

End of Project Evaluation for “Women Stepping Forward” project

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Submitted by
Waddah Abdulsalam, CEO
ABC Consulting

Ramallah Office:
Ramallah Tower, 2nd floor,
Al Nuzha Street,
Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine
Telefax: 02 297 3779

Nablus Office:
Al-Imara Building, Eighth Floor,
Sufyan Street,
Nablus, West Bank, Palestine
+97292336869

Final Evaluation

Project:

Women Stepping Forward

Contractor:

ABC Consulting

Contracting Authority:

Action Aid

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Acronyms

HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
DFAT	Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ANCP	Australian NGO Cooperation Program
UNRWA	UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees
MoH	Ministry of Health
MOEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
CoC	Chamber of Commerce
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PwDs	People with Disabilities
ABC	Associates in Building Capacity

1. Background

The southern West Bank is profoundly impacted by the Israeli occupation, and Palestinians have experienced loss of land and livelihoods, displacement, family dislocation, restrictions on movement and planning developments, lack of basic services and destruction of infrastructure. Within this context, women's opportunities and freedoms are further limited as a result of social and cultural norms, which isolate women within their homes and restrict opportunities for women to participate in or demonstrate their capacity to contribute to strengthening their communities.

ActionAid has been working in the occupied Palestinian territory for 10 years, predominantly in the Hebron governorate, where it has its headquarters, as well as implementing an emergency response in Gaza. ActionAid's main activities include promotion of women's rights and women's economic empowerment; youth empowerment, capacity building and strengthening of CBOs/NGOs and advocacy related to access to services and the impacts of the occupation.

The rationale for undertaking the evaluation is to independently assess the effectiveness of the approach and the implementation of the program over the last 3 years and to provide feedback to inform future programming.

2. Introduction

Associates in Building Capacity (ABC Consulting) has been contracted by ActionAid in Palestine to undertake an evaluation study for ActionAid's project "Women Stepping Forward"; the project is funded by DFAT and in partnership with ActionAid Australia. The project concluded in June of 2018. The objectives of this assignment are as follows:

- To independently assess the effectiveness of the approach and the implementation of the program over the last 3 years and to provide feedback to inform future programming
- To assess the project achievements, strengths, weaknesses, and implementation constraints, with a view to identifying any lessons that can be incorporated in the project in future and in any future ActionAid Australia support of the project.
- Assess the extent to which the project enhanced women's voice and status at household and community level as a result of their increased control over income earned and undertaking collective actions addressing priority issues.

2.1 Overview of the Completed Project

The project sought to enhance role and status of Palestinian women and young women through employing HRBA and Reflection-Action methodology that contribute to amplify their leadership and influence at household, community and national level. The following are the expected outcomes and outputs of the project that were assessed as part of this assignment:

Outcome 1: Strong women's groups enhance women's voice and status in households and communities

Outputs Year 1:

- Community sensitization to and acceptance of the project's objective.
- 75 women trained on women's rights and introduced to the concept of women's groups.
- 6 women's groups established, 2 in each of 3 target communities.
- 24 women trained in leadership.
- 45 women participated in exchange visit.
- 6 meetings conducted annually between village council member(s), community activists and members of the women's groups in each community.

Outputs year 2:

- 24 women trained in communications, 24 trained in gender and violence against women.
- Linkages established with women's organizations and networks.
- 45 women participated in exchange visit.
- 6 meetings conducted annually between village council member(s), community activists and members of the women's groups in each community.

Outputs year 3:

- 24 women trained (for example) on Palestinian laws and policies related to women's rights, 24 women trained in sexual and reproductive health.
- Linkages established with women's organisations and networks.
- 6 meetings conducted annually between village council member(s), community activists and members of the women's groups in each community.

Outcome 2: Women-led advocacy actions effectively address the key concerns of women

Outputs year 1:

- Women identify and prioritise their key concern and conduct stakeholder analysis
- Three action plans developed to tackle women's prioritised issue
- Participatory monitoring plan developed for each Action Plan and documentation of progress and achievements

Outputs year 2:

- Women identify and prioritise their key concern and conduct stakeholder analysis
- Three action plans developed to tackle women's prioritised issue
- Action plan activities implemented such as round table discussions, community meetings, advocacy campaigns; workshops or seminars, and documented
- Participatory monitoring plan developed for each Action Plan and documentation of progress and achievements

Outputs year 3:

- Women identify and prioritise their key concern and conduct stakeholder analysis
- Action plan activities implemented such as round table discussions, community meetings, advocacy campaigns; workshops or seminars, and documented.

Outcome 3: Increase in women's income and decision-making power over income earned

Outputs year 1:

- Community meetings conducted, and selection criteria identified to select women livelihood beneficiaries
- Questionnaire developed and applied to identify the 15 women livelihood beneficiaries within the women's group
- Context oriented livelihood opportunities explored with beneficiaries
- 15 feasibility studies conducted with support from appropriate livelihood experts
- Women trained to establish and manage their enterprise including calculation of costs and profit
- Seed fund/grants provided to 7 women to establish new livelihoods – either as individuals or collectives. In at least one community the funds are pooled to establish an ongoing revolving fund for enterprise purposes, managed by the beneficiary women themselves (potentially enabling more women to access funds in future years)

Outputs year 2:

- Women trained to establish and manage their enterprise including calculation of costs and profit
- Seed fund/grants provided to 8 women to establish new livelihoods – either as individuals or collectives. In at least one community the funds are pooled to establish an ongoing revolving fund for enterprise purposes, managed by the beneficiary women themselves (potentially enabling more women to access funds in future years)
- Rules for management of the revolving fund established
- Ongoing coaching and mentoring to ensure viable and sustainable enterprises, including technical experts e.g. veterinary support

Outputs year 3:

- Ongoing coaching and mentoring to ensure viable and sustainable enterprises, including technical experts e.g. veterinary support.

In order to achieve these goals, the project targeted the population in three villages; Khirbet Ad-Deir (total population of 344: 175 males and 169 females), Jala (total population of 323: 164 males and 159 females) and Hatta (total population of 1170: 594 males, 576 females), with a total of 1,837 people. The project ran over three years and comprised three components that are inter-connected and build upon each other. First, facilitating women's voice and agency through

women's groups; awareness raising on women's rights was facilitated and processes of reflection-action utilising ActionAid's REFLECT methodology were undertaken.

The second component of the project was based on women's analysis of their situation and collective decision on the key priority concerns they wish to change. Through developing action plans, collectively organising and addressing their common concerns through engaging with stakeholders, networking and advocating for their rights at both community and household levels.

Livelihoods, the third component of the project, illustrates that support for livelihoods deepened the project's reach for very poor women by providing the most vulnerable women with skills and capital to establish viable small business/income generating activities according to their interests. A participatory process was implemented with the communities to identify the participants according to clear criteria. In ActionAid's experience, the livelihood component was critical in gaining men's acceptance of and support for their wives/sisters/daughters participation in the project, as well as enabling women's economic empowerment.

2.2 Evaluation Research Questions

1. Relevance:

- a. To what extent was the Project relevant to the needs of people in the target communities?
- b. Is the approach consistent with development priorities of the Palestinian Government?
- c. How relevant were the reflect circles in helping women achieve economic empowerment and facilitating women's voice and agency?

2. Efficiency:

- a. To what extent were the project activities carried out in a timely and resource-efficient manner?
- b. To what extent do women from groups and other stakeholders identify and value the success of the project?

3. Effectiveness and Impact:

- a. To what extent did the Project achieve its intended results and planned outcomes? Why and why not?
- b. Were there any unintended results of the project?
- c. What were planned and unplanned changes that occurred in the lives of women? To what extent are these changes valued by communities themselves?
- d. How were the most marginalized women reached, and what was the impact of the activities on their income?
- e. How did the project affect the participated women status in the home and freedom of movement?

4. Sustainability:

- a. To what extent has the project made lasting changes?

- b. What is the extent of sustainability of the project outputs and outcomes at the level of the project objectives?
- c. Have lasting links been established with national women's movements and government authorities?
- d. What evidence is there that women's small-businesses and livelihood activities will be sustained beyond the life of the project?

5. Women's livelihoods:

- a. To what extent has the project contributed to strengthening women's status?
- b. How has the project enhanced women's control over income and decision-making processes?
- c. Has a backlash been experienced by the women involved, and how has this been managed?
- d. Has involvement impacted women's unpaid work negatively or positively?

3. Methodology

ABC Consulting developed a clear methodology in order to comprehensively evaluate the project. The methodology was sensitive to the needs and constraints of different stakeholders, protecting them from potential risk, encouraging truthful and transparent responses, and ensuring confidentiality. The methodology comprised 3 focus groups for women in three main communities Ad-Deir, Jala and Hatta, interviews with key informants and success stories of the target group. The research team practiced triangulation of data and document verification in order to ensure the quality of data collected.

3.1 Field Work

In all activities of data collection, the participant was informed of the contractor's purpose in doing this research and was ensured that participation was voluntary and could be stopped at any time in the process of data collection. **Informed consent was taken orally from all participants (see oral consent script in introduction to data collection tools in annex).**

3.1.1 Desk Study

The evaluation team reviewed program documents, the project proposal and M&E Plans, in addition to secondary sources related to the project. The following is a list of documents that contributed to the findings of this evaluation study.

- ANCP Baseline Data 2015/2016
- ANCP Annual Performance Report
- ANCP 2016-2017 6-Month Report
- ANCP AD Plan Project
- ANCP 16/17 Proposal Template

3.1.2 Key Informant Interviews

Interviews with key informants and program stakeholders were conducted in contribution to the project evaluation. A total of 6 interviews were conducted by telephone with key informants. The following table depicts the stakeholders interviewed as well as the date of the interview.

Table 1: Key Informant Interviews

Position (gender)	Date
Palestinian Family Planning and Protection Association (F)	29 July 2018
North Hebron Agricultural Directorate (F)	31 July 2018
North Hebron Health Directorate (M)	31 July 2018
North Hebron Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (F)	31 July 2018
The Independent Commission for Human Rights (M)	31 July 2018
UNRWA (M)	1 August 2018

3.1.3 Focus Group Discussions

A total of 3 focus group discussions were held with women from 3 targeted locations (Ad-Deir, Jala and Hatta). All women participating in the reflect action circles were invited for participation by the group coordinator. The attendees were mixed from those that had participated throughout the entire project and those that had more recently joined, those that had received a grant and those that had not, and older and younger participants. A series of questions were asked of the group, and answers, disagreements, and discussion around each was noted. The following table depicts the specifics of the focus groups held for this study.

Table 1: Focus Group Discussions

Location	Target Group	Date
Ad-Deir	Women (12)	24 July 2018
Hatta	Women (12)	22 July 2018
Jala	Women (22)	22 July 2018

3.1.4 Beneficiary Interviews

Individual interviews with the project's beneficiaries were conducted in contribution to the project evaluation. A total of 3 full interviews were conducted in person with 3 beneficiaries from the three target location; each one of the beneficiaries talked about her success story as a result of the participation in this project.

3.2 Analysis

Qualitative data, transcriptions and notes of focus group discussions and key informant interviews were coded. Axial coding was undertaken with the coding informed by the evaluation questions presented above. Once coding was completed, major trends and key perspectives were identified, and triangulation was employed to verify statements and trends. Triangulation was used to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the data. Data from focus group discussions was compared with project documents and feedback from key informants and the project team in order to verify findings and address and discrepancies.

3.3 Limitations and Data Reliability

This study faced few constraints during the field work phase due to the large amount of cooperation and support from contracting authority and project coordinator. One potential limitation to the study is the use of purposive sampling for the qualitative data collection activities (key informant interviews and focus group discussions) in accordance with the participatory approached used for this study. This is not expected to have affected the quality of the data or the reliability of the findings.

4. Findings

This section presents qualitative findings related to each evaluation criteria. Secondary sources, publications, reports, and other statistics are also mentioned and cited throughout this section when relevant. Primary data is also indicated by source when presented.

4.1 Relevance

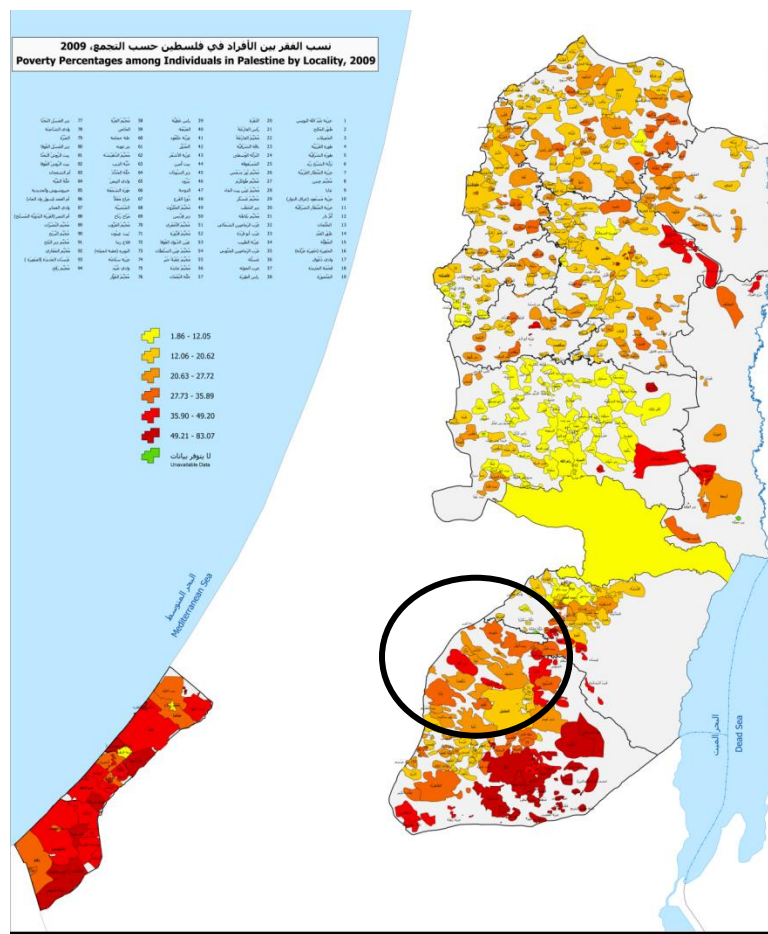
The evaluation study has found that the project is highly relevant to the needs of the beneficiaries and the Palestinian community, and that the project's unique approach was appropriate for addressing those needs and contributing to the realization of the project objectives.

The governorate of Hebron has the largest population of all Palestinian governorates and has the largest number of villages. It also has the highest poverty rates in the West Bank (see figure to the right). The three villages targeted by this project are some of the most vulnerable based on a number of factors: location in Area C, directly affected by the Israeli occupation (either by proximity to a settlement or the Annexation Wall), have a high population of refugees, are geographically isolated from main urban centers, and lack essential governmental services and facilities. The project team conducted a needs assessment and baseline survey to fully assess the specific needs and vulnerabilities of each community. According to a stakeholder involved in the project, *"ActionAid Palestine does not go into any village without fully understanding the village.*

They know what kind of local government there is and what the power structures are. They work with decision-makers and made sure to be accepted by the community as a whole."

The marginalization of these villages has affected both the economic status of the residents of the target villages as well as the social status of women and the achievement or violation of their rights. All three communities are extremely culturally conservative; according to beneficiaries, at the start of the project it was unthinkable that a woman in these communities would attend an activity outside the home unrelated to traditional social visits or duties. At the baseline, only one woman of 63 interviewed had ever participated in a community group.

Figure 1: Palestine Poverty Atlas



Women going out together, especially in the afternoon, used to be impossible a hundred times over. – Woman from Hatta Women's Group

Restrictions on women have led to violations of a number of rights:

- Young girls' right to education and development through the widespread phenomenon of early marriage;
- Women's right to livelihood, as working outside the home is not encouraged;
- Lack of women's agency in decision-making at the household and community level;
- Women's freedom of movement.

Participants of focus group discussions explained how unheard-of the idea of women doing civic activity and income-generation was before this project. This complex reality of multiple intertwined constraints on women and girls ensures that the project is of utmost relevance.

The project is also in line with the priorities and development objectives of the Palestinian Authority overall, and relevant ministries in particular. The Palestinian National Development Plan proposes a gender-responsive approach to development that contributes to ensuring “fair distribution of resources between various social groups and secur[ing] an adequate level of sustainable development and social justice.” (Palestinian National Development Plan, pg. 24) Representatives from the ministries of health and agriculture interviewed for this study indicated that the objectives of the project and the approach adopted were relevant to their interventions and goals. The beneficiaries of this project were also found to be eligible for support through the Ministry of Agriculture because they fit the eligibility criteria that the MoA uses, indicating that ActionAid is working in a complementary way to governmental bodies. This was also found to be the case with the Hebron Chamber of Commerce, as the chamber's Small Business Incubator provides support to the same general target group as that of the project, although complementary support to that of ActionAid.

In our incubator we focus on women and youth from marginalized areas like the target areas of the ActionAid project and we also focus on promoting start-ups in the agricultural sector, which was the sector that most of the ActionAid beneficiaries began businesses in...We provided the beneficiaries with business management training that was complementary to the social empowerment work and start-up support that the project provided. – Chamber of Commerce representative

In terms of the approach adopted by the project – specifically the REFLECT circles – the evaluation findings show that it is a relevant method in helping women achieve economic empowerment and facilitating their voice and agency in their communities and homes. In focus group discussions, while all project activities were discussed, the focus was always on the REFLECT circle and its weekly meetings. Most of the achievements and changes described by the interviewed beneficiaries were in some way tied to the fact that they are part of this group and come to the meetings. The women in focus group discussions spoke about many aspects of change

in the plural, e.g. *“We now have more courage to speak our minds.”* (woman from Ad-Deir) or *“We are now more self-confident.”* (woman from Jala).

One woman participant from Hatta equates the group and its weekly meetings with a prestigious job:

We get ready to come to our Wednesday meetings like we’re employees in an organization. Even our husbands are saying – tomorrow is Wednesday, your day to go to the meeting. We come no matter what, even if other things are going on in our lives.

Other alternative approaches are often adopted in similar projects in which women are provided with small-grants and different associated trainings and capacity building activities without the creation of a women’s group. These projects often face problems of a lack of wider community impact and sustainability. The focus of the women on their group and its collective achievements, and the linkage that women participants make between the group, its weekly meetings and their empowerment show that the REFLECT circles approach has been relevant to the objectives of the project.

The approach itself is designed to ensure relevance to each community because the methodology allows community members to map their own needs and make plans to address them. In this way, a one-project-fits-all is not imposed on the communities, and thus the interventions are inherently relevant to the lives and needs of the target communities.

4.2 Efficiency

The evaluation assessed the extent to which the project activities were carried out in a timely and resource-efficient manner and if the women from groups and other stakeholders identify and value the success of the project.

The project did not face any significant delays in implementation of activities and the overall project can be considered resource-efficient in that its budget is modest. The large amount of networking undertaken with other NGOs, governmental organizations and private entities resulted in the utilization of community-wide resources in addition to the project budget in order to contribute to the project outcomes. For example, although the budget allocated for small grants was limited, the MoA Hebron directorate office was contacted to include the project beneficiaries in a livestock support project it was implementing and thus a number of project beneficiaries were provided with fodder for their livestock at no cost to the project. Additionally, as mentioned above, the services of the Hebron Chamber of Commerce’s small business incubator were used to provide project beneficiaries with business administration training. NGOs with similar objectives also provided the project beneficiaries with training and support through their programs, but in contribution to the project’s objectives. One stakeholder from a partner Palestinian NGO describes this: *“We have partnered with ActionAid Palestine for a long time. We do many things together so that together we can cover all issues. ActionAid focuses mainly on economic empowerment, while we focus more on awareness surrounding health and reproductive rights.”*

Project beneficiaries reported high levels of satisfaction with the implementation of the project activities. Women in all three target areas noted that the project coordinator was flexible in terms of timing of the project activities, considering their community events or other time constraints when scheduling. At the same time, beneficiaries also reported that all activities were implemented in a timely and professional manner, and the provision of the small grants was also done without delays or procurement issues, according to beneficiaries.

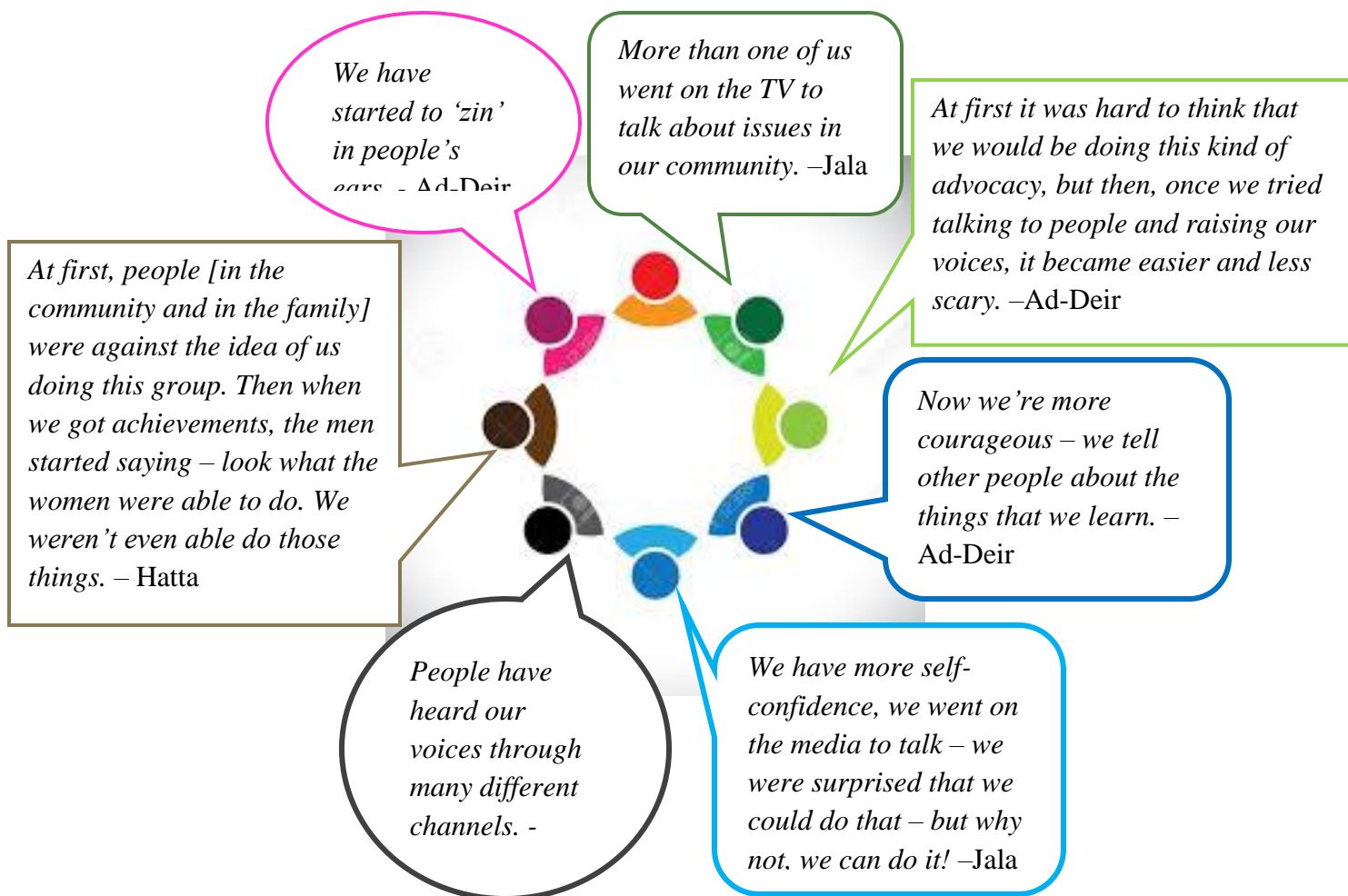
All stakeholder groups interviewed for this evaluation identified and placed a high value on the successes of the project – women in the target communities described in detail the changes that they have experienced in their lives (explained in the next section), and stakeholders interviewed from NGOs and governmental organizations noted that this project has effectively made changes in the environment of women's economic and social empowerment in these marginalized communities. A number of these stakeholders reported a high level of value for the integrity and approach of Action Aid in the implementation of its programs. For example, one stakeholder from a Palestinian NGO stated: *"ActionAid Palestine has a great methodology for their programs. They are working in a comprehensive way to address the needs of their target communities. They have a specific and detailed methodology that increases opportunities for success on the community level instead of only individual successes."*

4.3 Effectiveness and Impact

The project logical framework presents three expected outcomes to be achieved in contribution to the project's longer-term goal. The evaluation has assessed the extent to which these outcomes have been achieved, as well as any unintended results or changes experienced in the lives of the participant women. The issue of women's status in the home and freedom of movement and changes that the project has promoted in this regard is also discussed in this section.

4.3.1 Enhancement of Women's Voice and Status

The first expected outcome of the project is that strong women's groups enhance women's voice and status in households and communities. Participants of focus group discussions clearly stated that their participation in the groups has given them a voice and status in their communities that they previously did not have. The following quotes from participants of focus group discussions demonstrate this:



Although changes in the status of the participant women in their families was not as strongly voiced by all participants as the changes on the community level, a number of women said that they are now looked to by their extended families as sources of knowledge and resources.

When my family has an issue I now can tell them that they should do something about it. They ask me to follow up on the problem with the organization or government services because they know I can do it. – Hatta

Now if I say something or give advice when sitting with my in-laws, my mother-in-law will say: 'Listen to her, she knows things'. – Ad-Deir

It is clear that a step forward has been made in the target communities in terms of women raising their voices and beginning to change their role and status in their communities and their families, even if there is still much progress to be made in this regard.

Another change that was experienced by the women participants of the project was on the individual level – many women who attended focus groups discussions noted that their self-confidence increased, as well as their knowledge about a variety of subjects and issues, and that their personalities were strengthened overall.

4.3.2 Women-Led Advocacy Actions

The second expected outcome of the project is that women-led advocacy actions effectively address the key concerns of women. A number of initiatives were implemented by the women's groups and the project coordinator throughout the project. The women who attended focus group discussions described how they drew a map of their communities in order to be able to identify their communities' needs. The women stressed that they were the ones that identified the problems that they wanted to tackle and that the project coordinator played the role of the facilitator rather than influencing the process. Stakeholders interviewed also confirmed that the initiatives that they were lobbied as part of were led by the women's groups with support from the project coordinator. A total of 10 main duty bearers were targeted as part of these initiatives from the local councils to regional bodies to ministries. The following are the initiatives that were implemented by the women's groups.

Table 3: Women-led Initiatives

Location	Initiative
Hatta	Integrating people with disabilities (PwDs) into public life by linking children with disabilities and their families with centers that provide services for them.
	Lobbying the Hatta school and the MoEHE to open an alternative gate to the school so that students from an entire section of the village can access the school without having to take a lengthy detour.
	Meetings with the MoEHE to discuss the high drop-out rates in the village and the lack of counseling support to the students resulted in a part-time school counselor being placed in Hatta school.
	UNRWA and the MOH were lobbied to provide better health services to the community. Considering limited resources of these entities, an NGO was contacted to extend the services of its mobile clinic to Hatta while UNRWA has also allocated health service providers to regularly visit Hatta.
	The MoH was lobbied to provide solid waste containers to Hatta village to put an end to random dumping and burning of rubbish.
Ad-Deir	Addressing the lack of kindergarten or preschool services in the village by encouraging one of the members of the women's group to open a kindergarten class with support from the village council and the community. The kindergarten class for 17 children was opened and has since been integrated into the public elementary school.
	Meetings with the MoEHE to discuss the high levels of peer-to-peer violence amongst children in elementary school and the lack of counseling support to the students resulted in a part-time school counselor being placed in Ad-Deir school.

A lack of transportation for middle and secondary school students to school in a town 6 kilometers away on hilly roads caused the women's group in Jala to lobby the MoEHE to provide a school bus for students.

Jala

Meetings with the Ministry of Transportation (MoT) about the lack of public transportation also resulted in the allocation of a bus to pass through Jala once per day.

UNRWA and the MOH were lobbied to provide better health services to the community. Considering limited resources of these entities, an NGO was contacted to extend the services of its mobile clinic to Jala while UNRWA has also allocated health service providers to regularly visit Jala.

The women interviewed for this evaluation study also voiced a number of community issues that they are hoping to work on in the future. In Hatta, the women's group envisions having a central building to house the village council, utility services, a health clinic, the women's club, and other rooms for activities and educational support programs. The group will also address the issue of transportation to the secondary school in the nearby village, hoping to be able to secure a bus so that female students would not be deterred from finishing high school. In Jala, the women's group is interested in continuing advocacy around the issue of transportation and the FGD participants also indicated that the Jala elementary school is in need of development and expansion. In Ad-Deir the women's group that collectively works on food processing hopes to be able to better market their goods in the future in order to have an income for their members. They also hope to

Ad Deir

Achievements of Advocacy to Date:

1. A kindergarten class included in the public elementary school
2. A part-time school counsellor placed at Ad-Deir school

Future Advocacy Goals of Women's Groups:

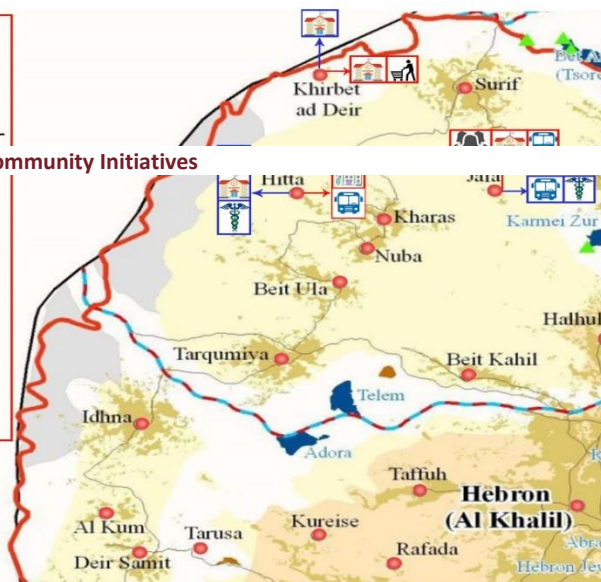
1. Work on marketing the association's processed products
2. Developing their school to have a full-time counsellor and to employ teachers from the village itself.

Jala

Achievements of Advocacy to Date:

1. A school bus allocated for secondary school students to access school in nearby village
2. Improved health services provided by UNRWA

1. Improve public transportation to and from the village.
2. Advocate for more teachers to be placed in Jala school so as not to have two grades in one class.
3. To have a center for the women's association.



Hatta

Achievements of Advocacy to Date:

1. More services provided to people with disabilities (PwDs)
2. Additional school gate opened in Hatta school
3. School counsellor placed at Hatta school
4. Improved health services provided twice per week to the community by UNRWA and an NGO

Future Advocacy Goals of Women's Groups:

1. A centralized services center with a room for the women's club, a room for the clinic, and other rooms for community activities.
2. Transportation for secondary students to the school in the nearby village to combat female drop-out.

develop their school and involve the community more in education. The figure below provides a graphic display of the initiatives undertaken and those planned for the future in each area.

3.3.3 Income and Decision-Making Power

The last expected outcome of the project is that there is an increase in women's income and decision-making power over this income. A total of 33 small grants were provided to women participants of reflect action circles in different fields – livestock raising, catering and food production, hair dressing and beautician. Women attendees of focus group discussions provided feedback about the income-generating projects that they implemented through the small-grant from the project. There was a high level of satisfaction with the small grants among those that received; the main issue brought up was the small size of the grant. For those women that received the grant in the first and second years of the project, a number report that they do now have an income from their projects. Others have focused on expanding their projects and developing them in place of earning immediate income.

I have more than when I started – we got something basic, now we have expanded. The success of the project depends on how you manage it and how you can obtain more resources for it. –Ad-Deir

I was one of the first to get a project. I've had them for 2 years, but I don't want to sell any sheep yet, I want to expand. –Ad-Deir

For those that already have an income from their business, they explain what change this had made for them:

Now I have money, and I am able to give my children their allowance [instead of my husband]. –Hatta

It's good to have money to have for yourself and earned by yourself so you don't have to beg for it from your husband. –Jala

We have something that's ours that we can depend on, so we don't just rely on our older children to provide for us. –Hatta

I am covering the needs of our house. –Hatta

I got 3 livestock. They got sick and I had a hard time with them, but I worked with them and now they are 6. It's a lot of work, but I'm happy. It's an income for me and I'm working on expanding. –Jala

I think I hope to have saved some money to get my daughter into university. –Hatta

For myself and another that did a joint project it's been good. We have expanded. –Ad-Deir

Table 4: Main concepts raised about livelihood projects

Expansion	Administration	Using resources
Provide for my family	Earned by yourself	Don't have to ask others for money
Depend on	Something that's ours	Work
Happiness	Pay for my children's education	Do anything you put your mind to

Marketing is one of the main constraints that business women are facing and are expecting will be a challenge in the future of their business. Managing the livestock, especially when they get sick or have infections was also an issue brought up by women in two of the groups. They were linked through the project with the Ministry of Agriculture that provides veterinary services for them and other support. Despite this support, a number of attendees of focus group discussions mentioned that they have had deaths of their livestock **mainly due to disease or infection. The women interviewed did not attribute this to lack of support – on the contrary they all indicated that they receive veterinary support and capacity building from the MoA (linked through the project). Disease and death are issues that are naturally part of livestock raising, and can be mitigated more with increase experience in the field.** In one case the woman beneficiary reported that the death was due to the fault of the supplier in transporting the goats, and she has requested compensation. In other cases, women are still willing to continue their projects and replace animals that have died. One woman describes the kind of empowerment that she experienced in taking care of her livestock:

My goats got sick and the vet came and said I have to give them a shot every day. I said – no way, I can't give a shot to a goat! He showed me how, and can you believe it, I actually did it! I can give shots now. [The project coordinator] always tells us that we can do anything we put our minds to and now I see how true that is. –Ad-Deir

Independent of the small-grants provided by the project, the women have also been encouraged and supported to develop their talents and consider them as income-generating activities. One woman in Ad-Deir revived her old hobby of knitting and now sells some of the pieces she makes. Another woman from Jala was linked by the project with a training course in beading; she reports benefit from the training and hopes to sell beaded products in the future.

Women in one group noted that when they learned more about their rights through the awareness raising courses, they understood that they have a right to be compensated for their work on the family farm. Although they reported that they did not begin to get a set wage as a result, they said that they are more confident in asking their husbands for money for themselves because it is not anymore asking a favor, but rather asking for what is theirs.

In terms of increased decision-making over the income generated from these projects, the women participants of focus group discussions mentioned that they spend their new income on household needs as well as saving for education of their children. As mentioned above, some women noted that having their own income frees them from having to justify their or their children's expenses to their husbands, who traditionally provide the income. One woman said that her son is against her having her own business. He told her that he would give her whatever income it is that she makes and she can quit the business and stay home. She refused, saying that having money is not the only goal, but rather to have her own means of livelihood. Similarly, a woman from another group said that she overheard her husband saying to his friends that he is going to sell her livestock. She entered the room and told him that he has no right to sell them because she owns them. Although such stories were not a trend among participants of focus group discussions, it is clear that women have started up their businesses facing a number of obstacles related to deeply engrained cultural norms.

4.3.4 Freedom of Movement

In addition to the outcomes realized as detailed in the project logical framework, one of the most significant successes realized was the increase in freedom of movement of the women participants. Whereas previously (as discussed in the relevance section above), women in the target communities were expected to stay at home for the majority of the time, and only went outside the town with a male relative as an escort. One main achievement that all interviewed women reported was that they were able to leave their houses to attend the meetings and the other project activities. It is considered in all three target areas that leaving your house and leaving your children in the care of someone else is a shame. One women debunked this logic:

My sisters-in-law and neighbors all sit around drinking coffee and gossiping all morning. When I leave to go to the meeting, they say so many things about how I shouldn't be leaving my house and kids to do something useless like the meetings. I go to the meeting and come back and they are still sitting there talking and drinking coffee. Who is it, then, that is doing something useless? –Ad-Deir

Mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, husbands, sons, brothers and brothers-in-law were all groups that participants reported as rejecting the idea of going to the meetings. One woman said:

We have heard talk that you wouldn't believe. Another: We hear words from 200 different sides when we want to do anything.

Even on the day of the focus group discussion one woman faced negative talk from one of her family members for coming to the discussion. One woman explained that a result of the project was not necessarily that all community members became accepting of women going out, but that women participants were more empowered to attend activities in spite of the negative reactions of those around them:

The women have more self-confidence even to say to those that talk – I'm doing nothing wrong. -Hatta

Considering the large amount of resistance they experienced from the community and their families in just leaving their homes to come to the weekly meeting, this achievement of increased ability of movement can be considered one of the main successes of the project. However, the obstacles and resistance remain, indicating that these deeply engrained customs and perspectives are not changed quickly and very tangible improvements in this regard can only be expected in the long-term.

4.3.5 Backlash

One aspect assessed by the evaluation was the extent to which there was a backlash to the project activities in the target communities. Although women in focus group discussions were very vocal about the constraints they faced from their families and communities due to their participation in the project, all women agreed that these obstacles were dealt with and overcome during the project so that there was no major backlash as a result. All of the negative reactions that women faced, according to participants of focus group discussions, were verbal comments about their participation. Participants confirmed that none of the women experienced an increase in violation of their rights or restrictions as a result of their participation in the project. As mentioned in sections above, the close relationship that the project team built with the community and its decision-makers at the onset of the project was key to ensuring that backlash did not occur, and negative reactions to the project activities could be managed.

4.3.6 Conclusion of Effectiveness and Impact

As can be seen from the above discussion, the expected outcomes of the project as well as cross-cutting issues and unintended positive changes have been largely realized considering the scope of the project. **The project's overall goal – to enhance the role and status of Palestinian women and young women and contribute to amplify their leadership and influence at household, community and national level has thus been clearly contributed to through the realization of the expected outcomes.**

The evaluation has found a number of best practices that can explain, in addition to the sound design of the project and approach, the success of the project. The main factor is the commitment and high competence of the project coordinator. All women participating in focus group discussions were overwhelmingly positive about the way the meetings were facilitated, about the support for the initiatives that the project coordinator provided, and about her warm interaction

with them as a friend and an equal. Secondly, as mentioned in the efficiency section, the large amount of networking and utilization of community resources has contributed to the success of the project. The linking of female entrepreneurs with relevant governmental and private sector entities enabled them to get additional support outside the scope of the project.

4.4 Success Stories

As one activity of this final evaluation, three women were interviewed individually to capture their story of change over the course of the three years of the project. One woman from each target locality was interviewed and their stories are presented below.

Success Story 1: Community Activist

Asma, a resident of Hatta village, is not one to dominate discussions during the REFLECT circle meetings, but is always the first to be present at advocacy meetings with decision-makers and lobbying activities. When she talks about the achievements of the women's group in her community her quiet demeanor is replaced by a sparkle in her eyes and a sense of excitement. She recalls how the changes that her group brought about for Hatta had not been able to be achieved by the village council or any of the men of the community. She recalls their first advocacy directed at the Ministry of Health: "We went to the Ministry of Health together as a group. It was great to go. They listened to us and it was effective. Then we had some sway in the community. We were able to pressure the MoH to improve the solid waste collection in our village, so we can do other things. There was then no reason for the men to pressure us not to go to the meetings.

Asma, a mother of four boys who is originally from a neighboring village, did not receive support from her family in participating in the project. She said the most rejection was from her sons and her mother-in-law, who continually told her that she shouldn't bother with activities like this. However, she remained confident that she was doing good by going to the meetings and that no one can forbid her from doing so. She said that she was able to make gradual changes in the mentalities of her family members.



In terms of the effect of the project on herself personally and her group, she said: *"It changed our lives totally. Before the project, women in our community didn't have a say in many issues in their lives. After we began coming to the group, things started to change. We became more aware of our rights and duties, we discussed important topics. Our freedom of movement has also changed. Women used to never leave the village without a male escort, but now we go and come by ourselves."*

Asma says that she is optimistic about the future. She believes that the next generation will be more open and the situation of women will be better in the village. She is also ambitious for the future of the community, describing a number of initiatives that the group is planning to work on, from transportation to a building for services to citizens of the town. Asma hopes to own her own business in the future and put the skills she learned through this project into use. She has applied for seed funding for a goat farm from the local Chamber of Commerce and is awaiting a response.

There is no doubt that Asma is an example of how participation in the REFLECT circle methodology can activate the skills and ambitions of women and create lasting community activists from the communities' very own residents.

Success Story 2: The Troublemaker

Hanan is a 26 year-old that is bursting with energy. A resident of Jala village, she studied at Al-Quds Open University and had been active in her community and its civil society before the ActionAid project began in her village. She describes herself as having a volunteer spirit and enjoys networking with different organizations in the area, always eager to put her village, Jala, on the map.



When Hanan began attending the women's group meetings, her previous volunteerism and her activeness made it natural that she would be elected the facilitator of the group. She was eager to participate in all the trainings and workshops organized through the project, and was committed to the advocacy activities that the Jala women's group decided to work on. Hanan has become a focal point for the community now. If community members want to voice a concern or suggest a development for their town, they go to Hanan first in order for her to approach the relevant parties.

Two years into the project, the municipality of the neighboring town, of which Jala is part, announced elections for a shadow youth council and Hanan thought of running. Still unsure of how her family and community would react, she consulted the ActionAid coordinator who encouraged her to run for election. She was elected as the first youth from Jala to ever participate in the council, and one of 6 other females that are part of the council. Since then, she has thrived in her role, and ensures that the priorities her women's group had identified for Jala are continually raised in the Beit Ummar municipality and through

the youth council. She proudly recalls that the mayor calls her *the troublemaker*. She responds: "If I see a problem that needs to be addressed, I don't stay quiet."

Before the project began, Hanan had opened a kindergarten in her village to fill a gap in early childhood education services. Despite her hard work and investment to establish it, it was lacking in a number of infrastructural and equipment requirements in order to be licensed with the MoEHE. She also faced difficulties in securing a location for the kindergarten. Through logistical and moral support from the women's group and the ActionAid coordinator, Hanan was able to prepare all the requirements and submit all necessary documents to different governing bodies. This process was strenuous and filled with points when she thought it would not go forward, but she was determined to have her business both provide a needed service for her community, and be able to meet quality standards. The livelihood support from ActionAid, as well as the linkage with the Chamber of Commerce were integral to the current success of her small business.

Although Hanan has faced resistance from her parents and some of her 7 brothers and sisters to her active lifestyle, she has also noticed an increase in acceptance over the years. She hopes that her younger sisters can see her as an example and continue to push against socio-cultural norms that restrict women's activities and movement. Hanan's ambition, she says boldly with a laugh, is to become the mayor of the neighboring town that also includes Jala in its city limits. Hanan is an example of how participation in the REFLECT circle can cultivate and direct the already-existing activist spirit and can have a knock-on effect beyond the scope of the women's group.

Success Story 3: 'My Project'

Jihan is a 28 year-old from Khirbet Ad-Deir. She has Bachelors degree in geography, but was unable to find work after graduation in their small town. She married and moved to Amman with her husband, but returned soon after to establish her family in Ad-Deir. Although she was happy to be back in her hometown, she did not like the idea of staying at home with no work or activities. Her sisters told her about the women's group and she began attending. From the onset, she was committed and active in the group. She was the first to sign up for all the trainings and workshops offered and even began to network with organizations beyond the project scope.

At the same time, Jihan also became active in the women's cooperative out of which the REFLECT circle had emerged. She took trainings in food processing and began to coordinate the work of the cooperative and the advocacy work of the group. She has noticed a change in her status in her extended family. She says that her in-laws recognize the new knowledge and capacity she has gotten in the past three years, and often side with her on issues that arise in the family.

In the last year of the project, Jihan was selected to receive a small-grant. She started a livestock-raising project and is supported by her brother and husband in managing her livestock. She is very proud of the start-up, saying: *"I thought I would never work, but now I have done something in my life. I call this 'my project'. This is 'my project'!"* Jihan notes that not only has her position changed in her family because of her increased knowledge and skills, but also because of her income. She says that her relatives are really supportive of her business and say that they're confident she will succeed and be able to financially depend on herself.



Jihan had two children over the course of the last three years, but has not changed her commitment to community activism and entrepreneurship. Her calm determination was evident as she voiced the future vision for the cooperative and the group's community activism while pacing the floor to put her newborn to sleep. Jihan hopes to be able to improve the marketing of the cooperative's products, and to continue to expand her livestock-raising business.

4.5 Sustainability

The sustainability of the project was assessed on a number of different levels; namely, the strength and expected continuation of the established women's groups, the long-term benefits expected from the women-led advocacy initiatives, the extent to which lasting links were established with relevant authorities and movements, and the prospects for continuation of the small businesses established by the female project participants.

A number of factors are expected to contribute to the sustainability of the women's groups themselves. Firstly, the groups have all been registered as associations and thus have an official status in their communities. Two of the groups have a location specifically for their use – one provided by the village council, and another rented by the group, with the fees covered by the group itself. One group does not have a location and thus relies on using the village school for meetings. Members of this group were less confident that their group would be able to continue to meet after the life of the project due to this issue.

From the social perspective, women from all three groups indicated that they have developed close relationships and friendships with the other women in the group. In one group, the women explained that before the project they were all acquaintances and from the same extended families, but that they did not have close social ties to one another. After the project they are all much closer, and they noted that this has positively affected the community as well, improving its coherence. All groups consider the project coordinator an integral member of their group and many doubted if they would be able to sustain their meetings and activities without her. Others responded to their fellow group members when this was stated, saying that they can and will meet independent of the project support. Members of focus group discussions in one group noted that getting to know women from the other two groups was a positive aspect of the project and made the connectedness that they feel with their own group expand to the other groups as well. This kind of networking amongst women's groups adds another dimension to the project-led networking with duty bearers and NGOs.

The inclusion of community advocacy initiatives in the design of the project ensured that long-term impact was accounted for. The initiatives implemented in the communities are expected to have created lasting change for the residents because they were not project-based in nature, but rather advocacy-based, requiring that relevant governmental authorities provide the requested services and infrastructure. In this way, the project has also created linkages between the target communities (represented by the women's groups) and relevant governmental agencies and duty bearers. Now that the contacts have been made, it is more likely that the service providers will keep the target communities in consideration in the future, and that women groups will be more easily able to contact these bodies for future lobbying. Indeed, women participants of focus group discussions voiced a number of ideas that they are interested in doing advocacy around in the future.

In terms of environmental sustainability, a number of the initiatives undertaken by women's groups were related to the environment and ensuring that the village is provided with proper sanitary services and support. For example, the initiative to get solid waste collection containers in Hatta has drastically improved the sanitation and environment of the village. The community map activity also ensured that women gained a perspective on the linkages between their natural and man-made environment and planned initiatives taking this into consideration. For example, in Ad-Deir, after drawing the community map, women realized that olive trees and other types of trees are many in number and spread out across the village. They were then able to see this as an aspect to protect and capitalize on in initiatives.

As mentioned in the previous section, women participants of focus group discussions who had started a small business through the project stated that they are committed to their projects and interested in investing in them in order to expand them. The support of the other women in the group, as well as that of different organizations and stakeholders that they have been linked to throughout the project (the Chamber of Commerce, the Ministry of Agriculture and various NGOs) is likely to contribute to the sustainability of the small enterprises. Although the foundations have been well set, the high cost of operating a business in Palestine, as well as the volatile economy and the high risk of political violence and restrictive policies stemming from the Israeli occupation must also be major factors to consider when assessing the perspectives for sustainability of the businesses.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the finding presented above, the following are the main conclusions developed, with suggested recommendations linked to each topic. The recommendations are built on the analysis of data and the consultant's own experience in the field and are in no way binding on the contracting authority.

1	<p>Conclusion:</p> <p>The reflection-action methodology through REFLECT circles of women is relevant and effective in promoting both women-led advocacy as well as sustainable economic empowerment.</p>
	<p>Recommendation:</p> <p>Increase awareness of the Palestinian community and other similar organizations of this approach and its successes. Consider training key members of a larger group of target communities or other NGOs on the approach and methodology so that they could facilitate REFLECT circles within their communities.</p>
2	<p>Conclusion:</p> <p>The large amount of networking undertaken with other NGOs, governmental organizations and private entities resulted in value-for-money through the utilization of community-wide resources in tandem with the project budget in order to contribute to the project outcomes.</p>
	<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>Create a database of relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations that can be easily contacted for contribution to future projects.</p>
3	<p>Conclusion:</p> <p>In addition to the outcomes realized as detailed in the project logical framework, one of the most significant successes realized was the increase in freedom of movement of the women participants.</p>
	<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>Consider including increased freedom of movement in the goals and expected outcomes of future projects in order to adequately document and assess the change.</p>
4	<p>Conclusion:</p>

	Gaining entry to the target communities through existing local government structures and getting the buy-in from community decision-makers is a best practice that contributes to the successful implementation of the project and achievement of objectives.
	<p><i>Recommendation:</i></p> <p>Ensure the continuation of this practice and institutionalize it in order to facilitate hand-down of this approach and specific methodology to future project staff.</p>
5	<p><i>Conclusion:</i></p> <p>Sustainability of the women's groups and start-ups is probable in the short-term, but there are a number of external factors that put this probability into jeopardy in the long-term.</p>
	<p><i>Recommendation:</i></p> <p>It is recommended to commission a social impact assessment for ActionAid Palestine's work. Previous beneficiaries can be contacted and surveyed to see how the changes that were realized during the life of any of the past projects have been sustained, and specifically what the current state of the start-up businesses are. This exercise would be able to highlight the impact that the program and approach is having, and also provide an opportunity to identify areas for improvement or considerations needed for future projects.</p>

Annex I: Data Collection Tools and Informed Consent Scripts

Focus Group

Introduction and Consent Script

Hello, my name is X and I am a researcher at ABC Consulting. We have been hired by ActionAid to conduct an evaluation of ActionAid “**Women Stepping Forward**” project. We are conducting this evaluation in your area of residence, as well as other areas. The information gathered through this evaluation will be used to help ActionAid understand the level to which their project achieved its goals and met the needs of people in your community. This will support them in improving their projects and implementation in the future.

I’d like to thank each of you for coming here today. Participating in this focus group discussion is completely voluntary, meaning that you do not have to participate if you do not want to, and there will be no negative consequences if you decide not to participate. In no way will this affect your ability to access resources or participate in projects in the future. Please feel free to respond to questions and participate in discussion openly and honestly. This discussion is entirely confidential, meaning that your name and specific identifiers will not appear anywhere on the data collected. We would like to audio record the session with your permission. The session will take 1-2 hours. Are there any questions?

[Obtain oral consent]

Question Set

To what extent has the project addressed your needs and priorities?
Were the activities facilitated and/or provided in a timely and organized manner?
Describe your interaction with project staff.
How did the project affect your status in your home? and freedom of movement? Did you experience any backlash due to your participation? How did you manage or deal with that?
What was the impact of the project activities on your income? on decision making processes?
Do you think that your small-businesses and livelihood activities will be sustained after the life of the project?
What recommendations do you have for ActionAid on this topic?

Key Informant Interviews – Local Stakeholders

Introduction and Consent Script

“Hello, my name is X and I am a researcher at ABC Consulting. We have been hired by ActionAid to conduct an evaluation of ActionAid “Women Stepping Forward” project. The information gathered through this evaluation will be used to help ActionAid understand the level to which their project achieved its goals and met the needs of people in your community. This will support them in improving their projects and implementation in the future.

I’d like to thank you for your participation. Participating in this interview is completely voluntary, meaning that you do not have to participate if you do not want to, and there will be no negative consequences if you decide not to participate. In no way will this affect your ability to access resources or participate in projects in the future. Please feel free to respond to questions and participate in discussion openly and honestly. This discussion is entirely confidential, meaning that your name and specific identifiers will not appear anywhere on the data collected. We would like to audio record the session with your permission. The session will take 30 minutes to 1 hour. Do you have any questions?

[Obtain oral consent]

Question Set

To what extent was the Project relevant to the needs of men and women in the target communities?
Is the approach consistent with development priorities of the Palestinian Government? Why or why not?
To what extent has the project made lasting changes?
Have lasting links been established with national women’s movements and government authorities? What can be considered a lasting link?
To what extent has the project contributed to strengthening women's status?
Has a backlash been experienced by the women involved, and how has this being managed?