

Promoting Women's Economic Development Through Beekeeping

Location: West Bank, Palestinian Territories



Millennium Development Goals:

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Duration: 2006 to 2008

Beneficiaries: 212 women in East Hebron ADP, 60 women in Jenin ADP

Partners: Two community-based women's organizations in Bani Naim and another CBO in Al-Udaisseh in East Hebron ADP and two community-based women's organizations in Tura Al Gharbiyya and Kferit in West Jenin.

Total funding: US\$249, 645

Funding source: Sponsorship and private donations

Project goal: To increase household income and improve household nutrition among vulnerable families in the villages of the East Hebron and West Jenin Districts, with a focus on women's economic development

What we have tried to accomplish:

1. To assist women in generating household income through beekeeping businesses to improve food security and economic stability
2. To assist women in providing nutritious food for their families and children through improved livelihood

Project Overview

In the West Bank, most families have traditionally made their livelihoods from small plots of land that supported small herds and crops of vegetables and wheat. Those without land depended on employment opportunities across the border in Israel. The ongoing political instability and conflict in the West Bank however, has eliminated this option for most people and significantly increased poverty in the area.

Since the recent construction of the Separation Barrier, the situation has deteriorated even further. The barrier has reduced arable land, limited water access and closed the large Israeli market to farmers and other workers. The West Bank's unemployment rate of 19 per cent does not include thousands of discouraged workers who have fallen completely out of the labour market inching rates closer to 40 per cent. Shrinking farmland and disappearing markets have pushed families deeper into poverty.

This difficult environment means that many families are facing chronic food insecurity—that is, they do not have adequate physical, social or economic access to sufficient food. Female-headed households are among the most vulnerable since women have very few opportunities to earn income outside the home in the conservative Islamic culture of the West Bank.

Partners in honey production

World Vision has been working in the Palestine Territories since 1975 and the West Bank beekeeping project was launched in 2006 to work in partnership with two community-based women's organizations in Bani Naim and another CBO in Al-Udaisseh.

Each of the women's organizations conducted training sessions and distributed beehives purchased through the project, along with the tools and

equipment the women needed to start raising bees. The project supported the involvement of a local agronomist who provided on-site coaching that taught the women to maintain healthy beehives and complete the proper harvesting of honey.

In order to manage the hives in the most efficient way initially, 12 women were selected to work as the main beekeepers for the project. These women received more specialized training and took responsibility for harvesting, managing the hives, packaging the honey and then distributing the net proceeds from the sale of the honey among the 80 beneficiary women and the women's organizations.

With the support of World Vision, the women worked together as a cooperative to market their honey in the local markets in Bani Naim, Hebron and Rammallah, where its high quality was able to command a very good price.

Shahleh and her family benefit from beekeeping business

Shahleh is a 30-year-old mother of six from Al-Udaisseh Village in East Hebron. Her husband, Raed, 40, is a farmer and the family was just barely able to survive until the end of the month, existing on tea, thyme and bread.

When she was approached by one of the local women's associations about participating in the beekeeping project, Shahleh leapt at the opportunity.

She managed to come up with the amount required to participate and threw herself wholeheartedly into the project. She was committed to learning and worked hard to become a highly skilled beekeeper.

Shahleh and her family are benefiting from the project in a number of ways. With the addition of the nutritious honey to their diet, her children's health has improved. The added income earned from the sale of surplus honey has given Shahleh more independence to determine how the household money is spent.

Socially, she has developed new relationships with members of her community through the sale of honey and participation in exhibitions. And she also reports that she is receiving great support from her husband.

"I have noticed a different treatment from my husband after being part of this project," says Shahleh. "He helps in maintaining the beehives by building new boxes and wooden frames for the splitting. We even discuss the best ways to invest in this project and increase its benefits."

The beekeeping project also provided Shahleh with the opportunity to broaden her world when she went on a field trip as part of her training. Before the project, she had never been outside the area where she lives.

"I have never expected to be out of the area that I was born, raised and married in," says Shahleh. "It's like a dream came true."

Honey producers taste sweet success

As a result of this project, 80 per cent of the women who participated were able to increase their annual household income by at least US\$200, an increase of more than 62 per cent. With greater household income and training in good nutritional practices, 75 per cent of the women reported that their families were now able to eat more nutritious foods.

In 2007, an additional 132 women from East Hebron participated in the beekeeping project. Through a similar partnership in Jenin Area Development Program, World Vision provided 200 beehives to 40 women and 20 hives each to two women's organizations. An additional 100 beehives were provided to the existing beneficiaries in East Hebron to increase honey production and productivity.

By the end of the project, about 700 beehives had been distributed in East Hebron and Jenin, and 32 additional beekeepers had been trained to look after the bees.

Participation in the project has provided women with a sustainable source of income and a greater sense of

economic independence. And by working together as community organizations, they have learned new ways to support each other.

The success of the women has impacted the whole community positively. Thriving beehives have helped to improve the pastures and fruit trees, which benefits both beekeepers and farmers in a country where arable land is extremely valuable.

Bees work in the West Bank

The beekeeping project has proven to be an ideal way to assist female-headed households. Although there was initial resistance from some men in the community, most beekeeping activities can be easily integrated with other household duties, enabling women to overcome the cultural barriers to earning income outside the home.

Initially, the men objected to the women leaving the house for hours to attend training sessions, not to mention the unprecedented social freedom and control of their own affairs which the beekeeping afforded them. Ultimately though, the men came to appreciate the additional income that was being

generated and saw how the project benefited both them and their families.

Beekeeping is also a very good business opportunity for women. According to a recent market survey, more than 70 per cent of the honey consumed in the West Bank is imported, and few other local producers exist. With a few pieces of simple equipment and modest start-up costs, beekeepers can quickly turn a profit and develop a vibrant and sustainable business.

The project has provided an effective context in which to build the capacity of women and the organizations that represent them. From the start, World Vision actively involved participants in the planning and management of their business endeavours. With frequent interaction and good communication, strong partnerships were developed and the women learned how to work together to build their business.

For example, in East Hebron, the women decided to establish three sites that would serve both communities. They selected 12 women who were trained to manage all the hives in return for an agreed percentage from the 80 women. This not only made their operation more



A local agronomist coaches women in proper beekeeping techniques.

efficient, but also helped to foster a spirit of cooperation among them.

The women's groups also built sustainability into their business model. Some of the organizations collected a fee from participants that covered their initial training and supplies.

These fees were kept low through practices such as requesting successful beekeepers to split their beehives and distribute these splits to other women in their communities.

Although the project has been successful in meeting its stated goals of increasing income and food security as well as helping to empower women, its very success created some

unforeseen challenges. The project's popularity caused a significant increase in membership of the women's associations which became a mixed blessing. Many more women expressed interest in participating in the project than originally expected.

World Vision responded to this interest by including a higher number of participants. However, this meant that the training permitted by the project budget was not as intensive and individualized as required for professional beekeepers. As a result, some women had difficulty maintaining their hives and required a great deal of technical support from the project's expert.

Looking ahead

Despite these challenges, World Vision has helped the women of the West Bank acquire the knowledge and skills they need to grow their beekeeping businesses and increase their household income, enabling them to improve their families' nutrition and health.

As a result of this project, the women's organizations have been revitalized through increased membership, reducing many women's isolation. They have learned to work together to overcome challenges such as wintering their bees and maintaining healthy hives during the recent drought. And as they have experienced business success, their standing in the community has also grown, along with their confidence.

Results to date:

1. Three women's groups have the capacity to manage and sustain members' beekeeping businesses.
2. Cooperative established to market honey in local markets.
3. Increase of more than 62 per cent in household income contributes to improved nutritional practices.

Policy influence:

Community level policies were developed to support cooperatives and women's groups.

What we learned from this project:

- In addition to the project budget determining the number of participants in a project, the technical nature of the training should also be considered. For technical projects, more participants per instructor equates to a less intensive training experience which could hamper the project's success.
- Project management needs to be both diligent and flexible in order to meet intended objectives and adjust to new circumstances. Diligent adherence to the project objectives and flexibility in the methodology allowed women to generate income through both 1) beekeeping and 2) investing in beekeeping businesses.