



WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN YEMEN

Female graduates face serious unemployment challenges in Yemen. Yemeni universities produce about 30,000 graduates each year, at least half of them women. Yet for government positions, which recruit 10,000 new graduates each year, women only constitute 40 per cent of the recruits, while the private sector employs only 7 per cent of working Yemeni women.

In this context promoting women's entrepreneurship is crucial in alleviating unemployment challenges. Women-oriented microfinance initiatives in the country have

allowed some women with low incomes to start their own businesses. By the end of 2003, the percentage of female microfinance borrowers had increased to 83 per cent. In 2005 two microfinance initiatives supported a microfinance start-up initiative with 100 per cent female clients. While small loans have allowed some to enhance their living standards and self-esteem, a number of women still lack any business competence to flourish, because of their weak management and interpersonal skills.

FACTS AND FIGURES

Partners:
Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion Service (SMEPS), a subsidiary of the Social Fund for Development

Beneficiary country:
Yemen

Timeframe:
Annual projects
from 2010 – 2015

Budget:
USD 160,357

THE RESPONSE

The Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion Service (SMEPS), Yemen's national agency promoting small and micro-enterprises and a subsidiary of the Social Fund for Development, recently embarked upon an initiative to empower women economically and to facilitate their access to microfinance – by building their capacity to open a business or to improve existing ones.

It thus entered into a contractual agreement with four private sector institutions to deliver business management training, namely: Soul for Development; the SEEDS Institute; the Bena'a Consultancy and Training Institute; and the Impact Institute.

This training targeted existing and potential women entrepreneurs in order to build further links with microfinance institutions. Given the ILO's experience in enterprise development in general – and women's entrepreneurship in particular – SMEPS approached the ILO to extend its technical assistance in this field.

Together with SMEPS, the ILO developed an entrepreneurship development training package tailored to women entrepreneurs in Yemen, entitled "Women Business Owners Training" (WBOT), based on the ILO's GET Ahead for Women in Enterprise Training and the Simplified Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) programmes.

Training courses were conducted for women trainers, following which the programme was extended to Yemeni potential and existing women entrepreneurs.

ILO experts provided technical expertise and quality control on business management training and follow-up activities, while SMEPS handled all national follow-up and monitoring activities. It also ensured that links with microfinance institutions were facilitated and established whenever possible for programme beneficiaries.



RESULTS

Despite intermittent security threats in Yemen and some project delays, the ILO and its national counterpart, SMEPS, have made strides in empowering Yemeni women and encouraging enterprise development among them, through the implementation of the WBOT programme – which has been extended until December 2015.

In 2011, after the development of WBOT, a training of trainers (TOT) workshop targeting only women trainers was conducted, followed by the subsequent training of women entrepreneurs (TOE) workshops in the four local Yemeni training institutions.

In one year, the TOE workshops targeted around 500 Yemeni women who had taken out a loan to either start a small business or expand their existing businesses.

In 2012-2013 two refresher workshops were held, and thirteen women WBOT trainers were certified to continue the provision of business management training to Yemeni women.

Following the successful implementation of the project activities and feedback from the four partner training institutions and project beneficiaries, SMEPS expressed its willingness to fund and implement a second phase of the WBOT programme to reach a further 2,000 potential and existing women entrepreneurs.

The extension of the project (phase II is under way) and the additional funds from SMEPS will serve to continue the delivery of TOTs to increase the number of Yemeni women trainers, including refresher workshops and the potential certification of Master Trainers. The review and finalization of the WBOT programme material will also be undertaken for final printing.

After the training courses, the women attained a much higher level of business knowledge and competence to start or improve their businesses. They also improved their quality of life with the income they earned, and consequently gained self-confidence.



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BENEFITS OF PARTNERING

The partnership between the ILO and SMEPS went beyond the usual donor/implementer relationship. SMEPS is the national counterpart overseeing all the project implementation in the field. The ILO was only responsible for providing technical expertise and did not need to post a staff member in Yemen. SMEPS facilitated access to the target beneficiaries, the organization of workshops – this was crucial to continue providing training workshops to beneficiaries when the security situation did not allow the ILO to enter Yemen – and the follow-up with trainers. Partnering with a renowned and competent locally established agency such as SMEPS also allowed the institutionalization of the programme (it is now provided by SMEPS in Yemen), the capacity building of its staff, sustainability, and the replication of the training programme in the country.