

LAVORO DIGNITOSO E AGRICOLTURA: AFFINCHÉ NESSUNO RESTI INDIETRO

Sviluppo rurale e lavoro: l'esperienza della "Fundación Promoción Social" nella promozione delle donne nei territori palestinesi.

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Grazie tante Dottore Conso ed a tutti i relatori per i messaggi condivisi, che ci offrono tanta informazione ma anche ci riempiono il cuore.

I am delighted to be part of this session today presenting the work of **Fundación Promoción Social (FPS) in Palestine, and walk you through our particular experience collaborating with rural women in agricultural settings.**

Let me please start by briefly mention our background as organization, established in 1987, with a clear **mandate: to eradicate poverty through sustainable human, economic and social development.** We work for the dignity of the person, putting people at the center of our interventions

Gender mainstreaming is one of our cross-cutting priorities, and supporting women across all sectors and activities is at the top of our agenda

We count with over **30-year experience in the area of International Cooperation for development**, where we have implemented more than **290 Projects worldwide**, of which, approximately **100 have targeted women** in terms of facilitating their access to education and productive resources, boosting employment/self-employment, and enabling their leadership and active participation in decision-making.

At advocacy level, to mobilize expertise and ideas, and fostering dialogue influencing policymakers, FPS created our **CEMO think tank specialized in the Middle East Countries** and the **Observatory for the Women and Equality**

Palestine is one of our main flagship programmes in the Middle East and North Africa. We have been operating here since 1994 with continued presence, covering **West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem**

By promoting economic growth and social stability in vulnerable agricultural communities we are looking for an inclusive, resilient and sustainable development, addressing some of the main challenges the rural population, especially women and youth, face.

It is very complicated providing an **overall picture** of the situation here, especially in the agriculture sector, not referring to the impact of the occupation in terms of access to natural resources (land and water) and opportunities, which mainly translates into 2 million of Palestinians being food insecure. With 49% unemployment rate in Gaza, almost the 70% of its households are lacking enough food to live a healthy and active life.

In terms of the demography, women represent half of the Palestinian society and more than one-tenth of the households are headed by them. We find high enrollment rates of females in secondary and higher education yet there is a clear gap of participation in the labour force (in 2019, women's participation rate reached 18% versus the 70% accounted for men).

The Gender norms dictate the role of women and men in agriculture and rural work. This is particularly certain in Palestine, restricting women's mobility and engagement in productive work outside their homes.

The recent events have increased this burden:

- i) **COVID-19 spillover effects have led to** rising unemployment and under-employment and decreasing purchasing power of the Palestinian families and disproportionately affected women, exacerbating pre-existing gender-specific risks and widening the inequalities.
- ii) The latest war in Gaza (last May), left 260 Palestinians fatalities (including 66 children) and over 2,200 injured (including children and women) and totally disrupting the markets, meaning even more jobs lost. Damage to the farming and agriculture sector is estimated at 45 million dollars so far.

There is much to do in this path to “building back better”, and ensuring employment creation and decent jobs in the agriculture sector is key for the future of the Palestinians.

Agriculture is an important source of livelihood for thousands of families, and it is critical to the resilience of Palestinian households and communities, and to its own identity.

Our Programme here supports the agriculture sector through assisting small farmers (males and females) and cooperatives/producer units by:

- Restoring productive assets and advocating for GAP and use of clean energy
- Strengthening organizational and marketing practices
- Providing institutional capacity development
- Liaise and network with Academia, vocational training centers, incubators hubs and private sector to facilitate transition into the job market
- **One of the main pillars of our work is increasing rural women socio-economic empowerment assisting** women cooperatives and female producers, establishing small businesses, increasing their access to productive resources, boosting income opportunities, and their involvement on decision making at community level.

To us, ***unleashing rural women's socio-economic potential and fighting rural poverty*** mean:

- i) Investing in skills for their socio-economic empowerment
- ii) Promoting gender-sensitive agricultural value chains
- iii) Fostering women's participation in producer organizations and decision-making at social and political level

- iv) Encouraging rural women's entrepreneurship: by improving their entrepreneurial skills and enabling the environment (including access to gender-sensitive financial and business services)

What we all know is that Women are the drivers of change. This is the reason of our focus on supporting them and enabling the environment for their personal and professional growth.

We recently commissioned a socio-economic analysis of more than one decade's work supporting rural women and their small businesses in Palestine. The long-term effects of the holistic approach, providing them with the necessary resources in terms of inputs, knowledge, and legal assistance, is beyond the expectations albeit the many challenges they face.

Individual wise, the main personal benefit reported by them is the increase of their self-confidence and self-esteem.

The most "unexpected" finding -unexpected because we were not explicitly looking for it- was to see how the skills acquired are disseminated among their communities and transferred other women not originally targeted as part of our intervention. This shows us, once again:

- i) how building capacity and supporting income-generating activities and decent job for the rural women, especially young females, has a **catalytic effect** and it is instrumental to the economic recovery of their communities and the whole Palestine; and
- ii) why investing in rural women is crucial to leave no-one behind in our way to achieve the 2030 Agenda

And since we advocate for giving them a voice, I would like to share with you a 3-minute video from our women producer unit in Al Manara, in the Khan Younis Governorate (south of Gaza) as example of our experience.