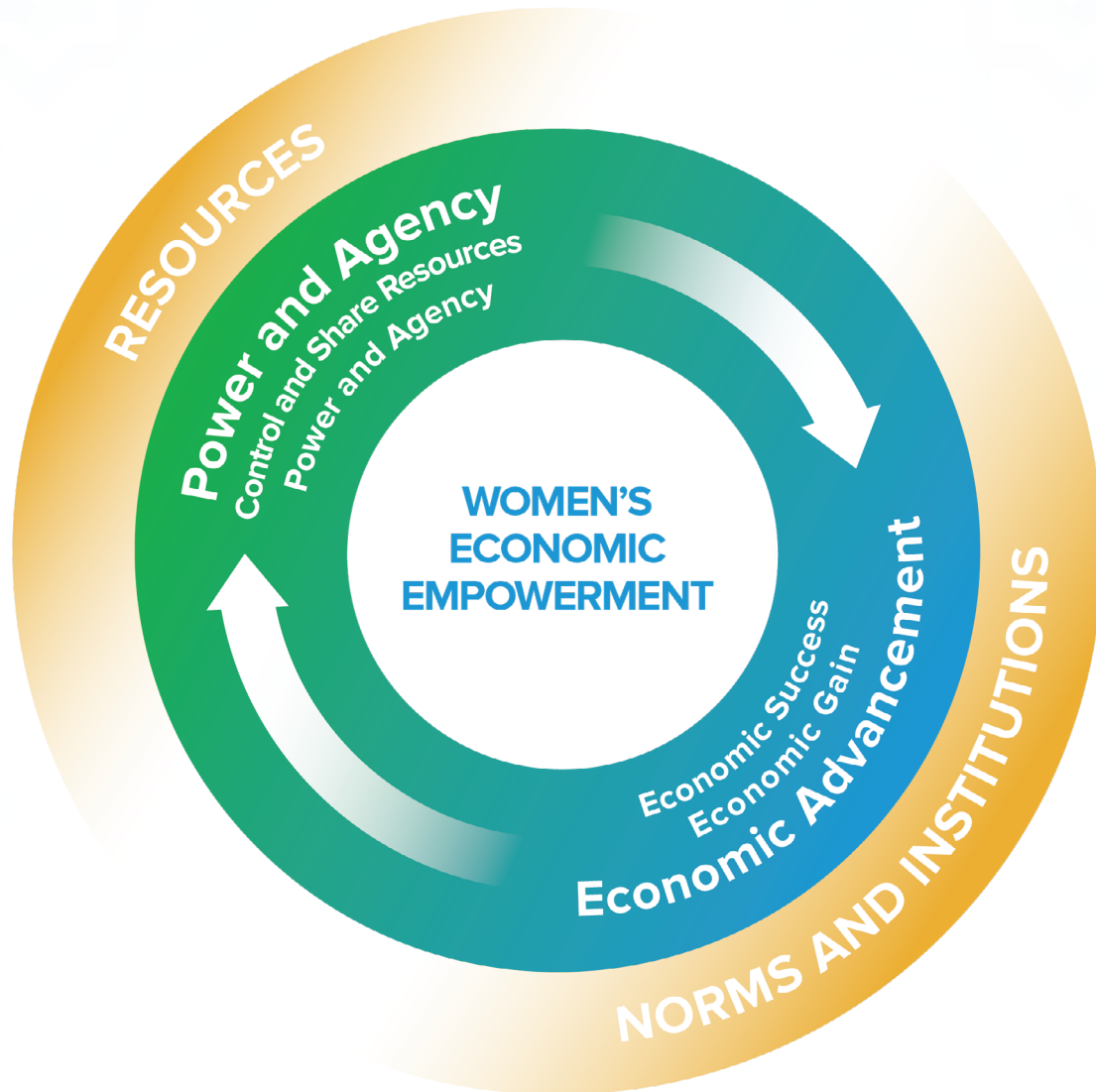


Figure 1: Contributors to women's economic empowerment. (Source: ICRW, 2011)

### BOX 1: DEFINING GOOD PRACTICES

While there is no global definition as to what constitutes “good practice”, the Project Management Body of Knowledge Guide, that became a standard for generally recognized good practices in project management defines good practice as: “the application of [identified] knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques’ to ‘enhance the chance of success over many projects in delivering the expected business values and results”.<sup>10</sup>

Good practice in the context of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEEW) is defined by UN Women as an intervention, business practice, process or methodology that is responsive to the needs of women and girls, replicable, scalable, and succeeds in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.<sup>11</sup>



The OECD definition of economic empowerment is: “the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways which recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth”.<sup>12</sup> For this review, this definition was predominantly used while selecting projects, by looking at activities that increased women’s access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information. These elements were used as criteria for the case studies selection, however, other elements in the wider definition of women’s economic empowerment that require interventions at various levels were also analyzed when they were included in the projects (i.e., expanding women’s resources defined more generally and addressing norms and institutions).

**Thematic Scope**

This assessment focused on “women’s economic empowerment” interventions that supported entrepreneurship, micro- small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), including cooperatives and social enterprises. While it included varied contexts, it had a specific focus on FCV contexts.

**Geographic Scope**

The initial process explored projects in all the 17 countries covered by UNDP’s RBAS office.<sup>13</sup> However the final selection was of nine projects in seven country offices: Djibouti, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen.

## 4. INTENDED USERS



**Productive sectors development programme (PSDP) in Lebanon.**

The primary audience for this report is UNDP staff working on gender equality, WEE and livelihoods at regional and country levels in the Arab region. More specifically, this report will inform the approaches of a future regional project on women's economic empowerment that UNDP RBAS is planning to develop. Furthermore, UNDP CO staff, in particular those directly involved in the implementation of similar projects in the region and in other regions, could use this report to learn from their experiences to design and implement new interventions for WEE.

A secondary audience will be stakeholders in the international development community, relevant government institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other organizations implementing similar activities, who may also have an interest in learning from the UNDP's experience.

## 5. METHODOLOGY



### Supporting resilient livelihoods and food security in Yemen joint programme (ERRY II).

The methodology for conducting this assessment followed a bottom-up approach in close consultation with, and receiving inputs from, the Country Offices. The steps followed were:

**A call for an expression of interest (Eoi)** to participate in this documentation study was launched by UNDP's regional bureau. 13 Country Offices responded by proposing a total of 35 projects to be considered for inclusion in the study. The Eoi described the eligibility criteria for project inclusion which consisted of the following: (i) projects that have supported women-run MSMEs, and/or entrepreneurship in the formal and/or informal sectors including projects that focused on access to finance; (ii) projects that have targeted women or gender equality, projects that include women as their participants, or projects that have specific components that targeted women or gender equality; (iii) projects that COs considered successful in achieving positive results for women or gender equality; and (iv) projects that have been ongoing for sufficient time (i.e., towards final or closing stage), or completed no longer than a maximum of one year ago.

**The second phase of the selection of projects was based on several additional criteria.** Since UNDP has presence in countries in the Arab region which are very diverse in terms of economic status, fragility context and key human development indicators,<sup>14</sup> the selection ensured that the countries included in the study would reflect this diversity and that at least 50 percent of the countries selected had to be affected by Fragility, Conflict or Violence (FCV). The selection process aimed to ensure the inclusion of projects that had the following characteristics: (1) support to entrepreneurship in digital, green jobs and non-

sectors; (2) have clear gender approaches (e.g., unpaid care, social norms, engaging men, mainstreaming GBV, and building self-confidence); (3) have scaling-up potential for women MSMEs; and (4) address different levels of women’s economic empowerment: policy level (research, policy and legal reform), institutional level (capacity building) and the individual level: direct support to women (business development services, access to finance). As a result, although several proposed projects fulfilled the eligibility and selection criteria, a final selection of nine projects across seven countries was made which endeavored to reflect the diversity of contexts as well as typology of interventions (see Tables 1 and 2).<sup>15</sup>

**Data collection used a mixed-method approach combining:**

- **Document review** which began during the inception phase, was the main form of secondary data collection. A more in-depth analysis took place once the full set of project-related documents was provided. The desk review included the project document, any monitoring and evaluation (M&E) reports, midterm or final evaluations, implementing partners’ progress reports and any other relevant documents which could inform the case study
- **Key informant interviews (KIIs)** were the main method used for primary and qualitative data collection. KIIs were conducted using a multi-stakeholder approach to hold in-depth discussions with people who can shed light onto the operational and technical details of the selected projects. It was envisaged that KIIs would be conducted with staff from UNDP, other United Nations agencies, donors, government and implementing partners, including the private sector and civil society organizations. The selection of the people interviewed in each country was performed in close collaboration with UNDP CO staff. In total, 133 KIIs were held; of which 59 percent were with women.
- In addition, and to obtain insights and perspectives from the participants, **individual interviews and/or focus group discussions (FGDs) with direct beneficiaries were held.** The challenges of conducting the research remotely as well as internet connectivity issues in some countries, meant individual interviews were held with project participants in two countries (Djibouti and Yemen) and FGDs in four countries (Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia).

**Table 1. Final List of Projects Included in the Regional Study**

Country	Country Status	FCV Status	Project Title	WEF Rank <sup>16</sup> (2022) <sup>17</sup>	HDI <sup>18</sup> Rank <sup>19</sup>	GDI <sup>20</sup>	GII Rank <sup>21</sup>	GII <sup>22</sup>	
1	Djibouti	LMIC	Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) Women Centric Climate Resilient Economic Empowerment for Inclusive and Greener Post-Covid-19	n/a	171	n/a	n/a	n/a	
2	Lebanon	LMIC	FCV	Women’s Economic Participation (WEP) Project	119	112	0.882	108	0.432
3	Lebanon			Productive Sectors Development Programme (PSDP)					
4	Morocco	LMIC		Enhancing the Participation of Women in Trade Activities in the Argan Oil Sector in Morocco (WTA)	136	123	0.861	104	0.425
5	Palestine	LMIC	FCV	Employment Generation for Young Gazan Women (EGYGW)	n/a	106	0.891	n/a	n/a
6	Syria	LIC	FCV	Self-Help Groups (SHGs) project	152*	150	0.825	119	0.477
7	Tunisia	LMIC		Entrepreneurship for Development (EfD)	120	97	0.931	61	0.259
8	Yemen	LIC	FCV	Strengthening resilience in crisis-affected communities of Yemen (ERRY II)	157*	183	0.496	170	0.820
9	Yemen	LIC	FCV	Rapid Financing Facility Project (RFF)					

\*For Syria and Yemen, the WEF Ranking is that of 2021 since there was no information available for 2022.



**Table 2: Objectives of the projects included in the regional study**

Country	Project Title	Project Dates	Project Objectives
1	Djibouti Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) Women Centric Climate Resilient Economic Empowerment for Inclusive and Greener Post-Covid-19	2021-22	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Relaunch rural economic activities in the five regions of the country by providing training and in-kind support to women-led cooperatives; and</li> <li>2. Create new economic opportunities for women through (i) provision of items (e.g., crates, tables and weighing scales) to facilitate the marketing of agricultural produce; (ii) support to cooperatives and micro enterprises to participate in the Agri-Business Fair; and (iii) development of the “Made in Djibouti” brand, logo and a marketing strategy for the locally grown products.</li> </ol>
2	Lebanon Women’s Economic Participation (WEP) Project	2018-23	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strengthen the capacity of Lebanese and Syrian refugee women to integrate into agriculture and non-agriculture value chains by providing training and basic toolkits.</li> <li>2. Improve the productivity and competitiveness of women-led businesses and cooperatives and increase their access to assets by providing training and grants.</li> <li>3. Increase public support and improve enabling environment for women’s economic empowerment through awareness-raising and advocacy activities.</li> <li>4. Increase skills, knowledge and means for municipalities to be more actively involved in local economic development to implement interventions to support women’s economic empowerment by developing gender-sensitive local economic plans.</li> <li>5. Promote strong integration on GBV prevention (this was a pilot activity implemented in one governorate).</li> </ol>
3	Lebanon Productive Sectors Development Programme (PSDP)	2020-23	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improve the enabling policy environment for women’s economic empowerment and participation in the productive sector (Macro level) implemented by UN Women.</li> <li>2. Enhance market access of both women and men led MSMEs in the productive sector (meso level) implemented jointly by UNDP and UNIDO.</li> <li>3. Strengthen the capacity of both women and men farmers, women-led cooperatives, women and men-led MSMEs, in creating and sustaining gender equitable job opportunities and adopting environmentally sustainable practices (micro level) implemented by all of the six United Nations agencies.</li> </ol>
4	Morocco Enhancing the Participation of Women in Trade Activities in the Argan Oil Sector in Morocco (WTA)	2022	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Support a dozen Moroccan Argan Cooperatives in exporting their products to the American market through several activities, including (i) establishing a digitalized e-commerce platform to market argan products; and (ii) training of women members of argan cooperatives on export procedures and marketing of their products (e.g., labelling and logo designs).</li> </ol>
5	State of Palestine Employment Generation for Young Gazan Women (EGYGW)	2020-21	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create short-term decent job opportunities in private and public sectors by providing Cash for Work.</li> <li>2. Support to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) that matched the market needs based on a detailed assessment by providing training and grants.</li> <li>3. Provide greater access to medium- and long-term job opportunities to entrepreneurs in two non-traditional sectors: ICT and industry, by enhancing project participants’ soft and technical skills through training and coaching.</li> </ol>
6	Syria Self-Help Groups (SHGs) project	2021-22	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create SHGs and link them with external capital.</li> <li>2. Establish two funds: (i) Social Solidarity Fund used for social purposes through providing grants to members who encounter emergency cases and serious problems or to implement social initiatives in their communities; and (ii) Lending and Saving Fund which was created to support group members in setting up or expanding their micro and small enterprises.</li> </ol>
7	Tunisia Entrepreneurship for Development (EfD)	2018-23	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop capacities for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies to promote entrepreneurship.</li> <li>2. Support the development of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) at national and territorial level through social entrepreneurship and micro-enterprises led by youth and vulnerable groups.</li> <li>3. Strengthen women’s economic empowerment and access to the market.</li> </ol>

Country	Project Title	Project Dates	Project Objectives
8	Yemen Strengthening resilience in crisis-affected communities of Yemen (ERRY II)	2019-22	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improve community livelihoods, productive assets, and food security to strengthen resilience and self-reliance.</li> <li>2. Increase access of vulnerable communities to solar energy for sustainable livelihoods opportunities and enhanced social service delivery.</li> <li>3. Strengthen capacities of communities and local authorities to respond to conflict and gender-sensitive priorities and needs.</li> </ol> <p>Note: The case study focused on the first objective and its three specific activities: (i) emergency employment (Cash for Work – CFW), (ii) business skill development and entrepreneurship development; and (iii) provision of small financial grants (USD\$600) to establish micro-businesses.</p>
9	Yemen Rapid Financing Facility Project	2020-22	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strengthen the national response to COVID-19 through the provision of uninterrupted solar energy to health facilities responding to COVID-19.</li> <li>2. Restore livelihoods through support for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).</li> <li>3. Strengthen COVID-19 prevention at the community levels through improved provision of clean water.</li> </ol> <p>Note: The case study focused on the second objective and its four specific activities including: (i) conducting a rapid market assessment, (ii) identifying and registering tuk-tuk operators, (iii) procuring of tuk-tuks, and (iv) training of select project participants.</p>

**A draft case study** for each project was produced and shared with the COs, as well as with RBAS teams for their comments and feedback, which were incorporated in the finalized version of the case study as an internal document. As mentioned above, this report synthesizes the lessons learned and findings of the country case studies.

## 6. CHARACTERISTICS OF PROJECTS INCLUDED IN THE CASE STUDIES



Women members of farmers association. Climate resilient women-centric economic empowerment for inclusive and greener post COVID-19 recovery, Djibouti

The projects selected to be part of this regional study are quite diverse. In terms of **budget**, they ranged from USD\$192,319 (Djibouti/MPTF) to \$7,580,000 (Lebanon/WEP). Similarly, the **duration** of the projects (including the no-cost extensions) varied from less than one year (10 months in Morocco) to more than five years (Lebanon/WEP and Tunisia). In terms of **economic sectors** supported, four projects focused on the agriculture sector, one in Yemen (RFF) on the provision of solar-powered tuk-tuks, whereas the remaining projects supported economic opportunities in multiple sectors, including two that focused on ICT (Palestine and Lebanon/WEP). Furthermore, four of the nine projects were envisaged as **pilot** studies (Djibouti, Morocco, Syria, and Yemen/RFF).

Almost all projects were **country** projects, with the exception of the one in Morocco which was part of a **regional** initiative. Whereas most projects were **implemented by UNDP** (directly or via implementing partners), one project (Lebanon/PSDP) was coordinated by the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) and jointly implemented with five other United Nations agencies, and the one in Djibouti was jointly implemented with FAO.

In terms of **gender markers** assigned to the projects,<sup>23</sup> five were given a GEN3 rating and four a GEN2 rating.

Finally, the **funding sources were varied**. They included bilateral development agencies (Canada, Japan, Norway and Sweden), the European Union (EU), UNDP's Rapid Financing Facility (RFF) to address COVID-19, and Multi-Partner Trust Funds (e.g., Djibouti and Lebanon/PSDP).

It is worth noting that the nine projects that were selected are not representative of the RBAS portfolio, as six out of the nine projects are from fragile and conflict-affected countries.



# 7. LESSONS LEARNT



Women as part of the different value chains: entrepreneurship for development project, Tunisia.

The key lessons that identified are listed under each section, with clarifying examples from the case studies included. Some lessons are specific to women's economic empowerment, while others are more general and may apply to other types of interventions. Nevertheless, for projects aiming to enhance women's economic status, both types of lessons are necessary to take into consideration when designing and/or implementing WEE programmes.

## 7.1. PROJECT DESIGN

**Conducting gender analysis, either during the design phase or at the very early stages of implementation, is necessary to guide project activities and ensure that gender specific barriers and entry points are identified in the projects.** For example, the projects in Lebanon, Tunisia and Palestine integrated gender analysis into the value chains (VC) assessment to better select the VCs where women were most likely to be involved. Lebanon's WEP and Palestine's EGYGW also commissioned an assessment to identify the value chains with potential growth where women have roles in non-traditional sectors (e.g., ICT) and greater potential for economic participation and leadership. **The "pilot/emergency" nature of some projects did not prevent them from conducting a rapid gender analysis.** This was the case for the Djibouti/MPTF, which demonstrated that, notwithstanding the emergency nature, short-time frame and modest budget, it is possible to carry out a rapid gender and value chain analysis by consulting with several women-led cooperatives to better understand their needs.

**Projects that had a duration of less than two years, and in particular those supported through emergency funding, limited their ability to design and implement development-type activities which require a longer period of execution (e.g., addressing policy issues, social norms or organizational strengthening of cooperatives).** In particular, addressing social norms regarding gender-related issues would require a longer timeframe. Nevertheless, using emergency funding for implementing



development activities also provided an opportunity to strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus in some countries. For example, in Djibouti, thanks to the MPTF, some non-emergency activities (e.g., farmers' training and organizing an agri-business fair) were used to demonstrate results which could be scaled up to other regions.

**Consultations during the design stage involving stakeholders within different institutions, including UNDP RBAS, government ministries and implementing partners (IPs) would improve the project's design and increase ownership.** In fact, several IPs recommended co-creating the projects with UNDP and jointly defining the eligibility and selection criteria based on technical considerations for individual, SMEs, cooperatives and startups project participants.

**Partnerships with several types of entities allow for greater ownership and sustainability (involving government institutions), innovation (partnering with the private sector), better outreach at the local level (working with CSOs) and addressing GBV (collaborating with women NGOs).**

- **Government involvement ranged from minimal to full engagement, which was reflected in government ownership (or lack of it) and the project's potential sustainability.** The PSDP in Lebanon was implemented in partnership with line ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Economy and Trade and Ministry of Industry. Other projects that also established close working relations, especially with local authorities, included the ones in Tunisia/EfD (see Box 2) and Djibouti/MPTF that worked with regional councils to validate beneficiary selection and engage in monitoring. In addition, both projects in Yemen: RFF and ERRY II, involved local authorities to obtain buy-in at the community level. There is a need for greater engagement with the **Ministry of Women, or with Government ministries that have the mandate to ensure gender equality, where they exist.**



**Women as part of the different value chains: entrepreneurship for development project, Tunisia.**

## BOX 2: THE INSTITUTIONAL SETUP OF THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT (EfD) PROJECT IN TUNISIA

The institutional set up of the Entrepreneurship for Development (EfD) project in Tunisia consisted of the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training (MEVT) as the national counterpart and six regional committees where the project was implemented.<sup>24</sup> The MEVT also chaired the committees at the regional level and the project partnered with the Office de Développement du Sud (ODS) which provided a list of the vulnerable female entrepreneurs in the southern regions; and facilitated the transition of women-led informal to formal enterprises by helping them register their economic activity. The selection of partner associations was done by UNDP in collaboration with MEVT Regional Directors. This structure allowed to ensure government buy-in at both the national and local levels. It also facilitated the implementation of several activities which benefitted women.

- **Partnerships with the private sector allow projects to implement innovative activities.** For example, in Tunisia, the EfD project partnered with the private sector to address financial and digital inclusion. It signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Attijari Bank to improve women's financial inclusion because the bank has existing branches in the regions where the project was implemented. EfD also teamed up with Orange Foundation which had established the "maison digitale" to increase digital inclusion and digital marketing, which was crucial especially during, and post, COVID-19. In Palestine, the EGYGW project created partnerships with several private entities which allowed its project participants to gain practical experience through on-the-job training offered by those enterprises.
- **Partnering with community-based organizations (CSOs) provides several advantages, including a better outreach and understanding of social norms and how to address them.** In Tunisia, the EfD project signed 10-month agreements with the associations selected for implementing the activities in six governorates. The CSOs proximity allowed the project to (i) target different types of vulnerable women (widows, persons with disability, victims of trafficking); (ii) cover different value chains (tourism, agriculture, handicrafts); (iii) support a greater number of women; (iv) carry out targeted awareness session to address social/gender norms; and (v) reach women in remote rural areas which no previous project had covered since the associations played the role of UNDP "local antennas". **Careful selection of implementing partners is crucial for both implementation and sustainability. In conservative contexts, projects may seek the support of male champions or male NGO staff as entry points with some government institutions that are male dominated in order to establish better collaboration.** For example, in Yemen, the RFF project collaborated with SOUL for Development, a local development partner. As a result, the project was able to establish close rapport and collaboration with the local authorities because both the IP and the government staff were all men. UNDP/PAPP selected implementing partners with the requisite experience, connections and multiple sources of funding. This allowed the IPs to provide complementary support, which was not covered by UNDP funding, and to continue to follow up with project participants after the project ended. At the same time, the project further built the capacity of those IPs which allowed the scalability of the project.
- **Greater involvement and collaboration with local/national women's organizations adds value to project design and implementation.** Partnering with local women's organizations ensures greater and better outreach to women, a better design of the activity, and a culturally appropriate approach for addressing the backlash from families and local communities. An example of a successful collaboration with an NGO specialized in gender issues, was the WEP project in Lebanon. Through this relationship, the project was able to pilot the linkages between gender-based violence and women's economic empowerment.





**Women working in solar panels from women's economic participation project, Lebanon.**

**In the case where there are multiple United Nations agencies or several IPs within a consortium targeting the same area, greater geographical convergence would translate to targeting the same women to achieve greater impact.** For example, in Lebanon the six United Nations agencies targeted the same districts to maximize impact of the diverse and integrated interventions. Specifically, UNDP's solar energy component was designed to contribute to the efficiency and sustainability of FAO's productive assets and livelihoods interventions targeting women, such as dairy production. Similarly, UNDP and ILO successfully adapted ILO's Start and Improve Your Own Business package to build capacities of vulnerable youth and women on business start-up packages and business grants.

However, while the United Nations agencies were implementing the project in the same geographical area, it was not necessarily the case that they were supporting the same beneficiary. For example, in Djibouti greater collaboration between UNDP (provision of livestock or establishing home gardens) and FAO (provision of technical training) would have enhanced the effectiveness of UNDP's support and ensured sustainability of interventions for the MPTF project. Finally, Lebanon's WEP project and Yemen's ERRY II supported women through a consortium of IPs. According to the consortia members, the IPs worked in silos, focusing on their own delivery. Greater coordination and collaboration within the consortia would have led to greater support to the targeted women.

## 7.2. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

**Involving gender expertise within UNDP CO, implementing partners and project technical committees contributes to improving project design and implementation.** For example, in Lebanon, Palestine and Yemen, UNDP gender experts provided inputs and/or reviewed documents (project document, gender assessments, etc.). Furthermore, in these countries, most UNDP staff had participated in a gender training course. In the case of Lebanon's PSDP, since it was a project co-implemented by several United Nations agencies, UN Women and UNRCO had recruited a Gender Equality Advisor to mainstream gender into the project. Furthermore, and this was noted by several UNDP CO, especially those that are implementing large programmes through IPs, that while it is important for UNDP Programme staff to be gender-aware, it is even more crucial that IP staff be trained on gender issues since they are the ones in direct contact with project participants and communities (see Box 3). Both UNDP and IP staff would also benefit from training on the Do No Harm approach (see Section 7.4).

### BOX 3: AN INTEGRATIVE AND HOLISTIC APPROACH TO STAFF RECRUITMENT AND IMPLEMENTING PARTNER'S SELECTION. GOOD PRACTICE IN THE LEBANON WEP.

In recruiting key project staff, the Lebanon WEP project used "experience and expertise in GBV programming" as core criteria. In addition, in the project's call for proposals, a clear reference to GBV prevention and the intersectional elements between WEE and GBV was included, and the proposal evaluation criteria included assessment of GBV considerations and commitment to regular GBV risk analysis and mitigation. In selecting partner organizations, UNDP encouraged consortium arrangements in which partners' expertise was leveraged to fully support women's economic participation and preventing GBV.



**Training women farmers. Climate resilient women centric economic empowerment to inclusive and greener post COVID-19, Djibouti.**

Finally, in Yemen's RFF, UNDP insisted that the Project Technical Committee (PTC) included women and that a sufficient number of community volunteers were female to ensure better community outreach (see Box 4).



#### BOX 4: ENSURING THAT THE PROJECT TECHNICAL COMMITTEE (PTC) IS GENDER-SENSITIVE – THE CASE OF YEMEN RFF

The initial membership of the PTC – as proposed by the local authorities - included only men; however, due to UNDP's insistence it was modified to have two women and three men as public officials. In addition, UNDP recruited 20 Community Mobilization Volunteers; 14 out of which were women to disseminate information about the project. This was the result of sustained and conscious efforts made by the project team to mainstream gender equality and women empowerment despite deep-rooted cultural norms that limit the visibility and participation of women in public life.

**Collaborating with other UNDP projects can achieve greater efficiencies, better results and allow for the tackling of issues (e.g., GBV) which were not initially foreseen in project design.** For example, in Djibouti, as the MPTF project was one of several projects within the Rising Djibouti Portfolio, it was successful in achieving efficiencies by using staff time funded by other projects within the portfolio. Considering the short time frame and modest budget of the project, UNDP ensured complementarity with other UNDP-implemented activities which focused on post COVID-19 socio-economic recovery, to create better value for money and optimize the administrative and operational expenditures. **The portfolio approach broke down the silos, allowed for a more integrated approach and provided greater opportunities for project participants.** For example, women-led MSMEs (supported by USAID) were provided access to markets (through MPTF financing). Since the MPTF targeted only women, by having both the USAID and MPTF as part of the same portfolio, this also allowed for the provision of tools and for men to be included in training (funded by USAID). Furthermore, staff costs were shared across the projects in the portfolio, which likely increased MPTF's value for money. As a result, and by being part of a larger portfolio, the MPTF project was able to achieve more results than if it were a stand-alone project. This is particularly relevant for projects spanning a short period of time and with a limited budget. Similarly, in Tunisia, the Entrepreneurship for Development (EfD) project collaborated with several other UNDP projects such as Tamkeen,<sup>25</sup> Addressing Gender-Based Violence (AGBV) project, and the Justice and Human Rights Programme. By working together closely, EfD project was able to support victims of human trafficking and provide GBV training to its female artisan project participants.



Women members of the self-help groups. Self-help groups pilot project, Syria

## BOX 5: THE USE OF THE PORTFOLIO APPROACH IN DJIBOUTI'S MPTF PROJECT BROKE THE SILOS

The project was designed to offer fast and flexible finance that is suited to meet the shifting demands of the rapidly developing and multidimensional global COVID19 crisis. It had a short implementation period of less than two years. Hence, the project invested in the portfolio approach and was thus able to benefit in designing its training modules from the Value Chain Analysis and Market linkages assessment which was funded by USAID, under a different project within the Rising Djibouti Portfolio. Moreover, the MPTF project developed a “Made in Djibouti” brand, logo and a branding strategy for locally grown products. The project also demonstrated that, notwithstanding the emergency nature, short-time frame and modest budget, it is possible to carry out a rapid gender and value chain analysis by consulting with several women-led cooperatives to better understand their needs.

**For projects implemented by several United Nations agencies, greater vertical and horizontal integration would ensure better results.** Planning on integrating the different levels of the project’s intervention, clarifying roles and responsibilities of the participating United Nations agencies, and ensuring a similar implementation timeframe are key to integration, complementarity and impact of the activities implemented. **Similarly, coordination and experience-sharing by different consortia of NGOs in the same country would improve implementation of projects.** For example, in the case of Lebanon’s WEP, UNDP selected consortia which included organizations that complemented each other in technical expertise, such as digital knowhow, GBV, agriculture, organizational skills, etc. Better coordination within the consortia and exchange of experiences between the consortia would strengthen similar projects and benefit partnering consortia in learning from each other.

**Finally, when different NGOs are implementing similar activities in different local contexts, there are valuable opportunities to share experiences and lessons among the different IPs.** For example, in Yemen, EERRY II was implemented through several IPs, partly because the IPs were implementing the activities in different regions and under different local contexts (levels of poverty and literacy, social norms, internet access, etc.). Each IP designed its activities in a slightly different way (e.g., manner in which training was delivered, selection of small-grants project participants, providing the cash grant in one tranche or several tranches, assisting women to obtain IDs, etc.) Similarly, in Syria, the IPs supporting the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) were operating in several contexts i.e. rural, urban, women only SHGs, mixed SHGs. Bringing together UNDP’s IPs to share experiences and learn from each other could lead to an improvement in the design and implementation of activities.



Women members of the self-help groups.  
Self-help groups pilot project, Syria.



Women receiving vocational training.  
Employment generation for young Gazan women, PAPP.

**Adaptability and agility are critical in addressing the needs especially in FCV countries.** Since most of the activities implemented in the projects included in this synthesis report took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, UNDP and its implementing partners were able to adapt activities to respond to the changed context and increased fragility. It allowed the introduction of new activities to respond to the emerging needs. In the case of FCV countries, for example Lebanon, and due to multiple crises, UNDP succeeded in adjusting its operations to better address needs and remain relevant (see Box 6).

### **BOX 6: UNDP DEMONSTRATED GREAT PROGRAMMATIC FLEXIBILITY IN IMPLEMENTING THE WEP IN LEBANON**

WEP was designed in 2018 prior to the multiple crisis that hit Lebanon. However, implementation started in 2019. As a result, the project had to adapt to the ever-increasing challenging context and project activities had to be modified and extended twice. The following are examples of how UNDP adapted its programmatic approach:

- **Changing the number of targeted project participants.** Targets were reformulated in response to the deteriorating situation to be more attainable and to provide a more tailored and crisis responsive intervention.
- **Revision of target breakdown.** Initially, the project had planned to reach an equal number of Lebanese and Syrian women. The split was revised to 60 percent Lebanese and 40 percent Syrian women to address the severe economic crisis that an increasing number of Lebanese women were facing as well as to reduce tensions, enhance social stability and ensure conflict sensitivity in the targeted locations.
- **Changing the modality of delivering training.** Due to COVID-19 lockdowns and movement restrictions, the project used a blended approach, facilitating women's access to online or in-person training.
- **Adapting curricula to remote modality.** An example of this was the adjustment of the digital skills training that was modified to be delivered completely online. Specifically, the consortium had to produce condensed curriculum that provided women with basic digital tools in order to follow the online course. In addition, the implementing partners revised the training curricula and processes to fit distance learning, such as producing interactive audio-visual tools and developing ethical guidelines to ensure safe virtual training spaces.
- **Introducing new topics and new equipment.** For example, one consortium member included crisis management as part of the training provided to the cooperatives and another added COVID-19 awareness-raising sessions. In addition, budget savings were used to provide women-led cooperatives with solar panels (not initially foreseen), which allowed them to operate the equipment they had (due to lack of electric power) as well as to generate savings in energy costs.
- **Increasing incentives for transport/communication.** The consortium, which provided cash incentives to its project participants to participate in the training, increased the amount to keep up with inflation and the devaluation of the Lebanese pound.



### 7.3. PROCESSES TO STRENGTHEN WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT

This section draws on lessons from the different projects in building the capacities at the individual, organizational and institutional/policy levels to strengthen women's economic advancement. Whereas the processes at the three levels are those that are applied in any capacity strengthening intervention, this section synthesizes the practices and lessons with the specific aim to build capacities and increase resources for women.

#### 7.3.1. PROCESSES TO STRENGTHEN INDIVIDUAL CAPACITIES.

**Clear and transparent communication regarding the selection criteria of project participants to be supported with training and grants, is necessary to avoid local conflict, decrease the risk of elite capture and ensure a Do No Harm approach.** In order to identify the potential project participants who would be supported with training and grants, the projects developed specific criteria which were used to select the project participants. They also used different ways to advertise the activities and encourage potential project participants to apply. These ranged from using social media and printing posters to using community-level meetings as well as collaborating with local authorities to share information.

**Following a two-step approach (i.e., first selecting a large number of project participants to participate in training, followed by a second round of selection of a smaller number of project participants to receive the in-kind grant) may result in dissatisfaction at the community level.** In some instances, the non-selected participants from the first training were dissatisfied that they were not chosen for the second phase. In a few instances, some women were subjected to abuse from within their household because they were not selected to benefit from the in-kind grant. In Yemen, for example, stakeholders suggested that all women should be provided the grant – given the high social barriers that women have to overcome to participate in the project and attend the training. This would encourage other women to participate in future projects.



Women's economic participation project, Lebanon.

#### 7.3.1.1. TRAINING – BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

**Conducting an initial assessment to better understand the project participants' capabilities would allow for training offered to be tailored to respond to their precise needs.** One such example was the project in Morocco which developed a specific questionnaire to assess the argan cooperatives' capacities and to design the training accordingly. Furthermore, it is necessary

to allocate sufficient time and budget to conduct such needs assessments and baseline studies which have a triple purpose: (i) provide information for what training needs are required; (ii) identify specifications of equipment; and (iii) establish baseline information which would be useful for monitoring and evaluation. In Lebanon, the project supported the curriculum and course material development as well the adaptation of training curricula for the hybrid modality.

**For in-person training, especially in conservative communities, it is necessary to take into consideration several aspects to ensure the greater participation of women (e.g., awareness-raising at the community level, selection of venue, timing and duration of training, availability of transport, etc.).** Box 7 provides some of the lessons learned from the Yemen/ERRY II and Yemen/RFF projects.

### **BOX 7: GOOD PRACTICE REGARDING IN-PERSON TRAINING AS DEMONSTRATED BY ERRY II IN YEMEN**

- **Community awareness-raising:** Prior to the training, IPs conducted awareness-raising consultations at the community level with a broad group of stakeholders to encourage women's participation in training and to encourage families to allow their daughters to attend the training sessions.
- **Venue selection:** The training venue was in a government-owned institution (not a hotel) which led to men being more likely to allow their female relatives to attend, as government facilities are perceived to be safer.
- **Time and duration of training:** Sessions were not full day but rather held during the time that was most convenient for the women to attend (starting after the children had gone to school and ending before they came back home).
- **Provision of transport:** IPs contracted buses to transport women from their homes to the training venue and back.
- **Appropriate budgeting:** The training budget included the cost of having a mahram who would accompany the female relative to the training.
- **Respect for the local culture:** It was necessary to be flexible and modify the training to respond to the local context (e.g., in some conservative areas, the local authorities did not allow training on beauty salons activities and, as a result, these sessions were removed from the training program). In some cases, separate training was held for women and men.
- **Gender considerations in designing the Training of Trainers (ToT):**<sup>26</sup> IPs attempted to identify trainees, especially female trainees, from different geographical areas in order to cover a wider area. Furthermore, due to high drop-out rate of women participating in ToT, some IPs suggested increasing the number of female participants in order to end up with a sufficient number of available female trainers.
- **Preference for women trainers:** To the extent possible, and especially in the more conservative areas, IPs attempted to use women trainers to train women project participants.

Source: Meeting with United Nations agencies (FAO, ILO, UNDP, WFP) and KIs and IPs.



Several issues need to be considered when designing and delivering online training, including erratic power supply in some countries and poor internet access, especially in rural areas. Specific challenges related to women participants, included lack of familiarity with online tools and lack of access to the internet. In addition, the training related to digital access was sub-optimal due to the selection of participants (age, basic digital knowledge) whereby the digital knowledge among participants varied greatly, rendering the delivery of the training more challenging. Women in rural areas often have different levels of skills and digital knowledge, and the training when offered online should consider illiteracy rates and ownership of cell phones. Nevertheless, several projects which delivered online training due to the COVID-19 pandemic implemented steps that could be considered good practices (see Box 8 for examples from Lebanon/WEP).



A woman trimming olive trees in front of her own nursery. Employment generation for young Gazan women, PAPP.

### BOX 8: GOOD PRACTICES RELATED TO ONLINE TRAINING PROVIDED IN LEBANON'S WEP

Following are some of the practices that the implementing partners used to render the online training more accessible and effective:

1. Technical content was offered in a digital user-friendly and timely manner and project participants could continue to access the content for future reference.
2. Implementing partners used WhatsApp because Zoom did not work due to poor internet connection and not all participants had an email address.
3. Established WhatsApp groups for up to 12 selected project participants (the small number allowed for better interaction).
4. The project provided the participants with a data bundle to ensure they could access the WhatsApp group sessions and download the videos which were sent to participants.
5. The trainers conducted live interactive sessions with the project participants to go through the content and address questions and clarifications.



6. The training sessions were shortened from two hours to one and a half hours to accommodate women's capacity to participate due to their competing priorities and care burdens.
7. Trainers offered sessions when electricity was available, including outside of normal working hours.
8. Short clip videos covering the theoretical aspects allowed women to connect whenever it was convenient to them (e.g., in the evenings or when their husbands came back home so they could use their cell phones, as in the case of Syrian women).
9. A schedule of delivery was developed and agreed upon. The videos were delivered via WhatsApp groups, as per the schedule, 48 hours ahead of the live sessions. This allowed project participants to watch the videos and interact with their peers on WhatsApp ahead of the live sessions.
10. Each participant could send their questions to the trainer who grouped all the questions and sent the list of Q&A's to everyone in the group.
11. The project developed ethical guidelines for ensuring safe virtual training spaces.

Another lesson learned is that age matters when it comes to digital access and literacy, hence the importance of selecting project participants to participate especially in online training that have a similar level and understanding of ICT, in order to fully benefit from the digital training. In Palestine, the EGYGW project, addressed this issue by developing tutorials and handouts on how to use Slack and Zoom which were circulated with the project participants prior to the training sessions.

### 7.3.1.2 TRAINING – TECHNICAL/PROFESSION

**“Business development” training should be accompanied with technical/professional training,<sup>27</sup> to build the capacities in the sectors women project participants are engaged in.** Such technical training is essential for several reasons: (1) to ensure that the women's production is of high quality in order to attract customers and ensure the business' viability; and even more importantly in the case where the women have access to loans (as opposed to grants), (2) to make sure that the women are able to pay off their loans and ensure that the Do No Harm principle is applied. Furthermore, sufficient time should be allocated for such technical training to ensure that capacities are built to a certain level. For example, in the pilot/emergency projects, this was not possible due to the short duration of the project.



Training on administration of self-help groups, pilot project, Syria.

**Technical training can be enhanced by providing coaching and on-the-job training** as was done through the Lebanon WEP and Palestine EGYGW projects. In particular, the latter followed a specific methodology to support Gazan women and matched them with private sector companies where they could gain hands-on experience (see Box 9). Several stakeholders of other projects requested that similar opportunities be offered along with the theoretical training as part of WEE projects.

### BOX 9: STRUCTURED METHODOLOGY FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT IN PALESTINE'S EGYGW PROJECT

The IPs of the project in Palestine supporting Gazan women followed a well-structured methodology to select, train, provide on-the-job coaching and assist project participants in developing their business models before selecting the most promising model and providing further support through sourcing equipment and tools.



**Support to cooperatives and micro-enterprises should take into consideration two important aspects: access to water (especially important for the agriculture micro-enterprises) and access to electricity, necessary for several production processes.** In the case of access to electricity, some projects (in Lebanon and Yemen) provided solar panels to some of their project participants.

#### 7.3.1.3. TRAINING – SOFT SKILLS

**Offering soft skills training allows the project participants to enhance their negotiation skills and improve their time management.** In Lebanon's WEP project, one IP used an innovative approach, and provided training on time management and work-life balance to female members of the cooperatives. This allowed women to better organize their time spent on unpaid work and to participate in the online and in-person training. Similarly, in Palestine, the project trained women on negotiations and communication skills - this increased self-confidence.

#### 7.3.1.4. PROVISION OF IN-KIND OR CASH GRANTS

**Often when a grant is fixed as a flat amount and distributed equally to all project participants, it can result in being too low or too high for the type of activity participants are engaged in. Therefore, it would be better to determine the amount based on the business proposals developed by the project participants.** For example, the Palestinian EGYGW project supported women in developing their business, on the basis of which the grant amount was allocated. In the case of Tunisia's EFD, the associations noted that the amount of the financial grant (capped at \$20,000) was too low to really assist the project participants in increasing their production and marketing it. Similarly, 61 percent of the project participants of Yemen's ERRY II considered that the amount of the financial grant was not sufficient, while for the remaining 39 percent the cash assistance was sufficient for establishing their micro-enterprise.<sup>28</sup> In Lebanon's WEP project, the opposite was found. Several implementing partners noted the original amount budgeted (\$30,000) was too generous given the capacities of the recipient enterprises. As a result, the consortium provided lower amounts based on the SMEs absorptive capacity. Finally, an interesting lesson regarding the use of the grants can be taken from Yemen's RFF project, which took into consideration the poverty levels and priority needs of project



participants and introduced flexibility in the use of part of the cash grant (see Box 10).

### BOX 10: FLEXIBLE AND REALISTIC USE OF GRANTS IN YEMEN'S RFF PROJECT

UNDP implemented an innovative approach in the case of Yemen's RFF project, by taking into consideration the project participants' economic vulnerability. It allowed up to \$140 (26 percent of the total amount) to be used for purchasing items not related to the business (e.g., clothes, food, qat, housing, soap and hygiene, transportation to market, hospitals, to visit family, to go to work or to the university, purchase water, repay loans, health treatment, education and fuel). This realistic approach allowed participants to cover some of their immediate needs while at the same time ensuring that the cash grant would also be used to develop their business ideas.



**Women's economic participation project, Lebanon.**

In particular, when the grant is provided as a cash assistance and not as an in-kind one, it is important to ensure that women are able to access those grants and that they do not face barriers due to lack of formal identification (ID) or inability to physically access a financial institution (see Box 11).



### **BOX 11: ACCESS TO FINANCIAL GRANTS, GOOD PRACTICE IN YEMEN'S ERRY II PROJECT**

Women faced several challenges in accessing the grants provided by the ERRY II project in Yemen, including lack of an ID document and social norms which prohibited them to go to a bank. In one area, women were not allowed to the cash point to receive their grant. The IP – in order to ensure access to the financial assistance – requested the bank to organize a mobile team to reach the women in their homes. In some contexts, it is advisable not to transfer funds destined for women into a bank account because there is a high risk that a male member of the family would de facto control the bank account. Another suggested option is the use of mobile money to ensure confidentiality and safety as women can open an account privately without anyone in their family knowing. The IP suggested that in such cases it would be better to provide the women with cash in tranches and ensure that the cash was utilized to purchase the items that the women need to start/continue their businesses before transferring the successive tranches.

### **7.3.2. PROCESSES TO STRENGTHEN ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITIES**

Addressing the organizational capacities of the supported entities contributes to ensuring their sustainability. For example, in Syria, the pilot project focused extensively on building the organizational capacities of the Self-Help Groups spread over a period of one year. The IPs offered several training sessions on different thematic areas, such as: SHG by-laws, group dynamics, conflict management and group management so that the SHG members could properly conduct their roles in reaching out to the local communities, introduce the project and attract members of the community to join the SHG. The project's investment in supporting the governance and organizational aspects of the SHGs paid off. Furthermore, the project allowed the SHGs to tailor their by-laws based on their needs and priorities. This ensured that the project was relevant, enhanced the feeling of ownership and contributed to the SHGs' sustainability (see Box 12).

### **BOX 12: FLEXIBILITY IN DESIGN OF FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS GOOD PRACTICE IN SYRIA'S SHGs PROJECT**

In Syria, following the training related to the SHGs' organizational aspects, the project allowed the SHGs to determine their internal rules based on their members' needs and priorities. For example, SHGs determined the following:

- Repayment, monthly or seasonal (agriculture season or Ramadan)
- Amount of loan (some SHGs were able to increase it to reflect inflation)
- Selection of beneficiary (on a rotational basis or random selection)

In Lebanon, UNDP/PSDP developed an Export Readiness Self-Assessment Tool to help Lebanese companies and entrepreneurs across all sectors understand the requirements and procedures to export goods from Lebanon to the world. In addition, training was provided to all SMEs on the use of the tool and there was a tracking mechanism which allowed measurement of who used the tool. One of the lessons learned through the project is that it needs to establish a helpline which micro-enterprises can call so that they can be walked through the portals and registration process.

In the Lebanon WEP project, one of the implementing partners, developed a capacity assessment tool (see Box 13) and delivered accordingly training to the cooperatives on organizational aspects as well as technical ones.

### BOX 13: THE COOPERATIVES ASSESSMENT STRATEGY & TOOL (CAST) IN LEBANON'S WEP PROJECT

The tool covered five areas broken down into strategic questions allowing identification of the subtle differences between nascent, growing and mature cooperatives, as follows: determine their internal rules based on their members' needs and priorities. For example, SHGs determined the following:

- Legal status, cooperative planning and strategy
- Management structure and accounting system
- Production and quality of inputs
- Market linkages and relationships
- Membership and member retention strategy

Source: Cooperatives Assessment Strategy and Tool Environment and Sustainable Development Unit (ESDU) Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences – American University of Beirut Patricia Kebbé, May 2020.

In Tunisia, in addition to partnering with SHANTI to develop the capacities of associations in three governates,<sup>29</sup> organizational capacity strengthening included the establishment of incubators and rehabilitating and furnishing the venues. These incubation spaces were used not only for providing technical training to the project participants but also as a social space where women can meet and exchange ideas.

**When projects have a short duration and/or limited budget, it is still possible to support organizational development, albeit in a more limited manner.** For example, in Djibouti, the project funded the cost of registration and obtaining a business license for operating the five women-owned agriculture enterprises it supported. This financial support to obtain a “patent” allowed these micro enterprises to open a commercial bank account and receive a \$5,000 micro-grant. In Palestine, the women who set up their small enterprises were supported through a three-year exemption to pay business registration fees to the Ministry of Industry.

### 7.3.3. PROCESSES TO STRENGTHEN POLICY/INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES

**Addressing policy level issues related to women's economic empowerment and building institutional capacities are necessary to ensure long-term sustainability. However, prioritization of gender-related issues at the policy-level would require (i) lengthier project duration; (ii) inclusion of policy and/or regulatory interventions in the projects' scope; and (iii) a sufficiently stable environment (e.g., stability in the economic, financial and security situation).** The EfD project in Tunisia - addressed policy level issues, albeit not specifically related to women's economic empowerment. In collaboration with ILO, UNDP produced three policy briefs on the social and solidarity economy (SSE).<sup>30</sup> The objective of these briefs was to promote the SSE in Tunisia by (i) assessing the legal and institutional framework; (ii) highlighting the attractiveness of the sector; and (iii) promoting public policies conducive to the development of SSE. UNDP organized a workshop in 2020 to advocate and raise awareness regarding the laws concerning the social and solidarity economy, crowdfunding and micro-enterprises.

**Notwithstanding the absence of institutional support at the national level related to women's empowerment, it may be possible to address policy issues at the decentralized level (municipal or village level).** For example, in Lebanon, the project

conducted a gender audit to measure the level of effort the municipality has put in to ensure women's participation in the workforce, and promote gender equality through its policies, programming and engagement with neighboring communities. In addition, the gender access and control tool were used for developing, jointly with women project participants and municipal officers, the local economic development plans. It aimed to identify barriers to women's access to economic resources, as well as opportunities. The result was a selection of concrete activities that were supported by both the municipality as well as the project (see Box 14 for examples of such activities). The main lesson from Lebanon's WEP experience is the importance of linking advocacy/awareness-raising regarding gender equality at the municipal level with funding for implementing gender-informed local development plans. Often, projects limit their gender approach to awareness-raising and to formulating a local development plan without allocating funding for implementing such plans. The WEP selected the municipalities based on specific gender responsive criteria, conducted sensitization at the local level, co-designed the municipal plans and contributed financially to their implementation.

### BOX 14: EXAMPLES OF WOMEN-LED/WOMEN-IMPLEMENTED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS IN LEBANON'S WEP PROJECT

Following are the five initiatives which were proposed and selected in a participatory manner to be implemented jointly by WEP and the targeted municipalities in Lebanon:

1. Harvesting aromatic plants (thyme and saffron) and farming mushrooms (the municipality provided land and project provided supplies).
2. Setting up a specialized sewing factory for the production of cotton undergarments (the municipality already had sewing machines and women had been trained in sewing; the project provided needed additional equipment and supplies to increase and diversify their production).
3. Setting up a flower farm to harvest flowers for decorative bouquets (the municipality made available land and identified a local agricultural engineer; the project funded seeds and training).
4. The sewing atelier, already established by the municipality, which has in the past year shown great production potential (the project purchased additional machines and supplies).
5. Setting up a market where women would be invited to showcase and sell their products. The municipality provided the needed space (indoors and outdoors) to host a women's market and committed to organizing it on a regular basis. The municipality already owned some equipment which could be used during the market days, including large fridges for women who want to sell food and perishable items. The municipality committed to prepare the Bill of Quantities (BoQ) listing the different items needed to hold the market (tables, table runners, chairs, signs, etc.) and the project purchased those items.

Source: ACTED, Strengthening Women's Resilience in a Time of Crisis – Women's Economic Participation (WEP) Project (Targeted municipalities: Sarafand, Ein Ebel, Qana, Hasbaya and Burj Rahal). Municipal workshops recommended economic plans.

**In Yemen, the ERRY II project, given its focus on early recovery, did not address policy level issues related to gender issues. However, it did succeed in significantly increasing women's participation in Village Community Committees (VCC) through the requirement that 50 percent of members must be women.**<sup>31</sup> According to the endline study, "this rate of participation of women is considered a best practice toward building a reasonable leadership level for VCCs and will contribute significantly to identifying and tackling basic service needs, mainly for women, and local conflicts concerning access to resources".<sup>32</sup> While the need for increasing women's participation in decision-making bodies at the local level is significant, it needs to be accompanied by developing their leadership capacities and their life skills in order to ensure that women's voices are heard and that their participation is effective.



## 7.4. GENDER EQUALITY APPROACHES

Strengthening women's economic empowerment also requires addressing informal gender norms and stereotypical roles that place barriers to women's economic advancement and participation in public life, which are highly contextual, through gender equality approaches. These elements were analyzed, and lessons drawn as follows:

**Establishing a minimum target for ensuring women's inclusion during the design of the projects would trigger actions during implementation to ensure that a minimum number of women are selected as project participants as well as for systematically using sex-disaggregated indicators.** For example, in projects that did not target exclusively women (e.g., Yemen's ERRY II and Syria's SHGs) and in order to ensure gender mainstreaming, the projects set a minimum target of 30 percent of women in all of their components. The objective of this benchmarking was to ensure that both women and men get equal opportunities to receive the projects' support. In some cases, some IPs reported that they were able to reach a 50 percent target of women participating in their activities.

**Targeting exclusively women project participants is not always the best strategy depending on the prevalent social norms, and engaging men can contribute to the success of women's economic empowerment initiatives. Engaging men can be in response to gender-differentiated roles which are often complementary in economic processes and value chains especially in local rural areas.** For example, while targeting exclusively women ensures that women participate in various types of training and benefit from grants, this may create several challenges. First, in the agriculture sector, there is a benefit in including men in the training, since it is usually men that prepare the land because it requires heavy physical labor. Focusing only on women will result in training the persons who do not prepare the land and excluding the ones that do, thus rendering the training less effective than if a more nuanced gender approach is followed. Second, in the agri-food sector, by targeting only women-led cooperatives and MSMEs and startups, there is a risk of focusing on the production aspect of the value chain where women are more prominent. However, other aspects of the value chain (e.g., harvesting, storage, transport, marketing, etc.) where men might be more predominant are neglected (see Box 15).



Engaging men, entrepreneurship for development project, Tunisia.

### **BOX 15: INCLUDING MALE FAMILY MEMBERS: GOOD PRACTICE IN TUNISIA'S EFD PROJECT**

An interesting example is that of La Ruche Association, one of UNDP's IPs in Tunisia, which used other sources of funding to finance activities implemented by male members of the family (father, husband, brother). The funded activities complemented what the female beneficiary was producing (e.g., provision of seeds to the husband to produce the primary product which his wife needs to produce the essential oils, or provision of seeds to the female beneficiary's father to plant the flowers necessary for producing the honey by the bees kept by the wife). The inclusion of men in the value chain had a double positive effect: it helped women to increase their production and it also addressed potential resistance from the part of male family members regarding women's economic participation.

Third, by addressing the complementary roles of men in the value chains and taking a household approach, the opportunity to start a discussion around a more equitable distribution of unpaid care responsibilities within the household could be provided. This could further remove barriers for women to fully engage in the labour market. Finally, engaging men from the start minimizes the risk of intra-household conflicts and GBV, and ensures that the Do No Harm principle is respected (see Box 16).

### **BOX 16: TARGETING WOMEN WHILE ENGAGING WITH MEN GOOD PRACTICE IN LEBANON'S WEP PROJECT**

WEP engaged with men as well as targeting women project participants. Though WEP targeted only women as direct project participants, it engaged with men as a pilot activity by including intimate partners, co-workers, managers, community members, and municipal officials to transform gender norms, reflect on how men use their power, promote healthy relationship skills, and build support for women's empowerment and participation. As a result, 85 percent of Lebanese and 47 percent Syrian targeted men reported positive beliefs and attitudes towards women's economic roles; compared to 29 and 28 percent at baseline. There was a high increase in men's reporting equal participation in care work.<sup>33</sup> The pilot brought about positive changes in women's perceptions of shared care work with men. It also encouraged some women (younger, newly married, or parents of new-born children) to ask for their husband's co-sharing care work.

Source: UNDP (n.d.). Violence Against Women and Achieving SDG8: Innovation to Integrate VAW Prevention into Women's Economic Empowerment in Lebanon, PowerPoint.

**Earmarking a budget line for gender mainstreaming would allow the planning of actions that tackle the barriers of women's engagement and participation.** For example, in Yemen/ERRY II, all the agreements with the implementing partners included 2 to 3 percent of their budget allocated for gender mainstreaming. This allowed some IPs to implement innovative practices to ensure the greater participation of women, for example through assisting them in obtaining IDs (see Box 17). It is useful to note that UNDP's Gender Strategy 2022-2023 requires the allocation of 15 percent to advance and mainstream gender equality in projects.

### **BOX 17: ASSISTING WOMEN IN OBTAINING IDS GOOD PRACTICE IN YEMEN'S ERRY II PROJECT**

In Yemen/ERRY II, there was a budget line dedicated to gender mainstreaming which some IPs used to assist women in obtaining an ID. This was an important activity to empower women in areas of life beyond the economic. One IP reported that it had helped around 2,000 women obtain an ID. Furthermore, and in case they were unable to do so, they issued a project ID and negotiated with the local banks to accept the project ID as proof of identification for women. However, the IP still had to raise awareness for this activity: in one example, after convincing both the woman and her husband regarding the importance of having an ID, the man wanted to provide his fingerprints instead of allowing his wife to do so.

**Awareness-raising at the community level would address social barriers, ensure greater acceptance at the local level as well as ensure greater participation of women.** In several projects, UNDP and its IPs conducted community consultations and raised awareness at the community level regarding the projects' objectives and the importance of women's participation prior to implementation (see Box 18).

### **BOX 18: GOOD PRACTICES IN AWARENESS RAISING FROM SEVERAL COUNTRIES**

- Selection of venue. One IP in Yemen, targeted male members of the community while they were playing football to carry out their awareness raising activities.
- Targeting a wide circle of stakeholders. In several countries, IPs raised awareness and coordinated with different stakeholders, local authority, transitional council, security authorities and religious and community leaders in order to ensure wider acceptance at the community level.
- Individualized awareness-raising: In Tunisia, UNDP partnered with local CSOs at the community level who were able to engage at the individual/household level to raise awareness. For example, the CSOs would meet with the husband and provide greater information on the purpose, venue and other participants which convinced the husband to permit his wife to participate in the training.
- Using videos to initiate awareness-raising at the community level. In Lebanon's WEP project, videos addressing gender equality issues such as GBV, were produced and screening of these videos were organized at the local level, to kick-start discussion around these themes.
- Respecting the local culture. In Yemen, staff wore appropriate attire to be accepted by the local community (e.g., one IP staff wore burqas to facilitate their acceptance by the local religious community).

**Using targeted outreach to incite women to participate in specific sectors can lead to breaking societal stereotypes and increasing their participation in non-traditional value chains.** In Palestine, in order to address the gender stereotypes regarding women, the EGYGW project made a conscious effort to incentivize women to participate in sectors in which they were not traditionally present (e.g., ICT). The IP produced several communication tools and implemented an outreach campaign to ensure that a greater number of women were aware of the project and that they would be encouraged to apply (see Box 19).



### **BOX 19: USING MULTIPLE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION TO REACH WOMEN IN NON-TRADITIONAL SECTORS GOOD PRACTICE IN PALESTINE'S EGYGW PROJECT**

- Developed a project brand, with logo and slogan (SheTech, where Technology Empowers Women)
- Developed a web-based application form for interested applicants to use for online registration.
- Produced three promotional videos to raise awareness of the importance of entrepreneurship and attract potential talented Gazan females and entrepreneurs.
- Implemented a specific outreach campaign targeting talented Gazan females from IT, engineering and business sectors, by emailing female graduates of IT, engineering and business schools to inform them of the opportunity.
- Produced a one-of-a-kind promotional video by documenting seven successful women from the Middle East who have successful IT-related careers.  
(<https://www.facebook.com/1854106118152772/posts/2820747521488622/>)
- Produced an informative video on how to register through SheTech Website. (<https://fb.watch/1mh9j8tNJm/>)

Source: Final Report (2021). "SheTech" Project - Employment Generation for Young Gazan Women through Fostering Entrepreneurship in the ICT Sector at Gaza Strip. Submitted by: The Business and Technology Incubator (BTI), Community Services and Continuous Education Deanship (CSCED), and The Islamic University of Gaza (IUG), 30 September 2021, pp. 6-17.

#### **Behavioral insights can be an effective tool in understanding behaviors that support or prevent women's financial inclusion.**

In Tunisia, the EfD project sought to better understand the enablers and barriers for women's financial inclusion. It noted that there were fewer women participating in competitions/hackathons and even fewer who were winning. As a result, and in collaboration with UNDP's regional initiative on behavioral insights, the project brought together women micro-entrepreneurs and bank representatives to identify those barriers and put in place concrete activities to address them (see Box 20).

### **BOX 20: UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIORAL ENABLERS AND BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S FINANCIAL INCLUSION, GOOD PRACTICE IN TUNISIA'S EFD PROJECT**

UNDP Tunisia, through the Accelerator Lab and the Entrepreneurship for Development (EfD) project, joined the regional Behavioral Insights Initiative and defined a scope of work on conducting experimentation on financial inclusion for women entrepreneurs in the southern regions of Tunisia. As part of the solution, the project invited UNDP's partner, Attijari Bank, to build a trust relationship between the bank, as a financial institution, and female entrepreneurs. To do so, two workshops were organized in two different cities where bank representatives and women entrepreneurs met for two days to exchange ideas. Women got the chance to express their frustrations towards the bank's requirements, staff behavior, ask questions about products and services. On the other hand, Attijari Bank took the opportunity to demystify the bank's image and was open to discussions to integrate women entrepreneurs' needs into their services. As a result of this two-way exchange, several specific financial services were identified to be included in the bank package: (i) needs for training on business management, (ii) financial literacy, (iii) payment flexibility, (iv) transparency and communication, and (v) administrative support (specifically for business formalization).

**Addressing unpaid family care (in particular, childcare) to enable project participants' participation in project activities such as training sessions.** While none of the projects had included in its design a specific activity to address unpaid family care, in Tunisia and Syria, some IPs implemented ad hoc solutions which allowed women with small children to participate in the in-person training sessions (see Box 21).

### BOX 21: ADDRESSING UNPAID FAMILY CARE IN TUNISIA'S EfD PROJECT

- In Tunisia, women were allowed to bring their babies with them to the training which permitted a greater number of women to participate.
- In Syria, in order to encourage women with young children to attend the training, one IP provided care services during the training session.

**Physical and virtual safe spaces for women in economic empowerment projects provide an avenue for peer exchange and social support that advance women's leadership and confidence.** Lebanon's WEP project, realizing the impact of the multiple crises on women, provided psychosocial support, which proved to have several unplanned, intangible and positive results (see Box 22). The organizing of women in small groups on WhatsApp allowed women to create a support group. This was also reported in Palestine where female project participants remained in contact and have established social relationships. The importance of female solidarity and establishing women's groups (e.g., women SHGs in Syria) was underlined, especially in FCV countries, where women face stressful and traumatic situations and the necessity of engaging in economic activity adds to the daily pressures they have to face.

### BOX 22: ADDRESSING PSYCHOSOCIAL NEEDS IN TIMES OF CRISIS GOOD PRACTICE IN LEBANON'S WEP PROJECT

Unlike mainstream livelihood projects which focus on providing economic resources and technical skills training, WEP created safe and women-only spaces for women to discuss challenges, share expertise and advice, obtain psychosocial support, and learn about local services and risk mitigation measures. The midterm review findings confirmed the benefits of the psychosocial support, with women reporting increased self-confidence, improved well-being and sense of belonging, and an increased ability for building relationships with peers. The latter was specifically relevant and important at the time of COVID-19 confinement.

Source: UNDP. Strengthening Women's Resilience in a Time of Crisis, Women's Economic Participation Project. Fourth Annual Report, January 1, 2021 – December 31, 2021, p. 8.

**Supporting WEE is not without controversy and can trigger conflict at the household level, as well as domestic violence or other forms of non-partner sexual and GBV. Integration of strategies that prevent GBV into WEE programmes, within their local contexts may minimize male resistance, reduce the risk of domestic violence and improve women's self-confidence and self-reliance.** In Lebanon, the WEP project piloted the "Stronger Together"; a gender transformative initiative in South Lebanon.<sup>34</sup> Recognizing that there is no "one-size-fits all" approach and that each environment requires a different design and approach, the pilot activity was adapted to fit the Lebanese context. The integration of "Stronger Together" within the

WEP program aimed at evaluating the extent to which the integration of GBV prevention strategies would accelerate the achievement of women's economic empowerment and participation (see Box 23).

### **BOX 23: LESSONS LEARNED FROM LEBANON'S WEP PROJECT REGARDING LINKING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND REDUCING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

The pilot was inspired by an experience in Rwanda and was modified to fit the Lebanese context (e.g., translating curriculum into Arabic, case stories of some sessions were amended to be more culturally appropriate, and some changes were introduced to make the sessions more relevant to Syrian refugees). While implementing the "Stronger Together" activity, different FGDs were organized with women-only, men-only and mixed groups. This ensured that men did not feel threatened that the project was promoting women over men which could backfire and create conflict within the family. An independent evaluation found that the difference in economic empowerment between "Stronger Together" and WEP participants was not statistically significant.<sup>35</sup> It also cautioned that the "findings need to be understood by factoring in the rapidly changing context and on-going multiple crisis that have been taking place in Lebanon since the start of the project, and which are likely to have influenced the results".<sup>36</sup> However, the same evaluation found that "the main change in terms of what "Stronger Together" project participants learned/gained was related to their self-perception. Respondents reported a positive change in their self-confidence, courage, self-reliance, and recognition of self-worth."<sup>37</sup>

**Integrating Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) while working with MSMEs and cooperatives can tackle GBV at the workplace.** In Lebanon, WEP delivered PSEA sessions aimed at advancing gender equality and non-discriminatory practices at the workplace as part of the overall training. The sessions addressed concepts related to PSEA such as power dynamics, consent, and the impact of sexual harassment on employers and employees. Participants also discussed safeguarding recommendations and mechanisms for creating a safer space for employees, focusing on adopting a safeguarding policy informed by PSEA core principles and implementing reporting channels. Similarly, in Palestine, the Palestinian Employment Fund (PEF), with support from UNDP, set up a complaints-handling mechanism to capture any grievances the women project participants might have (either within the household or at the workplace) and, more importantly, addressed them in a satisfactory manner (see Box 24).

### **BOX 24: PUTTING IN PLACE A COMPLAINTS-HANDLING MECHANISM. GOOD PRACTICE IN PALESTINE'S EGYGW PROJECT**

In Palestine, PEF established a complaints-handling mechanism for its project participants to report their grievances. It also developed a detailed Standard Operating Procedures document to outline the process. In one case, during on-the-job training, the trainees complained about harassment from one of the trainers. The project took action and cancelled the contract with the trainer. Furthermore, and to avoid creating social tensions within the community, the women were transferred to another company to continue their training and provided a justification that the new venue offered additional technical opportunities from which they could benefit.



Finally, targeting women, who are part of specific social groups such as refugees or IDPs, can trigger additional tensions in the community. Therefore, undertaking a gender-responsive conflict analysis in women's economic empowerment projects that analyze conflict dynamics in the personal and public space would help the projects succeed. It is crucial to follow a Do No Harm approach to avoid/mitigate such risks. In Lebanon, the WEP project by reassessing the number of host community versus migrant project participants at the community level, contributed to social cohesion at the local level. In order to ensure that this principle is applied in all projects, gender-responsive conflict sensitivity training for UNDP project staff is essential. In Palestine, UNDP and PEF are exploring partnering with CSOs that can provide psychosocial support and help address the social problems if and when they arise, and mitigate harm where relevant.

## 7.5. MARKET ACCESS

Strengthening women's economic empowerment occurs within the market system and thus requires a market systems approach. As such these elements were also analyzed in the case studies and lessons drawn as follows.

**Market assessments looking at both the supply and demand side - are necessary in order to ensure that the capacity building provided to women addresses both the interest of women as well as the needs of the market.** In Lebanon, the Rene Mouawad Foundation (RMF), one of UNDP's implementing partners in the WEP project, conducted such an assessment for the MSMEs and Startups it supported. RMF looked at the value proposition, market needs, revenue model and structure, competition and competitive edge, marketing (including digital marketing) and distribution strategies, etc. In Morocco, a "Readiness to Access Market" assessment was carried out with the six argan cooperatives. Following the one-on-one assessments done by the marketing expert, three cooperatives were deemed to have the minimum requirements to be featured on the online marketplace.



Women producing argan oil. Enhancing the participation of women in trade activities in the argan oil sector project, Morocco.

Mapping all key components of a particular value chain to support the involved actors would lead to higher value creation for women. The three projects that aimed to address key aspects of the value chain directly through the project and/or indirectly through partnerships were in the Lebanon WEP project, Palestine's EGYGW project and Tunisia's EfD project.

In those countries, the projects clearly demonstrated the importance of supporting all the steps of the chain from production (training, inputs, grants) to digital/financial inclusion, (such as financial literacy), to commercialization (quality, design, packaging, labelling) and access to markets (local, national and international). If the project's budget and activities do not envisage to do so, then it is crucial to partner with other initiatives to ensure that the value chain, in its entirety, is supported.

**Exploring ways of formalizing women micro-entrepreneurs would lead to greater income predictability and ability to access the national social security system.** One interesting example is in Tunisia, where SHANTI buys directly from the project participants and re-sells the items at its boutique with an objective to formalize their activities in the long-term (see Box 25).

### BOX 25: SHANTI'S EXPERIENCE, WORK TOWARDS FORMALIZING WOMEN MICRO-ENTREPRENEURS IN TUNISIA'S EFD PROJECT

SHANTI, a Tunisian NGO, partnered with UNDP to support women directly. Shanti created an opportunity for the individual project participants to sell their products at SHANTI's shop. This allowed women who do not have access to the internet, are illiterate and/or not internet savvy to market their products for similar women to purchase them. SHANTI signed a contract of production with each beneficiary for six months which provided income security and predictability to these women and even gave them the opportunity to take a two-week "paid" vacation. SHANTI buys directly from the project participants, pays them upfront and sells on their behalf. SHANTI was also able to exhibit some of the products in Europe and has had six international orders so far. As a result, SHANTI has gained experience in what sells at the national and international levels and places orders with the women based on the demand. Based on this six-month pilot experience, SHANTI's long-term objective is to formalize its relationship with the project participants and offer them a salary which would allow them to also access the social security system.



**Women marketing their goods. Climate resilient women centric economic empowerment for inclusive greener post COVID-19 recovery, Djibouti.**



**To complement the development of women's business skills (writing a proposal, business plan, business management), it would be useful to offer training related to the marketing aspects in order to build their capacities to sell their products in order to achieve economic empowerment.** In Tunisia, the EfD project partnered with SHANTI - to provide training on packaging, labelling and commercialization for project participants in three governorates. In Lebanon, the PSDP reported that the training was useful, as it exposed project participants to new concepts/ideas regarding pricing, packaging, branding and marketing. It also showed them the steps to follow (in the words of one stakeholder: "I didn't know where to start before the training") and increased their self-confidence. In addition, some projects looked beyond the theoretical training on marketing and supported the branding and packaging of products. The Lebanon WEP project assisted its project participants in developing a logo and a marketing strategy. In Palestine, the EGYGW project facilitated the promotion of the businesses, by providing visibility, such as shop boards, business cards, and Facebook sponsored advertisement. Finally, the project in Djibouti launched the first ever attempt to create a brand and logo, which will benefit female and male cooperatives, entrepreneurs and MSMEs in Djibouti. The project recruited an international branding consultant to develop a "Made in Djibouti" brand, logo and a branding strategy for locally grown products.

**Organizing and supporting project participants in participating in fairs provides an opportunity for women to sell their products and to network with other buyers/sellers.** For example, UNDP in Djibouti organized the first ever Agri-Business Fair and supported women's participation by covering the cost of transportation and providing crates, tables and weighing scales which could later be used for storage and/or display of produce in the local markets. Similarly, UNDP in collaboration with PSDP in Lebanon organized two business-to-business (B2B) events which provided an opportunity for the MSMEs who participated in the training to market their products and, in some cases, to identify new clients. Similarly, in other projects, project participants participated in Christmas markets and an annual event for foodservice and hospitality (Lebanon), week-long handicraft exhibitions (Tunisia), and a three-day marketplace in collaboration with the Gaza Chamber of Commerce (Palestine). However, greater attention is needed regarding (1) the timing of the fairs which need to be aligned with the agricultural season in case of agricultural products; (2) the cost-benefit of organizing and participating in such marketing events (physical marketing versus online/digital marketing in some countries) and (3) the contextual and market analysis which would ensure strategic relevance of the fairs/events.

**Rehabilitating community marketplaces can have a double result: increasing availability of local markets and facilitating access to women by shortening the distances to sell their products.** Through Cash for Work (CFW) in the EERRY II project in Yemen, UNDP was able to restore 38 community market fixed assets. The rehabilitation of marketplaces has created a positive impact which has improved access to markets for the enterprises and consumers by shortening the distance to markets where women can both purchase and sell their products.

**When establishing online platforms to improve access to markets, several aspects should be considered: including the cost involved, women's access to the internet, national regulations to receive payments online, the cost of delivering items purchased, maintenance of these platforms and their sustainability.** In Tunisia, the EfD project assisted its partner associations in setting up websites and/or Facebook pages for marketing the products of their project participants; and while no information was available on the quantity and/or value of products sold, some were therefore able to sell products in Tunisia and overseas. Similarly, in Yemen, the EERRY II project, in collaboration with UNDP Bangladesh, developed and is currently piloting the first business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-customer (B2C) online platform for MSMEs to improve access to the market. It is expected that this platform, once fully developed, will provide virtual market solutions which will help Yemeni businesses to recover and enhance their capacity to expand and grow. Similarly, in Morocco, to help the argan cooperatives in promoting their products in both the national and international markets, an e-market place was developed, however it not institutionalized and hence the platform was not activated.

**Informal networking opportunities to connect producers and buyers, can be another effective way to establish market linkages.** In Palestine, UNDP's IP used its own network to put in touch its project participants with markets outside of Gaza (e.g., the West Bank and to participate in international markets in the Gulf countries). Similarly, in Lebanon, one of the WEP IPs created linkages between the WEP producers and other existing initiatives the IP was supporting, for marketing the agri-food products. Also, in Lebanon, one women-led cooperative was connected to a top restaurant in Beirut and a project-supported SME offered to display the products of other cooperatives supported by WEP. However, these initiatives often remain small-scale, ad hoc and rely on pre-established personal relations.



**Providing institutional support to government agencies can lead to increasing market access, in particular exporting to foreign markets.** The PSDP project in Lebanon provided institutional support to several ministries including the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), the Ministry of Economy and Trade (MoET), and the Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL).<sup>38</sup> With MoA, UNDP contributed to streamlining all the local food safety and food standard requirements for six products (wine, olive oil, milk, potatoes, pickles and mango),<sup>39</sup> that Lebanese companies, cooperatives and farmers need to abide by prior to selling in local and external markets. As a result of this exercise, all the regulations pertaining to one product can now be found on one webpage, thus facilitating access to information to all interested stakeholders. In collaboration with UNIDO, UNDP supported IDAL in both its market intelligence and export promotion functions through the design and development of an export promotion platform and supported the MoET in the development of part of the national LEBTRADE portal.



**Women's cooperative food production. Women's economic participation project, Lebanon**

## 7.6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION AND LEARNING

**Carrying out a baseline study allows a clearer assessment of the results achieved by the projects. Equally, setting up a monitoring system that captures sex-disaggregated output-level information is necessary to obtain information on the number of women/men reached.** In Yemen, the ERRY II project conducted a baseline and endline study as well as an impact assessment to monitor the project's achievements. Similarly, in Lebanon, the WEP project outsourced the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) function to a private company which allowed the establishment of a baseline and the better monitoring of results. In addition, the project monitored the training that was delivered. However, some participants found it hard to complete the pre and post evaluation forms since they had to be filled online which underlines the importance of using data collection methodologies that are compatible with capacities of female and male project participants (access to internet, ability to use online forms, literacy rates, etc.).<sup>40</sup>

**There is a need for greater clarity in the definition of terms/indicators and consistency in their use and monitoring.** Specifically, the term “women-led” enterprises and/or cooperatives needs to be clearly defined. This is important not only for monitoring the projects' outputs, but it is also necessary when designing the activities and selecting the project participants. During KIs, it was evident that, in some cases of “women-led” businesses, the husband was the owner of the enterprise (the woman was unable to answer the questions) and that the wife was proposed as “beneficiary” in order to access project resources. Similarly, the projects used the terms “SMEs” or “MSMEs” to refer to micro-enterprises.<sup>41</sup>

**Outcome level data collected through qualitative and gender-responsive methods are necessary to better understand the impact the project had on gender equality and empowerment of women.** During FGDs, women shared several examples of how the projects have improved their lives at different levels, including (i) greater voice and participation, (ii) greater financial independence, (iii) networking, (iv) psychosocial support, (v) improved livelihoods and food security, (vi) ability to pay off debts, (vii) ability to save, (viii) expansion of business and hiring employees, and (ix) possibility to access new national and international markets. In particular in humanitarian contexts and pilot projects, there was a tendency to focus on output monitoring (distribution of inputs, grants, equipment). **While it is clear that most projects created economic opportunities for women and improved women's economic status, it was not possible to determine the level,<sup>42</sup> and extent,<sup>43</sup> to which they actually contributed to women's economic empowerment.**

### BOX 26: AN EXAMPLE OF SEX DISAGGREGATED OUTCOME MONITORING GOOD PRACTICE IN THE LEBANON'S PSDP PROJECT

In Lebanon, the PSDP project monitored the outcome-level results of providing access to markets. In its report, it stated that a total of 112 MSMEs participated in two fairs through an expression of interest, 50 percent of which were women-led. Of those MSMEs, 10 succeeded in having new business deals, of which five were women-led.

Similarly, since the PSDP placed information (e.g., market reports) and tools (e.g., export readiness checker) on digital platforms, the process was able to monitor the number of people accessing the information and using the tools that were published on the various ministries' websites.

Source: PSDP, Annual Narrative Report 2022, p. 5.

**Documenting success stories from the field to demonstrate results, while important from a communication perspective, does not substitute the need to monitor results in a more systematic manner and to collect information at the outcome level.** There are several participatory and qualitative methodologies (e.g., Most Significant Change),<sup>44</sup> to carry out such monitoring

which could also be used and adapted to the short nature and limited funding of some of the projects.

**One specific outcome: the change in social norms, needs to be better monitored and documented, since it is related to the Do No Harm principle.** It is important to document successes and failures in changing social norms. In conservative communities, there were examples of positive changes in social norms as a result of advocacy and awareness raising at the community level (e.g., women being permitted to participate in training, travel outside the community and engage in economic activities). However, there is a need to document the step-by-step process, which was followed to achieve those results, as well as the challenges encountered and how they were addressed. This information could be useful for other projects implemented in similar contexts. Similarly, and importantly, in some communities, women faced societal backlash. In FGDs, stakeholders reported that there were incidences of abuse (within the family and/or community), increased intra-household conflicts (leading to divorce in one example), and lack of additional support to carry out household chores (resulting in greater stress for women having to manage both household tasks as well as their economic activity). Case studies that detail the processes followed in successfully changing social norms as well as failures and how they were addressed are important to document in order to learn from past experiences and disseminate good practices.

**In large projects implemented through different implementing partners, there are opportunities for exchange of experiences which need to be fully utilized.** For example, both in the Lebanon WEP project, and the ERRY II project in Yemen, the projects partnered with different NGOs to carry out assessments, training, provision of in-kind grants, etc. The IPs were responsible for different geographical areas with their own specificities and implemented project activities in different ways by adapting them to the local context and needs of their own project participants. Workshops (at mid-progress and end of project) bringing together all the IPs involved in a project can provide an opportunity to document results, lessons learned, important qualitative information and guided future programming.

**Projects produce a wealth of knowledge products which need to be managed and made accessible for other projects both in the region and globally for developing women's economic empowerment initiatives.** The projects have developed several knowledge products (e.g., tools, survey questionnaires, assessments, culturally appropriate GBV material, training material, videos, etc.) both in Arabic and English that could benefit other countries if they are organized and made publicly available.



**Women cooperative food production. Women's economic participation project, Lebanon.**



## 7.7. SUSTAINABILITY

**Institutional sustainability is closely linked to the extent to which the project partnered with government institutions and engaged at the policy/institutional level (as discussed in Sections 7.1.1 and 7.3.3). In particular, the ministry responsible for women's affairs would be a natural partner.** In Lebanon, the PSDP project established the Lebanon Export Academy within Berytech.<sup>45</sup> To ensure its sustainability, a governance structure was developed, ToR for a Public-Private Steering Committee were drafted, and a sustainability plan for the Academy completed. The Academy's role was envisaged through two activities: (1) paid courses that SMEs would pay for, and (2) new and advanced classes that more export-ready SMEs can benefit from. Furthermore, in order to ensure the web-based portals established by the project continue, 12 staff from Ministry of Agriculture were trained on how to maintain and update their portal. Finally, UNIDO and UNDP provided three Ministry of Economy and Trade staff with training on the methodology and techniques to conduct market research.

The best practice in terms of sustainability and scalability could be found in the project UNDP implemented in Gaza (see Box 27) which partnered closely with the Palestinian Employment Fund (PEF) to ensure ownership. As a result of the various steps the project put in place, it was able to achieve results and presented its methodology to the Council of Ministers. Consequently, the PEF – the project's institutional counterpart - was allocated three million euros to scale up its approach to cover all of Gaza and the West Bank.

### BOX 27: STEPS FOLLOWED TO ENSURE SUSTAINABILITY WHICH LED TO SCALABILITY GOOD PRACTICE IN PALESTINE'S EGYGW PROJECT

- Strong partnership with the Ministry of Labor (MoL). UNDP/PAPP established a strong partnership with MoL by including it in the Steering Committee. This ensured government ownership, which is necessary for long-term sustainability. Furthermore, PEF established linkages between TVET centers and Chambers of Commerce to ensure sustainability.
- Selection of strong IPs. UNDP's IPs were selected on a competitive basis and had other initiatives on which the project could build. They also had their own networks which they put into use to support the project's participants beyond the project's end date.
- Capacity building of IPs. The project's implementing partners became more knowledgeable on provision of technical expertise and life skills support to women and youth to effectively engage in the private sector.
- Ongoing follow-up of TVET project participants. UNDP/PAPP and (PEF) continued to follow up with the project participants during the first year of operation, to assure their sustainability and address and resolve any challenges faced.<sup>46</sup>
- Putting in place procedures to ensure the proper use of equipment provided. The project's IP requested that its project participants sign a document in the presence of a lawyer agreeing not to sell the equipment provided for at least three years. Furthermore, the IP followed up closely, including on social media, to ensure that its project participants adhered to this agreement.
- Developing curricula which can be used for other TVET specialties. The project generated knowledge and resources for the local TVET sector through the development and adaptation of curricula for four TVET specialties, which will be utilized for future interventions.

**Mobilizing additional resources through new projects ensures financial sustainability, continuity and the scaling up of activities.** In addition to the Palestine example, this was the case in Yemen where ERRY II is being scaled up through ERRY III, a 50 million USD, EU-funded project. In other projects, UNDP has attempted to link up the projects with other donor-funded interventions in order to complement and/or scale up the activities. For example, in Djibouti, UNDP has reached out to the African Development Bank (AfDB) and USAID to mobilize additional resources and implement activities (e.g., rehabilitation of

wells) which would complement the agriculture interventions the project supported.

**Economic sustainability of the projects is a function of the extent to which the different microenterprises supported are economically sustainable.** For example, as a result of the “Employment Generation for Young Gazan Women” project, the Palestinian Employment Fund (PEF) continued to follow up with the TVET project participants during the first year of operation, to assure their sustainability and resolve any obstacles that they faced to access the labor market.



**Women owned business of healthy food production. Employment for young Gazan women, PAPP.**

**Environmental sustainability and addressing water and energy needs and costs, especially in the case of activities supported in the agriculture sector, is necessary.** Most project participants pointed out that the projects did not address access to water and energy, which was necessary to implement their economic activity. One interesting example is in Lebanon the WEP project provided solar panels to some of the women-led micro-enterprises it supported. This allowed the women to (i) expand their business; (ii) use equipment that they were unable to utilize due to lack of access to affordable and clean energy; and (iii) generate savings in energy costs. In Yemen, the RFF project distributed solar tuk-tuks.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Women's economic empowerment requires interventions that tackle individual and community resources, and rules and institutions. As such, it is necessary that interventions move beyond access to economic resources, where the focus is on skills and training, financial resources and economic assets. They should pay equal attention to social resources and networks and address norms and institutions: both formal (national policies, gender discriminatory laws and the market system) and informal social norms.

Achieving women's economic empowerment requires long term support, ownership, engagement, and collaboration by key stakeholders to be effective and sustainable. As such, WEE projects should be implemented in partnerships with government institutions, the private sector, civil society organizations, including formal and non-governmental women's organizations at the national and local levels. Partners are also essential for the success of gender equality and market system approaches. Integration among different UNDP projects, and with United Nations agencies and partners on the ground is critical for establishing linkages, enhancing efficiencies, and sharing resources and experiences. This is particularly useful when the project duration is short and/or the budgets are small and in FCV contexts, where an equilibrium between breadth versus depth (i.e. reaching a large number of project participants versus ensuring in depth support to a few) needs to be reached. Women's economic advancement should address the specific training and business needs at the individual level in a gender-responsive manner. In addition, addressing the organizational capacities of the supported businesses or cooperatives is critical for their sustainability. Furthermore, addressing policy/institutional level issues related to women's economic empowerment and building institutional capacities are necessary to ensure long-term sustainability. In situations of crisis, it is recommended to explore policy/institutional support at the sub-national level and link women's economic empowerment to local development plans.

It is important to avoid ad-hoc gender equality approaches to address gender-specific barriers and social norms. Instead, gender equality approaches should be included explicitly in the design of the projects, based on a gender analysis, and with sufficient resources. This will help ensure respect of the do no harm principle, effective access to and control over resources and an increase in women's agency. Monitoring and evaluation systems should also be strengthened to include qualitative elements that measure change in social norms and women's agency. As such gender expertise among project stakeholders must be provided.

Utilizing a market systems approach is critical for women's economic empowerment. As such gender-responsive market assessments that look at both supply and demand, and mapping key actors across the value chain are necessary to identify effective strategies that create higher value for women's products. Such approaches allow for linkages with markets and with other actors and are also useful as steps towards formalization of informal women enterprises.

The monitoring and evaluation system should be improved, to capture the various aspects of women's economic empowerment, utilizing gender disaggregated quantitative and qualitative data that measures outputs and outcome level changes. Furthermore, knowledge products across UNDP interventions need to be managed, and made accessible, for other projects both in the region and globally for improving women's economic empowerment initiatives.

Several of the above recommendations, if implemented, would achieve higher institutional, financial, economic, and social sustainability. It is essential to consider efforts towards environmental sustainability as integral and complementary to WEE efforts, given that affordable and sustainable access to water and energy is critical for businesses, especially in the agriculture sector.



# ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> UNDP (2022). Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2025. Accessed at: <https://genderequalitystrategy.undp.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Djibouti, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen.

<sup>4</sup> UNDP, Lessons from evaluations: UNDP support to livelihoods restoration and job creation in crisis countries.

<sup>5</sup> UNDP, Lessons from evaluations: UNDP Support to Gender Equality as an SDG Accelerator

<sup>6</sup> This framework is based on: Kabeer, Naila. 2002. Resources, agency, achievements: reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Development and Change*. 30(2).

<sup>7</sup> UNDP (2008). Innovative Approaches to Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment, Paper for the Partnership Event on September 25, 2008: MDG3 – Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women – A Prerequisite for Achieving All MDGs by 2015, New York, 2008, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> ICRW (2011), International Center for research on Women (ICRW), Understanding and Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment: Definition, Framework and Indicators.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> [Studying PMBOK® 6: Why Good Is Better Than Best in Project Management \(simplilearn.com\)](https://www.simplilearn.com/Study-PMBOK-6-Why-Good-Is-Better-Than-Best-in-Project-Management).

<sup>11</sup> UN Women (2017). Documenting Good Practices on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Guidance Note, Nairobi, April 2017, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> OECD (2011). Women's Economic Empowerment Issues paper, prepared by the DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET), April 2011, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> These are: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. However, it does not include any regional initiatives such as the UNDP-4YFN Women Innovators Programme in the Arab States.

<sup>14</sup> With the exception of the three Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the majority of Arab Region countries score low on Human Development Indicators (HDI). All countries are in the lowest 25th percentile according to WEF's Global Gender Gap Index, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Initially, the study was envisaged to include a case study from Sudan. However, due to the armed conflict that started in April 2023 and in consultation with RBAS and UNDP's CO in Sudan, the case study was not completed.

<sup>16</sup> Ranking out of 146 countries.

<sup>17</sup> WEF (2022), Global Gender Gap Report, July 2022, p. 24.

<sup>18</sup> [HDR21-22\\_Statistical\\_Annex\\_GDI\\_Table.xlsx \(live.com\)](https://www.live.com/HDR21-22-Statistical-Annex-GDI-Table.xlsx) [accessed on 28 December 2022]

<sup>19</sup> See Technical note 1 at [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2022\\_technical\\_notes.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2022_technical_notes.pdf) for details on how the HDI is

calculated.

<sup>20</sup> Gender Development Index: Ratio of female to male HDI values. See Technical note 3 at [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2022\\_technical\\_notes.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2022_technical_notes.pdf) for details on how the Gender Development Index is calculated.

<sup>21</sup> Gender Inequality Index: A composite measure reflecting inequality in achievement between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. See Technical note 4 at [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2022\\_technical\\_notes.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2022_technical_notes.pdf) for details on how the Gender Inequality Index is calculated.

<sup>22</sup> [HDR21-22\\_Statistical\\_Annex\\_GII\\_Table.xlsx \(live.com\)](#) [accessed on 28 December 2022]

<sup>23</sup> A tool that measures, on a 0-3 scale, whether or not a project is designed well enough to ensure women/girls and men/boys will benefit equally or if the project will advance gender equality. It is used to track its financial allocation to projects that promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender Marker Score 3 (Gen3) for projects that have gender equality as a principal objective. Gender Marker Score 2 (Gen2) for projects that have gender equality as a significant objective.

<sup>24</sup> The regional committee is chaired by the Regional Director of Vocational Training and Employment (DRFPE). It is made up of 13 members of entrepreneurship support structures, including a representative of Civil Society) and a rapporteur. The meetings are held bimonthly with the presence of the project Regional Coordinator.

<sup>25</sup> Tamkeen was a UNDP project implemented in Tunisia promoting citizenship and strengthening social cohesion and civil society organizations.

<sup>26</sup> Some IPs conducted Training of Trainers (ToT) workshops in order to have a pool of trainers that are available locally and who could provide the training without having to travel.

<sup>27</sup> In this case, technical/professional training means agriculture practices (for project participants engaged in agriculture), food processing, IT training (for women working in the ICT sector), make-up courses or handicrafts sessions for women who have beauty salons or who produce hand-made crafts, etc.

<sup>28</sup> CARE (2020). Enhance Rural Resilience in Yemen-II Project - Lahj Post Distribution Monitoring Narrative Report, August 2020, p. 38.

<sup>29</sup> SHANTI is a Tunisian NGO that works on social and solidarity economy (SSE).

<sup>30</sup> At the time of the study, the policy briefs were not yet available publicly and therefore, it was not possible to assess the extent to which they were gender sensitive.

<sup>31</sup> The VCCs are social structures established at the community level to enhance the abilities of the community to plan for their needs and implement their resilience plans, as well as monitor and evaluate the current projects, interventions, or initiatives in their communities.

<sup>32</sup> AFCAR Consulting (2022). End-Line Study "Supporting Resilient Livelihoods and Food Security in Yemen joint programme (ERRY II)", June 2022, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> This finding might indicate that men are less inclined to accept gender equality in terms of issues related to decision-making on investments, expenditures, and place of residency.

<sup>34</sup> Stronger Together is an adaption of the Indashyikirwa program, originally developed and implemented in Rwanda, to reduce and prevent intimate partner violence. What Works, Impact of Indashyikirwa (2019), Available at: <https://www.whatworks.co.za/documents/publications/352-indash-evidence-brief-aug-2019/file>

- <sup>35</sup> Jarrous, R., Asfour, H. and Kassis, S. (2022). Final Evaluation of UNDP's Integrating GBV Prevention in Women's Economic Empowerment, 18 July 2022, p. 104.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 105.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 104.
- <sup>38</sup> IDAL is Lebanon's national investment promotion agency. It provides local and foreign investors alike with a range of incentives and business support services to help them establish their operations in Lebanon.
- <sup>39</sup> Please note that these value chains are different from the ones that were included in the feasibility study.
- <sup>40</sup> Women's Economic Participation Project (WEP): Report on the Roundtable Discussion on MSMEs/Cooperatives' Support: Best practices, Challenges, and Recommendations, May 9, 2022, p. 4.
- <sup>41</sup> The OECD defines enterprises as follows: micro enterprises (fewer than 10 employees), small enterprises (10 to 49 employees), medium-sized enterprises (50 to 249 employees). Large enterprises employ 250 or more people. [Entrepreneurship - Employees by business size - OECD Data](#)
- <sup>42</sup> That is by how much women's economic status was improved.
- <sup>43</sup> That is how many women improved their economic status.
- <sup>44</sup> [Most Significant Change: What it is and how to use it - tools4dev](#)
- <sup>45</sup> Berytech is an ecosystem for entrepreneurs, providing a dynamic environment for the creation and development of startups and SMEs, fostering innovation, technology and entrepreneurship in Lebanon. [www.berytech.org](http://www.berytech.org)
- <sup>46</sup> UNDP (2021). Final Report - Country: Occupied Palestinian Territory Project: Employment Generation for Young Gazan Women PAL10-00120609, 03 March 2020 to 30 September 2021, p. 6.





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