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ACRONYMS

ECHO:	European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office
ESDC:	The Economic and Social Development Center
MOA:	Ministry of Agriculture (Palestinian Authority)
NIS:	New Israeli Shekel
OPT:	Occupied Palestinian Territories
Oxfam GB:	Oxfam Great Britain
UAWC:	Union of Agricultural Work Committees

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1. Background

1.1. Overview

With funds from the European Commission, Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid - ECHO, Oxfam GB has implemented a Food Security Project entitled “Increasing Food and Livelihood Security in the OPT” with focus on three locations: South Hebron, Jordan Valley and Gaza Strip. The specific villages in which the project was implemented included the following:

- ◆ **South Hebron:** El-Thaheriya, El- Samou’, and Masafar Bani Naim.
- ◆ **Jordan Valley:** Bardala, Ein Al Beida, Kardala (North), and Jeftlik (centre).
- ◆ **Gaza:** Jabalaya, Khan Yonis, and Rafah Governorate including Refugee Camp (South).

The objective of the project was to increase and diversify household food and cash income sources of vulnerable households in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

Project activities were:

1. Bee keeping;
2. Livestock;
3. Roof-top gardening and rabbit raising;
4. Cooperative capacity building;
5. Greenhouse and Open Field Agriculture;

The number of direct beneficiaries reached 555 households with an estimated number of around 4,400 beneficiaries. The projects were implemented in partnership with three local partners: UAWC in Hebron, ESDC: Jordan Valley and MA'AN in Gaza.

The Oxfam GB has requested an evaluation with the purpose to assess the project’s appropriateness and impact on the beneficiaries and to guide similar future food security interventions in the OPT. This proposal is being submitted in response to that request.

1.2 Objectives of the Evaluation

The general objective is to provide an independent and impartial evaluation of the project.

There are three specific objectives, as follows:

- To assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the intervention;
- To measure the degree of integration of the following cross cutting issues during the life of the project: link with development (LRRD), gender, rights-based and participatory approach; and
- Act as a learning experience for the Oxfam GB team in the OPT.

The target audience for this report includes a range of stakeholders:

- Oxfam GB team in Jerusalem, Hebron, and Gaza;

- Oxfam GB management team in Jerusalem;
- Oxfam GB Regional Management Team in Oxford;
- Local project partners;
- General Directorate of Humanitarian Aid – ECHO; and
- Other organizations working in food security and livelihoods.

2. Methodology and Evaluation Approach

The evaluation team employed a multi - dimensional participatory approach to carry out the mission, utilizing a number of tools that included document review, interviews with key informants and focus group discussions. Please refer to Annex A for details on the methodology. Annex B shows the lists of meetings conducted and participants.

3. Findings and Conclusions

The findings section provides a detailed assessment of the extent to which the project has succeeded in achieving its progress towards achieving the project objectives, as well as the relevance of project activities to those objectives. It also reviews any modifications that have been made to the project implementation. The discussion of project outcomes highlights achievements to date including outputs, challenges for the future, and specific recommendations. Findings are informed by the extensive document review conducted by the consultant, the individual and group interviews, focus group discussion, and case studies.

We have organized the findings according to the following categories:

- Relevance
- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- Impact
- Sustainability
- Cross-cutting Issues

Within each category, we divide our findings according to project activity.

3.1 Relevance

3.1.1 Bee Keeping

Bee keeping activities took place only in Hebron, in conjunction with local partner UAWC. Bee keeping was a highly relevant livelihood activity for this project. As part of the application process, project staff conducted field visits to assess the households as well as the suitability of their locations for bee keeping. The Hebron area is famous for honey production and thus the project was appropriate to the local context.

Applicants for the project saw announcements that provided two options: bee keeping and livestock. They were selected based on the assessed suitability of their lands for bee keeping. Each beneficiary received a 20-hour training course as well as technical support at the location of the projects. In addition, they each received two beehives, plus sets of specialized clothes and equipment (one set was shared between every two beneficiary households).

3.1.2 Agriculture

The agriculture component of the project, in which technical assistance as well as key inputs was provided to farmers in the northern Jordan Valley, was clearly demand driven and designed in a participatory manner. Beneficiaries were already engaged in agricultural activities and needed assistance in improving their productivity.

In focus groups, participants from Jeftlik and Ein Al Beida confirmed that they were consulted from the time of the needs assessment and that the three project interventions in the area—open field agriculture, greenhouse agriculture, and livestock—were addressing the three top priorities for the area. Farmers commented that they were even consulted as to the types of seeds they would like to receive, as well as their needs in terms of equipment (irrigation, other infrastructure) and they appreciated that aspect of the project.



Photo 1: Agriculture Beneficiary, Jordan Valley

3.1.3 Livestock

The project's livestock interventions were also designed based on a participatory needs assessment. The activity consisted of livestock distribution and technical assistance for 80 beneficiary households from the Hebron area of the South West Bank, including the communities of Masafer Bani Naim, Al Samou', and Al Thaheriya. In addition, some livestock was distributed in the Jordan Valley area for a limited number of beneficiaries. Although support for small ruminants was clearly needed in the Jordan Valley, project design could have better taken into account environmental conditions and the previous experience of beneficiaries, which raised issues during project implementation and negatively impacted the effectiveness of the activity.

Beneficiaries from different locations tended to differ in their perceptions of the level of consultation. Those from Al Samou' felt more thoroughly consulted on the project and felt that the decisions taken by project management were more in line with their preferences. In Masafer Bani Naim, farmers reported being consulted thoroughly on the project through the interviews and meetings conducted by the team of agricultural work committees regarding the number and the quality of rams to be provided to the farmers by the project. They believed that the project directly responded to their pressing needs for quality rams

Those from Al Thaheriya, on the other hand, felt somewhat left out of the decision-making process, although they agreed that they had been consulted during the needs assessment phase. This may have been due to the fact that the project staff decided which beneficiaries would take part in livestock and which in bee keeping, according to an assessment of local conditions.

Livestock activities reached beneficiaries with limited experience in Al Samou' and Al Thaheriya. Some focus group participants had some knowledge prior to the project, while others had none. They felt, however, that the project provided them with the needed knowledge and tools to start such a project. They also found the training to be well organized and systematic.

In the Jordan Valley, beneficiaries were interested in livestock interventions, and reported that they had been consulted systematically by ESDC as to their needs and priorities during the needs assessment phase of the project. There was some dissatisfaction with the health of the livestock distributed, which appears to have suffered as a result of the livestock being transported from the Hebron area to the Jordan Valley. That risk could have been identified in advance, and better communicated to beneficiaries.

3.1.4 Roof-top Gardening and Rabbit Raising

This set of activities aimed to allow urban Gaza residents to improve their food security by raising rabbits as a source of food and income generating activity. 255 households participated in the rabbit raising activity. Of those, 51 households were also provided with supplies and training to assist them in cultivating produce on their rooftops, while could aid in feeding the rabbits. The rooftop gardening activity targeted the poorest households, as it was foreseen that they would face difficulties purchasing fodder for the rabbits.

This idea was an innovative attempt to address food security issues, based on Oxfam's experience with previous projects of a similar nature. Thus the idea was initiated by Oxfam rather than simply through beneficiaries' prioritization. The result was that beneficiaries participated who had no prior experience in rabbit raising or rooftop cultivation. In focus groups, beneficiaries from Abu Tuima and Beit Lahya agreed that they would never have considered such a project on their own, for two reasons:

- 1) lack of start-up capital and
- 2) in most cases, lack of experience with rabbits or agriculture.

However, in most cases, beneficiaries believe that the activities introduced were relevant to their needs in terms of household food security.

Yousef Najjar of Beit Lahya commented: "As for the roof-top cultivation, I had not seen it before. I was introduced to it through this project, therefore it would have been difficult for me to think of it on my own. I consider it to be a new and wonderful experience."

3.1.5 Cooperative Capacity Building

The project worked with four groups on improving their capacities as cooperatives. Two were women's groups—the Jeftlik Women's Group and the Ein Beyda Handicrafts society—and two were men's groups—the North Bardala Agricultural Cooperative and the Kardala Green Agricultural Cooperative.

Experience from elsewhere in OPT shows that agricultural cooperatives can be an effective vehicle for collective action on the part of small farmers. In focus groups, members agreed that the trainings offered by the project were in line with their most urgent organizational development needs.

3.2 Efficiency:

Table 1 below shows the budget allotted to each activity, with the number of households benefiting and the cost per household.

Table 1: Project Activities and Costs

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Provisional Budget (EURO)</i>	<i># Beneficiaries</i>	<i>Cost/beneficiary household (EURO)</i>
Bee keeping	46,905 (includes 3,555 of training costs not included in the procurement plan)	50 households	938
Livestock	79,125	80 households	989
Roof-top gardening	36,814 (includes training costs of 2,614 not included in procurement plan)	51 households	736
Rabbit raising	70,441 (including training, excluding administrative costs)	255 households	276
Greenhouse and Open Field Agriculture	166,600 (includes 21,000 of training costs, not included in the procurement plan)	140 households	1190
Cooperative capacity building	25,200 (7,200 for packaging and processing included in the procurement plan, 10,000 for training, and 2,000 for market fair participation)	4 cooperatives Bardalah: 82 members Jiflek: 25 members Kardalah: 52 members Ein Al Beida: 63 members	113

From the above, we can see that the majority of activities had a similar cost per beneficiary, with the exception of the rabbit raising which was significantly less than the others.

The most costly activities per beneficiary were the Greenhouse and Open Field Agriculture (1,190) followed by the households participating in both Rabbit Raising and Rooftop Gardening (1,012), Livestock (989), Bee Keeping (938), and Rabbit Raising only (276).

The cooperative activity is difficult to compare to the others as it did not take the form of direct support to households. The cooperative capacity building activity allotted 6,300 per cooperative, or 113 per household, counting the households of all cooperative members as beneficiaries.

In partner interviews and focus groups, few concerns were raised about timeliness and cost of inputs. It appears that the project had the necessary bidding and tendering systems in place to perform due diligence on suppliers.

3.3 Effectiveness:

Implementation of the project appears to have gone fairly smoothly, with few delays or major problems in execution. From the interviews with management and partners and the focus group discussions with beneficiaries, it is clear that some program activities experienced more challenges than others in implementation.

Monitoring System

The project's monitoring system was, overall, very strong and substantive. Oxfam used a mix of focus groups and interviews throughout the period of implementation to identify progress toward meeting objectives and identify issues arising during implementation, from the perspective of the beneficiaries.

Oxfam conducted a baseline survey in May 2008, followed by another in September 2008. The surveys assessed the food insecurity of beneficiary households by identifying main sources of income and level of income, main expenses, "coping strategies," and the agricultural situation in the targeted area.

The project prepared a Monitoring Plan for the Hebron region that outlined how indicators would be measured for each project activity and location. The plan also specified what focus group discussions and interviews would be conducted, with whom, and identified the objectives of each. Separate discussions were held with men, women, and children to gather information from different perspectives within the household. The project also designed customized monitoring sheets for the Goat and Sheep Rearing and Bee Keeping activities in South West Bank.

In Gaza, Oxfam's partner, the Ma'an Center, was largely responsible for monitoring. Ma'an conducted a baseline survey using questionnaires, submitted monthly and quarterly reports, and held workshops with beneficiaries to help evaluate the project. Ma'an submitted a baseline study analysis report titled "Increasing Food and Livelihood Security in the Occupied Palestinian Territory," in September 2008. The report provided a comprehensive picture of changes in the lives of beneficiary households over the course of the project, in terms of household income and expenditure, food sources and food availability, and coping mechanisms.

The principal weakness of Oxfam's monitoring system was that it did not track the specific target indicators as outlined in the proposal. The Expected Results were phrased in terms of similar types of indicators (household food consumption, income) were measured, but not always in a way that was comparable to the target indicators.

For example, the proposal lists two specific indicators under Expected Result 2: "Poor beneficiary households will increase cash income by 20% from the sale of the food produced with project activities."

One of the indicators is: "At least 50% of beneficiaries engaged in household food production report a 20% increase in cash income as a result of project activities by the end of the project."

The Ma'an Monitoring Report of September 2008 measured households' increase in income, but reported the results in terms of an overall average, i.e. there was an average increase in monthly income from 505 NIS to 520 NIS (a 3% increase). Thus although we know that there was a slight increase in income overall, we cannot say whether or not the target indicator was met.

Such discrepancies can also be seen with many of the other specific indicators. Please see the discussion of impacts in section 3.4 below for a more detailed discussion.

To avoid such confusion in terms of project monitoring and evaluation, we would recommend that the monitoring reports be designed in a way that clearly indicates performance against specific target indicators in project proposals. If, during implementation, it becomes clear that those indicators do not adequately reflect the reality on the ground and the aims of the project, they should be revised in consultation with the donor.

3.3.1 Bee Keeping

The bee keeping activity was effective in identifying interested households and providing accessible and useful training. Results monitoring indicated that most households were able to produce substantial amounts of honey during the implementation period and planned to continue with bee keeping (See Impact and Sustainability sections below). It appears that the activity could have been made more effective with additional follow-up technical support to trainees; of course that would have had budgetary implications.

In the focus group discussion, participants' impressions were very positive about the project staff, and their responsiveness. They reported that a knowledgeable engineer was assigned to follow up the project; he was very concerned about the project and its success.

Participants received theoretical and practical training on bee keeping, including topics such as how to divide the bee hives to increase the number. In Oxfam's Baseline Report of September, 80% of beneficiaries rated the trainings as "Excellent," with only 1.3% saying that they added no new skills.

They felt that the training was mostly theoretical in nature, and also suggested that they needed more training as well as on-the-job support, due to the fact that for most of them this is their first time in bee keeping. They did not have the experience or skills for such projects and needed to know more about the diseases and how to deal with them.

The primary challenges to implementation cited by beneficiaries were primarily due to environmental factors outside the project's control:

- Harmful insects;
- Lack of necessary medicines and chemicals to confront the insect attacks on the bee hives;
- In Thahiriya the hives were attacked by wild birds;
- Lack of the necessary medicines;
- Lack of boxes and frames for the increased hives;
- Sharing of the equipment and clothes (especially after an increase in the number of hives); and
- Additional expenses to buy the frames, boxes and the fodder.

They mentioned that it would have been helpful had the project provided more technical support in areas such as dividing the hives and taking care of queens, followed up with field visits to the project site, and distributed informational booklets on bee keeping.

3.3.2 Agriculture:

Implementation of the agriculture activity in the Jordan Valley went relatively smoothly. The trainings and extensions received generally positive ratings from participants (80.4% "Good") during the Baseline Survey of September.

In focus group discussions, participants from Jeftlik and Ein Beida were emphatically positive about the effectiveness of project activities. They felt that the extension work carried out was very important to them. One participant noted that the trainer's experience in plant composition was particularly useful, and that beneficiaries had been able to successfully apply the knowledge gained from him.

Farmers cited a number of challenges were raised with respect to implementation, however. Their complaints can be briefly summarized as follows:

- 1) The timing of the trainings was not optimal, as they took place in March-April during an agricultural season. May-July would have been more convenient. (Jeftlik/Ein Beyda focus group)
- 2) Receipt of seeds and nets and other supplies was delayed until April, so the spring season was missed and they will not contribute to production until the winter season of this year.

Project management responded that the timing of trainings was agreed in advance with the farmers, and that it was necessary to carry them out during the season because of the practical elements to the trainings, which required field visits to ensure that the lessons were being applied.

In terms of the distribution of supplies, Oxfam project records showed that they were in fact distributed in December—the reason for the discrepancy is not clear.

Other challenges facing the agricultural sector in OPT are outside the control of the project, but affect implementation and thus should be taken into consideration nonetheless. Farmers mentioned the following:

- The market power is in the hands of Israeli traders, making it difficult for farmers to negotiate good prices on products exported to Israel.
- Farmers have no direct exporting channels to third countries, and no guarantees of buyers for their products.
- Environmental issues such as the frost of last winter.
- There is a problem with checks bouncing from Israeli traders.
- Procedures on check points and closures raise costs and waste time.
- High cost of tests required by the Israelis for products exported to Israel.

3.3.3 Livestock:

In general, while some short-term benefits were provided to beneficiaries of the livestock interventions, implementation was problematic in a number of important respects.

Jordan Valley

The partner organization, ESDC, reported that implementation went smoothly for the most part, with no significant delays, and that the livestock interventions were successful in providing for the milk and dairy needs of beneficiary households. They were also positive about the relationship with Oxfam, stating, “the partnership was strong and effective, both sides were cooperative with each other and showed high flexibility and jointly acted on any issues facing the project.” ESDC felt that they shared Oxfam’s goals and objectives.

In Oxfam’s Baseline Report in September 2008, the livestock trainings received lukewarm reviews in the Jordan Valley. The greatest number of respondents (40%) rated the trainings as “Medium,” while 30% considered them to be “Good” and 18% “Excellent.”

In focus groups, participants expressed some dissatisfaction with the project. Their complaints are detailed below, followed by responses from Oxfam staff.

First, beneficiaries asserted that the project is a failure and that providing two sheep per household was not enough given the large number of household members in Jordan Valley areas. They also argued that recipient families were very poor to be able to maintain and purchase the necessary fodder and medicine to the sheep given to them.

Others complained about the type of sheep they received, saying that the local breeds that were distributed produce milk for 1 – 3 months per year only, while the “Mikhla” sheep or “Samar” goats would produce milk throughout the year.

One beneficiary said: “The sheep I received were not productive and not in good health. I sold them and bought five instead, paying the difference, and I bought a ‘Samar’ that is more productive all over the year. I think the merchant from whom the sheep was bought has deceived them, all of them were either old or ill.”

Others reported that they had achieved success with what they received.

Fodder was another issue raised by the farmers, who said that the project did not provide enough and that they had to begin purchasing fodder to feed the livestock, before receiving an economic benefit from the activity.

Veterinary service is also a concern, as farmers will need to begin paying those expenses following the end of the project, which will severely cut into or exceed the additional income they are realizing.

Oxfam management responded to the complaints as follows:

- *Number of sheep:* because diversification of food sources was the primary goal rather than income generation, the number of sheep per household was adequate. Because many extended families graze their flocks together, the impact of adding a ram to the flock will take time to develop.
- *Type of sheep:* The “Mikhla” variety of sheep requested by some farmers are typically used in more complex and technologically advanced settings and are not well adapted to local environmental conditions. During the needs assessment phase, beneficiaries expressed a preference for sheep rather than goats and Oxfam technical staff agreed that sheep were better suited to the environment. There are no breeds of sheep or goats capable of providing milk throughout the year in current conditions in the Jordan Valley.
- *Health of the sheep:* Oxfam staff responded that they had strict specifications for the sheep that were purchased, and that a veterinarian checked them all prior to distribution. The health of the sheep suffered as a result of being transferred from Hebron to the Jordan Valley, which has very different climactic conditions.
- *Expenses of fodder and veterinary care:* To some degree, the expenses could not have been anticipated due to a rapid rise in the cost of fodder over the course of the program. (an increase of over 800 NIS/ton according to Oxfam). Even long-established and relatively prosperous herding households have been forced to reduce their flocks due to the challenging environment. Staff noted that it is a lesson learned that sheep should not be given to the poorest families as they lack the minimum resources required to maintain them.



Photo 2: Focus Group with Livestock Beneficiaries, Jordan Valley

Hebron

The partner in the South, UAWC, reported that project activities were effective in enhancing the diet or income of beneficiary households, and in transferring skills through the trainings. No delays in implementation were reported. The UAWC was generally positive about the relationship with Oxfam, although they would have liked to see more attention given to capacity building for UAWC as the local partner.

The effectiveness of project trainings was rated higher in Masafer Bani Naim than in the Jordan Valley, according to Oxfam's Baseline Report. 57.7% of respondents rated the trainings "Good," vs. 30.8% "Excellent" and only 7.7% "Medium."

Like the livestock activity beneficiaries in the Jordan Valley, those in Masafer Bani Naim involved in the goat and ram rearing activity had numerous complaints. The most prominent were:

1. The number of distributed rams (one ram per farmer) is small relative to the size of the herds of the farmers, thus improving production may take years.
2. The rams that were distributed faced difficulty in adapting to the local environment and particularly grazing outside. The farmers called them the "spoiled rams." They are not able to walk long distances with the rest of the herd to graze, which is necessary in many cases. Farmers had limited experience of how to deal with those issues.

Factors external to the project that were cited by the farmers included:

1. Marketing is a problem. Farmers tend to sell sheep to traders at low prices or in exchange for fodder, which is costly at certain times of the year. Farmers attributed this to market manipulation on the part of the traders; but it is less likely a character issue on the part of the traders than the predictable result of a weak bargaining position on the part of the farmers.
2. There is no market for fresh milk or for sheep's wool. Thus the farmers must turn milk into yogurt ("Jameed"), which is less profitable. They also burn the sheep's wool after sheering it.

With respect to the issues with the rams, researchers noted that only one of the 14 participants in the discussion had gone to the local partner UAWC for guidance. The others said that they were not aware of what other services the UAWC could provide, did not know the location of the organization and did not know the contact person or the employees of the organization. This lack of knowledge was also the case for the beneficiaries from Al Samou'.

From the UAWC's perspective, there were two major challenges to implementation:

1. An inadequate budget was allocated to the veterinary medicines and guidance, which forced most of the beneficiaries to purchase it at their own expense; and
2. The level of assistance for the selected was too low; distributing 3 sheep per family does not meet the needs of the large extended families in the area. The limit was imposed by the donor, but the partner would recommend adjusting it.

Oxfam management's responses were same as the above as regards that number of sheep distributed, which they believed to be quite adequate relative to the size of beneficiaries' herds.

3.3.4 Roof-top Gardening and Rabbit Raising

Implementation of these activities went well overall but faced two major challenges. First, the trainings on rabbit care could have been more oriented toward practical elements, and/or extended for an additional period of time. Second, the timing of the rabbit distribution proved difficult, due to weather conditions in July and August. The rooftop gardening activity generally went more smoothly.

In terms of the trainings, most beneficiaries felt that the trainings received were helpful but that they could have been more oriented to practical aspects rather than theory or, alternatively, that there should have been more follow-up to address problems that arose in implementation.

One said: "We received a 12-day theoretical training, but when we tried to implement the training we faced issues that required consultancies particularly since we had not implemented such activities before. The implementation differed from the theory. When we tried to implement the training we faced many problems which the theoretical training did not address such as the lack of medicines in the market and by the donor agency."

Another had a slightly different take, saying: "Most of the issues trained on were actually implemented. The theoretical training was sufficient as theory but we need follow up during the implementation as some problems surfaced during the implementation that could have obstructed the implementation of the project such as rabbits suffering from a certain disease and the inability of the beneficiary to provide the proper medication due to its unavailability in the market or its high cost."

In contrast to that sentiment, members of the Khan Younis focus group praised the support and follow-up provided by the project, saying that they obtained the numbers of the cellular telephones of all the trainers, who were ready to answer any inquiries and provide sound advice.

Participants in the various Gaza focus groups were asked to describe criticisms they had of the activity. The most common responses were:

- Trainings were not oriented enough toward practical elements.

- The rabbit project was implemented in July and August, which are bad months for rabbit breeding, due to heat and diseases.
- Cages and other materials were of poor quality.

Other major challenges faced by beneficiaries included the high cost of medications, which are scarce in Gaza due to the blockade, and the rising cost of feed for the rabbits.

There were generally positive comments about the rooftop gardening activity, although a number of groups mentioned issues with soil quality, as the soil in some cases developed a green color and becoming less healthy for the plants.

Ma'an staff concurred that soil should have been of better quality, as well as the irrigation networks. They also suggested that the number of training hours be increased to 12 hours for both aspects of the program.

3.3.5 Cooperative Capacity Building

Of all the project activities, the cooperative capacity building appears to have had the smoothest implementation, judging by project reports and discussions with the partner organization and beneficiaries.

Women's group members reported that they were very satisfied with the training courses they had received, mentioning in particular: management that focused on good governance, leadership, transparency and accountability. Participants also valued trainings on marketing, accounting, annual planning and the media. Overall, they agreed that the time frame was suitable and the trainers were competent.

One beneficiary said: "After the training on accounting, we started to apply the financial management principles including receipts, book keeping, issuing checks. We also started to document all board meetings and in the elections that took place in April 19th, 08, organized and completed files were handed over to the new board as Oxfam project supported the group with files and procedures for organizing them."



Photo 3: Focus Group with Cooperative Members

The men's group also found the trainings they received from the project to be useful, citing the trainings on accounting, proposal writing, management and good governance,

investment and group purchasing, marketing, media and gender. The time frame was organized according to the preference of each group and there were no complaints in that regard.

As a result of the trainings, said one member: “We initiated contact with a number of organizations who did not work with us before, we conducted a TV interview with a local station and spoke about the conditions of the agriculture in the Jordan Valley. We also started to organize our accounting records and most importantly we started writing proposals by ourselves and received funding accordingly”.

Another added: “The training was very useful, we started to develop daily and monthly reports, organized agenda and meeting minutes, something we did not do before...After the trainings we were encouraged to increase our membership, we increased it from 46 before the project to 80 after the project.” Members of the other cooperative also reported an increase in membership over the course of the project.

One constraint on the effectiveness of the cooperatives intervention was pointed out by ESDC, Oxfam’s partner in the Jordan Valley. Because of ECHO’s funding cycle, the project began August 1, whereas the agricultural season begins June 1. As a result, it was difficult to have an immediate impact when the season was already underway. This is of course outside the control of anyone working on the project but should be noted nonetheless.

3.4 Impact of the Operation

The project’s overall objective, expected results, and indicators were as follows:

Operation specific objective:

To increase and diversify household food and cash income sources of vulnerable households in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

The quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that the project achieved the main objective, at least for the duration of the interventions. Performance on specific indicators was mixed, as indicated by the tables below.

Expected Result 1:

Very poor households increase food consumption by 30%, through improved household food production.

Target Indicators	Verified Results	Source of Verification
At least 70% of beneficiary households of rooftop gardens will double their daily vegetable intake three months after the setting of the garden.	On average, beneficiaries increased their vegetable intake by 25% over the course of the project.	Ma’an Monitoring Report, September 2008
80% of beneficiaries of rabbit distribution increase consumption of meat by 30% by the tenth month of the project.	By end of project, beneficiaries averaged 1 kg/week of rabbit consumption. Prior to project, they did not consume rabbit meat.	Ma’an Monitoring Report, September 2008
60% of the 80 beneficiary households consume dairy products at least 4 times a week four months after the distribution of the small ruminants	55.6% of small ruminant beneficiary households reported an increase in consumption of milk and dairy products.	Oxfam Baseline Report, September 2008
85% of beneficiary households of	90.9% of bee keeping beneficiary	Oxfam Baseline Report,

beekeeping consume honey at least 4 times a week two months after the distribution of the beehives	households reported an increase in honey consumption.	September 2008
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The project did not report on households' overall level of food consumption, but did track consumption of specific foods such as meat, dairy products, and honey consumption. As can be seen from the table above, the household-level activities succeeded in boosting households' consumption of goods that they produced with assistance from the project.

Expected Result 2:

Poor beneficiary households will increase cash income by 20% from the sale of the food produced with project activities.

Target Indicators	Verified Results	Source of Verification
At least 80% of beneficiaries of home gardens, rabbits, ruminants and beekeeping activities are able to exchange or sell 30% of the production in local markets within 12 months of the project.	By Activity: Ruminants: 84.6% Agriculture and Cooperatives: 83.6% Bee Keeping: 12.7% Rabbit Raising and Rooftop Gardens: 12.5%	Ma'an Monitoring Report, September 2008
At least 50% of beneficiaries engaged in household food production report a 20% increase in cash income as a result of project activities by the end of the project.	The average increase in monthly income was 3% (505 NIS to 520 NIS).	Ma'an Monitoring Report, September 2008

Again, we do not have data on the cash income gains for all beneficiary households. There was a greater level of engagement with the market on the part of the beneficiaries of livestock, agriculture, and cooperatives activities. For the bee keeping, rabbit raising, and rooftop garden, beneficiaries, the data from monitoring reports and qualitative information from focus groups suggest that the more important impacts of the project were the increase in and diversification of food consumption, as noted above, and the savings households gained from producing goods for themselves that they otherwise would have needed to purchase. Please see the activity-by-activity analysis later in this section for an explanation of how this conclusion was reached.

Expected Result 3:

Small-scale farmers in the Jordan Valley improve their agricultural practices and farming income.

Target Indicators	Verified Results	Source of Verification
90% of the targeted 140 beneficiary households improve agricultural management practices by the end of the project.	86.7% of households reported improved practices	Oxfam Baseline Report, September 2008
At least 70% of beneficiary households are able to increase their income by at least 30%, through selling farm produce, within 12 months.	By Activity: Ruminants: 84.6% of households Agriculture and Cooperatives: 83.6%	Oxfam Baseline Report, September 2008

75% of targeted cooperatives in the Jordan Valley are involved in collective buying and are able to decrease costs by 20% by the end of the project.	Cooperatives reported a savings of 20.9% in purchasing costs.	Oxfam Baseline Report, September 2008
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As the table shows, the project did very well in meeting the indicators across the board under Expected Result 3.

A more detailed analysis of project impacts, divided by activity, is presented below.

3.4.1 Bee Keeping

For the most part, the bee keeping activity enabled beneficiaries to produce honey for their use within their own household. The principal benefit of the activity was to provide households access to a nutritious natural sweetener at no cost. In some cases, households are developing the commercial potential of the activity and generating income.

According to Oxfam's Baseline Report from September, the greatest percentage of beneficiaries produced 11 kg of honey over the course of the project. Considering that the market value of honey is 120 NIS/kg, the amount produced represented a sizable value for the households. Less than 13% of households sold honey in the market; of those who did, most sold less than 7 kg.

In focus groups, beneficiaries reported that they used the honey for domestic consumption, exchange, and gifts to family members and neighbors. A few also sell honey in the market, commenting that it is profitable and they want to increase their production for marketing in the future.

All focus group participants considered the activity as complementary to family income. Some worked on the activity after their main job ended for the day. For the project to become the main income source for the household, the person needs to own at least 20 – 30 hives.

3.4.2 Agriculture

The key impacts of the agriculture activities can be summarized as:

- Increasing vegetable production;
- Stimulating reclamation of agricultural land;
- Improving pesticide use; and
- Introducing new techniques such as composting and solar sterilization.

In Oxfam's post-survey, 86.7% of agriculture beneficiaries reported an improvement in vegetable production, and nearly 80% reported an increase of 15-20%. When asked to name the primary benefits of the project, 87% cited the improvement in agricultural management practices, 63% reported an increase in the amount of vegetables sold, and 80% reported an increase in household vegetable consumption.

In focus groups, Jordan Valley farmers reported that the primary impact of the project was to allow them to reclaim additional dunums of land for agriculture. The farmers in most cases were already in a position to provide a diverse food basket for their families, so their lives did not improve greatly in that regard. They said that the project's contribution to their level of income had so far been minimal.

All participants agreed that their use of pesticides had improved: and they decreased the amount used from 3-5 times, and thus the products are healthier. A member of the focus group discussion with Jeftlik and Ein Beyda beneficiaries stated: “We learned about the safety measures when using pesticides and chemicals, through rationalizing the use according to the information we received in the training, we started to save on the costs and produce a better quality”.

He added: “The compost project was very useful, since we no longer need to import it from Israel, and we started a compost project for our cooperative as an income generation project and to save costs for member farmers.”

Another participant said: “We beneficial from solar sterilization which is a natural and cost effective method.”

Rajab stated: “Due to the project support I managed to expand my greenhouse agriculture from 2 dunums to 6 dunums and this has increased my income as greenhouse agriculture is more profitable than the open field and less risky.”

Researchers noted that these beneficiaries already own relatively large pieces of land and have established commercial relationships and marketing channels: last year they traded almost 80% of their production to Israel and about 20% to the West Bank.

3.4.3 Livestock

The most important impacts of the livestock intervention were:

1. Increased household consumption of milk and dairy products;
2. Cost savings that supported households’ overall level of resources and could be used to purchase other goods;
3. Increased knowledge of how to care for livestock.

Oxfam’s baseline survey of participants from Hebron and the Jordan Valley in September 2008 revealed differences between the two locations. In general, Hebron beneficiaries reported a greater level of benefits. The data in the table below is taken from that report.¹

Table 2: Benefits to Households, Livestock Beneficiaries in the West Bank

<i>Benefits</i>	% of households		<i>Overall</i>
	<i>Hebron</i>	<i>Jordan Valley</i>	
Increased meat consumption	19.7	2.2	10.95
Became better able to spend on other food and non-food items	39.1	35.8	37.45
Milk consumption increased	62.4	40.8	51.6
Household’s income increased	36.3	9.7	23
Consumption of dairy products increased	58.4	40.8	49.6
Improved its resources and coping mechanisms	88.4	63.5	75.95

The table shows that Hebron beneficiaries were substantially more likely to see increased meat consumption, milk consumption, and income, as compared to those in the Jordan Valley.

¹ Baseline Survey Report, Oxfam, September 2008, pg. 29.

In Masafer Bani Naim, beneficiaries reported that the project has added new knowledge, techniques and ways for raising livestock and they appreciated that as they felt that the new knowledge has improved their performance. They stated that they would like additional and future similar advice on new techniques and tools.

In terms of social and economic impacts, Masafer Bani Naim participants reported that the project did not change their patterns of consumption of milk or meat, as they always have consumed what they needed from milk as well as the sufficient quantities of meat and sold the surplus. The families have been raising livestock for a long time and it is their main source of food security. So far, the number of livestock families keep has not increased, as there are no newborn offspring yet.

Beneficiaries from Al Thaheriya and Al Samou' reported that the economic impact of the project was so far not so great as to change the pattern of economic activity for the household or open up new investment opportunities. Basically, it has barely covered the needs of the families for milk and dairy and thus is a subsistence level activity, rather than an income generating activity, which would not be viable at the current scale.



Photo 4: A Beneficiary's Sheep, Jordan Valley

On a more positive note, beneficiaries reported that the project gave them experience, and additionally generated interest in raising sheep as a way to supplement their household's food security level. Previously, they would not have seen this as an option.

The families will continue to look for alternative and additional income sources to cover for their needs. It is likely that they will also try to maintain the project at the current size, as it is costly to expand given that they will need to purchase the fodder, the veterinary services and other costs of electricity and water on their own after the end of the project.

In general, the project has not raised incomes: rather, it has provided for some basic needs, saved the family the cost of buying these products from the market or provided them with better nutrition as they would otherwise retreat from buying these products from the market due to their low income. For instance, in El-Thaheriya the beneficiaries reported that 100% of their needs of the milk and cheese were provided through the project, and in Al Samou' the estimate was 60% to 70%. No one has mentioned selling surplus.

In terms of social impacts, beneficiaries mentioned that they believe that some of their neighbors envy them because they have benefited from the project; however, they also mentioned that many of their other family members and neighbors have shown interest in raising livestock which indicates that the project managed to spread the idea to a wider audience by stimulating them to repeat the experience and provide or save on some of their basic needs of milk and dairy products.

3.4.4 Rabbit Raising and Roof-top Gardening

The primary impacts of the project can be summarized as:

- A small benefit in terms of income generation;
- A relaxing activity that gives family members something to do; and
- A supplement to the family’s meat consumption and/or source of quality produce to supplement the family’s diet.

The rabbit distribution project increased the total consumption of meat by households, but it is not clear how many households increased their consumption. Ma’an’s monitoring report from September 2008 shows the number of households reporting consumption of each type of meat, and the average consumption among those households. See below:

Table 3: Food Items and Quantities Consumed Weekly By Beneficiaries (Pre and Post Intervention)

Food Item	Pre			Post		
	# of Beneficiaries		Quantity (Kg, Unit)	# of Beneficiaries		Quantity (Kg, Unit)
	Count	%		Count	%	
Rabbit meat	0	0.00%	0.00	4	39.58%	1.11
Fresh Meat	13	68.75%	1.06	14	56.25%	1.15
Frozen Meat	9	47.92%	1.48	12	62.50%	1.50

Drawing from those figures, we can conclude that 40% of households were able to consume rabbit meat, at an average level of 1.11 Kg/week. The percentage of households consuming other types of fresh meat dropped from 68.75% to 56.25%, but their average quantity consumed increased by about 8%. The percentage of households consuming frozen meat increased from 47.92% to 62.5%, while the average quantity consumed remained the same. Overall, the figures suggest an increase in meat consumption among beneficiaries, with rabbit meat supplementing or taking the place of other types of fresh meat for many households.

As for vegetable consumption, Ma’an’s post-survey of beneficiaries of the rabbit raising and rooftop garden activities showed a change in weekly vegetable consumption from 2.32 Kg to 2.87, an increase of 19%.

In a focus group discussion, beneficiaries from Abu Tuima group agreed unanimously that the project provided them with a source of income. That in turn reduced stress within the household and improved relations.

One beneficiary said: “The project helped in minimizing my family problems particularly when I used to need to purchase house needs and could not find money to do so.”

Another added: “My relationship with my husband and children has improved since we have a source of income, even if it is minor. This helps in relaxing the family members and minimizing problems.”

Members of the Beit Lahya focus group concurred, saying that the project provided a productive activity for the unemployed men in the households, which reduced conflict.

Along similar lines, one woman from Khan Younis said: “The project improved family relations. My husband now finds something to do to kill time instead of the constant fighting because of the unemployment and the constant boredom. This had its effect on his relationship with me and with his children.”

Another member of the Khan Younis group noted that the rooftop garden could only supplement the family’s diet, as the amount of vegetables yielded was relatively small compared to the needs. She said:

“For example, we obtain a kilo of tomatoes a week from the roof-top planting, while the family needs on daily basis more than that, and the same applies for the other vegetables.”

The focus group participants summarized the positive impacts of the project as follows:

1. The project encouraged women participation, and broke the barrier of customs and traditions that rule the society.
2. A new experiment, as the project worked on improving the relationship of the house head and his family.
3. Provide employment opportunities for the unemployed
4. Limited family problems.
5. Introduction to service organizations.
6. Providing simple expertise in agriculture.
7. Improve relations amongst beneficiaries
8. Transfer of knowledge of agriculture and rabbit raising and the diseases they might get affected by to other families that lack the expertise or knowledge.

3.4.5 Cooperatives

Principal benefits of the projects work with cooperatives were:

- Developing new market linkages through the exhibition;
- Improved management capacity; and
- Provision of valuable inputs.

In the Jordan Valley focus group discussion, the women’s group stated that their participation in the exhibition organized by the project was very useful and they managed to sell all their production. They also made permanent supply contracts and currently make according to individual orders. They participated in a subsequent exhibition implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and they applied the same things they learned from the project which they found very useful. The cooperative is now looking to make contracts at the business level rather than individually.

The Kardala women’s group received large orders from a merchant in Um Al Fahem (Arabs of 48) but they could not respond due to the large quantities requested and they did not have the financial means to fulfill such orders, though this was an excellent business opportunity for them.

Cooperative members reported that distribution of project assistance in the form of seeds, plastic etc, started in November 2007 at a time when the first season was already over. The effects of that assistance will be seen during the current season, but it is still too early to assess its impact in terms of quantities or income from sales. Beneficiaries expect that the training courses, which included material on improved packaging, will improve sales, however.

All participants praised the Oxfam and the partner, ESDC, for the high quality organization of the exhibition and the labeling and packaging possibilities they provided to the women. They also experienced group purchasing in preparation for the exhibitions through purchasing the needed quantities of milk to make the cheese.

Oxfam also provided support to the Jeftlik women's cooperative in the form of furniture and an electrical generator.

The livestock projects in the Jordan Valley were less successful. Almost all the beneficiaries stated that the newborn offspring did not survive. This could have been due to feeding or environmental and weather conditions.

Oxfam's partner in the Jordan Valley, ESDC, echoed the beneficiaries' perceptions in many respects. ESDC's consider the project's main achievement in the area to be the establishment of Al Jeftlik Women's Society. According to the partner, the group started off without any idea about management issues and quickly they managed to organize themselves, and with minimal support from the project they have formally registered the Society. The project supported them with training courses in management and other topics, which assisted them in organizing themselves internally and distributing roles and responsibilities.

ESDC believes that the capacity building efforts improved the cooperative's performance, which led to an increase in membership, and better chances of getting additional funding from other donor organizations.

3.5 Sustainability:

3.5.1 Bee Keeping:

It appears likely that the majority of bee keeping beneficiaries will continue to produce honey. For most households, production will be aimed at satisfying household-level demand rather than the broader market. A few beneficiaries expect to further develop the income generating potential of bee keeping; however, they may need additional training to do so effectively.

Beneficiaries all stated that their participation in the project, and the training provided, made them willing to continue their activities after the end of the project.

Some of the participants stated that they will continue, but some hesitated for not trusting their experience yet and not being sure if they can deal with upcoming diseases on their own. They will be more likely to continue if connected to the MOA or other institutions that can provide ongoing technical support.

3.5.2 Agriculture:

It is highly likely that the agricultural interventions will yield lasting benefits to the farmers. As noted by partner ESDC, there are a number of factors that would support sustainability of

the Jordan Valley agricultural interventions. First, the farmers have now received support for at least two seasons, which increases the chances that the training received will be put to use. Second, the inputs provided to farmers through the project are relatively durable. Some farmers were supported with irrigation networks that can be used for the coming 10 years, others with plastic for the greenhouses that will last 3 – 5 years.

3.5.3 Livestock

Overall, the sustainability of the livestock interventions appears to face major challenges.

ESDC's assessment was that some beneficiaries (an estimated 30%) will continue with their livestock and increase the numbers they had, but that the majority will most likely not. The majority of beneficiaries are still too poor to buy the necessary fodder, medicines and equipment for maintaining the livestock.

In the case of the South West Bank, beneficiaries were asked in focus groups whether they intended to continue raising livestock beyond the end of the project. Responses varied between those from Al Samou' and Al Thaheriya. In Al Samou' they unanimously stated that they intend to continue raising livestock even after the end of the project, despite the difficulties they face which is mainly relating to the cost of fodder and the fact that prices has increased over last year. Some beneficiaries in Al Thaheriya mentioned that they are not intending to continue raising livestock after the end of the project because of the cost of fodder given their low income as all the beneficiaries are from the unemployed workers category and their wives are not working.

In general, women were keener to continue with the livestock after the end of the project despite the facts that taking care of the livestock has added to their burden of domestic work. This might be due to the fact that women are generally responsible for the livestock or other home-based projects as an extension to their domestic work, and at the same time carry primary responsibility for food and hygiene in the family. Thus they felt the impact of the project more directly in terms of providing for their families' needs of milk, cheese and other dairy products instead of purchasing them from the market, something they could not have afforded to do anyway.

Masafer Bani Naim participants mentioned that in the case of many livestock projects, beneficiaries end up simply selling the livestock at the end or after the project, because they cannot handle the costs once the subsidies provided by the project ends. In this particular case, the farmers did not express an intention to sell their livestock, though they did not totally exclude the possibility.

Oxfam rightly does not place conditions on farmers to require them to keep the livestock after the end of the project, because the objective is to help target families cope with the deteriorating conditions they face. Nevertheless, the prospect of beneficiaries immediately selling their livestock raises serious questions about the sustainability of the model, especially given the complex and challenging broader environment for livestock in target communities.

3.5.4 Roof-top Gardening and Rabbit Raising

The sustainability of the gardening and rabbit raising activities is greater but still somewhat questionable, although beneficiaries expressed an intention to continue. A key challenge to households will be the affordability of fodder and medication, especially so long as the closure of Gaza persists.

Beneficiaries point out that the most difficult barriers to overcome with the activities are the start-up costs involved—such as the containers for the gardens and the cages, feed holders and water holders for the rabbits—and those have already been taken care of through the project. Thus keeping the activity going may be economically feasible. This is especially true for the gardening. The rabbit project entails higher operating costs due to the high expenses related to medications and feed.

In the Abu Taima focus group, participants agreed that they plan to continue to raise rabbits since as they have “great fun” with the activity. They also have noticed a benefit in terms of creating a potential source of income for them and their families, even if the impact has been slight so far.

Members of the Khan Younis group noted: “We also learned during the training how to make necessary fertilizer for the soil from the house litter; therefore we do not need large amounts of money to continue planting.”

Fadi Hindi of Ma’an, though overall very supportive of the rabbit project, expressed some concerns about the sustainability of the rabbit project, saying:

“Here we have a few worries. Until now, the beneficiaries have purchased vaccinations and feed to continue with the project, but there is fear that the necessary vaccinations or medications necessary for rabbit raising might become unavailable. They attempted in OXFAM to make these vaccinations available through the crossings in Israel, but there was complete denial of its entry by the Israelis, which makes us fearful that it will become unavailable. Also, the rising price of the feed might impose a burden on the beneficiaries.”

3.6 Cross Cutting Issue: Gender

As noted above, among the impacts of the activities have been the implications for gender relations within the household and the broader community. In most of the project activities, women were targeted as active participants and, for the most part, it appears that they gained a large share of the benefits of the project. In addition to the material benefits to themselves and their families, women often gained a greater degree of autonomy and, to some extent, an independent stream of income.

In the Jordan Valley, ESDC reported having greater success with household-level activities that were directly managed by women. Staff noticed that the effect of being able to generate income gives women more respect and, presumably, more bargaining power within the household. Activities such as selling rabbits have also given women the opportunity to become involved commercially in the public sphere, in some cases for the first time.

Anecdotal evidence from the interviews and focus groups also suggests that the increased income from the projects has reduced tensions within households that are often aggravated by financial pressures, and that is likely to have decreased the occurrence of domestic violence.

There are some concerns in some cases that the projects have created additional burdens for women. For example, in the case of the ram and goat rearing activity in Masafer Bani Naim, the women have the greatest level of responsibility for taking care of livestock. That includes milking, processing cheese or yogurt, and marketing and selling the products on top of their other domestic tasks at home, which are substantial. Often they carry heavy loads of cheese, milk and yogurt door-to-door to sell to individual consumers in the surrounding communities. Nonetheless, women proved to be even more enthusiastic than men about the activity, due to the increased potential for income generation.

4. Case Studies

For an in-depth view of how the project affected beneficiaries, Riyadh's researchers selected three workers and their families to participate in case studies that would reflect the situation for workers before, during, and after the project.

Case Study 1:

“Mohammad Siam Stepped Out of Deep Poverty after Participating in the Project”



Mohammad Siam is 48 years old and the father of 14 sons and daughters. Like many others in Gaza, he used to work in Israel and gained enough salary to provide for his family and even to his extended family. Mohammad suddenly became ill and needed an operation that prevented him from working inside the green line, and later the Israeli job market was completely closed to Gazans. He spent all his savings on building his uncompleted house, on his medical operations, and on providing for his family. The expenses have depleted all his savings, while the family lost its source of livelihood and fell into deep poverty.



Describing his bleak situation before benefiting from the Oxfam project, Mohammad stated: “I became unemployed and depended on the coupons and assistance from different organizations and from family members who stopped providing us with assistance after their situation deteriorated. I have two married sons, but they both have big families to provide for, one has 5 and the other 6 children. Two of my daughters got married at the age of 16, we had to agree as we were not able to provide them with a good life. The rest of my children are between 7 – 12 years old and all are in schools. I was not able to provide them with the minimum expenses for their schools”.

Mohammad heard about the project from his neighbor who knows his situation well and advised him to apply. He received support from the project and participated in both top roof gardening and rabbit raising. Project staff, visiting to assess his situation, encouraged him to proceed with the project after he described his feelings of hopelessness and frustration.



Mohammad and his family were excited about the project. He received 4 female rabbits and 1 male, a cage, the necessary equipment, fodder, seedlings of different vegetables, and special soil for planting and compost. Mohammad stated: “After I thought our case is hopeless and my children were not eating enough, the project came. I took care of the rabbits and now have 40 of them. I also planted tomatoes, cucumber, eggplants, pepper, mint and trees of guava, lemon and figs. We did not need to buy anything from the market. We were eating well and I managed to satisfy all my family needs of vegetables and meat. I will start selling from the rabbits soon and will be able to make some income to cover our other basic needs and will be able to buy the needed fodder and additional cage and equipment for enlarging the project”.

Mohammad’s wife added: “We were saved by the project. We managed to survive our harsh conditions and we do not need to beg people for money or food. We were able to feed our children. The project saved us NIS 500 every month, we would never otherwise be able to afford that amount.” Mohammad’s daughter said: “I am happy to see my father not angry or stressed. He is more comfortable, provided all what we needed for the school”.

Mohammad and his family managed to step out of deep poverty as a result of the project support. They will continue and will expand their project so that it will start generating them income to cover their other basic needs. The education and health of the children are less threatened now.



Case Study 2:

“Members of Al Jeftlik Women Society Empowered and Formally Registered their Cooperative with the Support of the Project”

Al Jeftlik is a poor, marginalized and an isolated community by the Separation Wall. Al Jeftlik Women Cooperative started off as a group of 22 women who came together with the aim of starting income generation projects for women in the area to contribute to their family income.

That became only possible after receiving support from the project, through which training courses were provided to the group on good governance, management, financial management and bookkeeping, as well as food processing and marketing. Through another Oxfam project, the group also received hygiene kits and training on health issues.

The members of the group became more self-confident and felt empowered by the project. With the encouragement of project staff, they formally registered as a cooperative for food processing; the first of its kind in the area. They held elections in 2008, and 5 women were elected as board members and 19 women are general assembly members. They developed their internal bylaws that state a 20 JD fee for annual membership and 400 JDs as the price for refundable shares. The members are highly committed, working together very actively and volunteering their time to achieve success with their new cooperative. The project has allowed them to begin to prove themselves in the local community and the importance of their work, starting with the exhibition for their products that was organized by the project.

Haleema, the head of the Board, stated: “it was the first time that we think of an exhibition or participate in one. It was held in Ramallah, which is far away and required sleeping over, something we never did before. We managed to convince our families and we managed to see the benefit of that. We sold all the products we produced for the exhibition. This did not only have a short-term impact of the income generated from our sales, but also we gained the community and family acceptance for our economic activity and mobility. We are now able to initiate and participate in such activities. When we received an invitation from MOA to participate in an exhibition they were organizing, it was straight forward, and we participated and also succeeded in this exhibition.”

The impact of the project did not stop at the formal registration of the cooperative; the women members extended their activity to the local community service and established a kindergarten that would help other women to engage in income generation activities while their children enjoy spending quality time instead of sitting at home. The whole village appreciated that.

Another remarkable achievement came when the women members of the cooperative decided that they need to be active in addressing their community concerns. They organized themselves and mobilized other women from the village and went to Ramallah and organized a sit-in to demand water provision to Al Jeftlik, a major issue in the area. They received a lot of media attention and talked to reporters about their concerns. They managed to attract attention to the area and were visited by PA officials, including the Minister of Agriculture and governor of Jericho. They also were influential in advocating for the re-opening of a health clinic, the only one in the village, after it was closed for a long time.

Zainab, a board member, stated: “the project was our starting point. We received high quality training in food processing and thus our products competed in the exhibition and we managed to sell all the products. We received orders and currently looking for permanent marketing channels for our products”. Rabia, another member, added: “After receiving the

training from the project, we became very organized. We have full documentation and organized files of financial records, organized meetings with clear agenda and minutes and we assigned committees for different aspects of the work of the cooperative”.

The women members were inspired by the project, and became very enthusiastic and ambitious. They are very clear about what they needed next; a big kitchen for commercial production, refrigerators and storage area, permanent business relations and advanced management and financial trainings. They mentioned that they are currently contacting other organizations that can help them receiving those trainings and implementing the projects that would enhance their income generation.

5. Lessons Learned

Over the course of interviews with project staff, local partners, and beneficiaries, a number of important lessons learned emerged, which would be useful in planning future food security interventions in OPT.

5.1 Roof-top Gardening and Rabbit Raising:

In projects where beneficiaries are performing an income generating activity for the first time, especially in projects with a moderate degree of complexity such as the rabbit raising, there must be a strong emphasis on the practical aspects of training, relative to theory. In addition, setting up adequate systems for follow-up with beneficiaries during implementation is crucial, as problems inevitably arise that have not been addressed during trainings. Second, in the case of rabbit raising projects specifically, more attention should be paid to the time of distribution. In this case, some rabbits were distributed at the end of May, and later died due to the heat and prevalence of disease in June and July.

5.2 Agriculture:

A one-year project cycle of August-July is problematic in the context of the agricultural seasons in the West Bank, as a new season begins every July. That means that the effects of project interventions cannot be seen until the following season, in many cases, which makes monitoring of results quite challenging. Although changing the start date of projects is not an option, the seasonal calendar should be taken into account in project planning. When possible, donors should aim for multi-year commitments to agriculture-related interventions.

5.3 Livestock:

Experience demonstrated the challenges of working with livestock in the context of an emergency project targeting the poorest of the poor. For livestock to make a lasting difference in the lives of beneficiaries, they must be in a position to sustain a larger herd through investments on relatively costly recurring expenses such as additional fodder and veterinary care. For many poor households, they are better off selling the livestock once project assistance is terminated. Even in such cases, there is an economic benefit to the households, but the activity serves little purpose in terms of development and represents a highly inefficient way of transferring resources. There may even be negative consequences for herding households not participating in the project, in that the selling of livestock by beneficiaries could contribute to drive down local prices.

Another lesson learned was that it would be better to purchase livestock locally when possible. In the case of the Jordan Valley, purchasing livestock from the Hebron area and transferring it created some problems by placing stress on the animals, which took a toll on their health and on reproduction. From that perspective, it would have been better to purchase the livestock from local livestock traders. However, that would require a relaxation of ECHO's standard criteria for the tendering process, which requires purchases to be made from registered companies who can provide VAT exemptions, for example.

Given the complex set of challenges facing herders in the West Bank—which include restrictions on movement, land confiscation, severe drought, and a lack of support from the government and academia—we believe livestock interventions are better suited to development-oriented projects with longer time spans, rather than emergency livelihoods projects.

5.4 Capacity Building for Cooperatives:

Building market linkages for cooperatives, as the project did, is an essential element of agro-processing and was highly successful in this case. The exhibition that was organized for cooperatives opened new markets for them, while the training provided by a specialized ISO expert enabled them to improve product quality, thereby increasing sales and revenue. Such interventions should be repeated in future projects supporting cooperatives.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The evidence is clear that project interventions in most cases met the overall objective of increasing and diversifying household food and cash income sources of vulnerable households in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

As the income generating effects of the projects were generally limited, however, the most important benefit to most households, however, was the savings they realized by producing food for their own households, whether vegetables, meat, dairy products, or honey. That was clear from the focus groups with beneficiaries. The savings on food allowed households to allocate resources to other essential needs.

While generally successful, the project faced a number of challenges in implementation that were noted by stakeholders. We have taken those challenges into account in formulating the set of recommendations below.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Agriculture

For future agriculture interventions, we would recommend an increased focus on improving marketing channels and market information through product exhibitions and other activities that introduce producers to potential buyers. Many farmers stated that it would be useful for them to have more information on demand from the Israeli market.

One model that could be explored would be to create a calendar for farmers comparing production and prices for various crops in Palestinian and Israeli markets at different times of the year.² This could be done for the Jordan Valley or South West Bank by an NGO such as Oxfam or a partnership of NGOs and the PA Ministry of Agriculture.

Another idea for consideration would be to explore a compost project for commercial purposes, potentially in partnership with one of the cooperatives. More research would be needed on feasibility, but the Jordan Valley farmers repeatedly mentioned compost as a priority for the area.

6.2.2 Rabbit Raising and Rooftop Gardening

We believe that in future projects, the economic feasibility of rabbit raising should be reevaluated in light of the rising costs of medication and fodder. Ideally, we would recommend that beneficiaries be capable of procuring key inputs locally and at relatively low cost, given the challenges raised by the closure of Gaza. That is the case with the rooftop gardening, which makes it more likely that those activities will be sustained.

If the rabbit raising is determined to be economically feasible and repeated, we would recommend additional training for beneficiaries focused on practical elements of rabbit care, which many beneficiaries as well as Ma'an found to be lacking. The possibility should be considered of providing training of trainers for beneficiaries from the present project who have been successful. They could then be contracted as trainers/guides for new beneficiaries from their communities.

² For example, Action Against Hunger-Spain in partnership with Applied Research Institute—Jerusalem (ARIJ) has had some success with this approach in the Tubas region of the northern West Bank.

6.2.3 Cooperatives

Our assessment is that the project's work with cooperatives was one of its most successful elements. Cooperative members requested additional trainings in technical areas including food processing, packaging, storage, and quality control, as well as more advanced trainings in management, administration, and finance. We believe that all of the above are worthwhile investments with lasting impacts. As mentioned in the above section on agriculture, strengthening market linkages should be another key area of attention for cooperatives. Both men's and women's groups requested additional help in identifying new marketing opportunities.

Other requests from beneficiaries included investment in the infrastructure of the cooperatives such as furniture, office equipment, and refrigerators to store the vegetables. We would recommend that any such assistance be made on a cost-share basis with the cooperative, and contingent on a sustainability plan with a simple cost/benefit analysis that would outline the economic benefits to the cooperative of any such investments as well as clear provisions for paying for upkeep/maintenance.

6.2.4 Livestock

We have two primary recommendations for livestock activities. The first is that more attention be given at the design stage of projects to the question of how beneficiaries will be able to pay for recurring expenses such as veterinary care and fodder. Many current beneficiaries appear to be facing significant hardship in those areas and are questioning whether it makes sense for them to keep the additional livestock.

We do not object to beneficiaries selling the livestock, but it appears that short-term projects targeting the poorest of the rural poor would be better off devising simpler interventions that enable more efficient economic transfers. Alternatives to livestock could take the form of cash-for-work activities on rural infrastructure or other public works projects, or providing micro-grants for income-generating activities proposed by beneficiaries themselves, based on a competitive selection process.

The second recommendation is to make sure that beneficiaries have a way of contacting local partners for support. For example, participants from Masafer Bani Naim and Al Sanou said that they were not aware of how to contact the UAWC. Those mechanisms should be spelled out very clearly.

6.2.5 Project Monitoring and Evaluation

As noted above, although the project's monitoring efforts gathered much useful information on project performance and impact on beneficiaries, the reports in many cases did not track the specific target indicators outlined in the project proposal. As a result, we found it challenging to evaluate how well the project achieved the three Expected Results, as defined by the specific indicators.

To avoid such confusion on future projects, we would recommend that the monitoring reports be designed in a way that clearly indicates performance against the specific target indicators in project proposals. If, during implementation, it becomes clear that those indicators do not adequately reflect the reality on the ground and the aims of the project, they should be revised in consultation with the donor.

7. Annexes

Annex A: Evaluation Methodology

Annex B: Lists of Meetings and Participants

ANNEX A: EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Stage I: Planning and Preparation:

The preparatory stage included preparatory meetings between the Riyada evaluation team and Oxfam management, as well as a comprehensive document review of relevant background information on project implementation.

The document review will cover documents relevant to the scope of the consultancy and will include at least the following documents:

- Review the Operation's history, location and implementation context;
- Review all Operation's documentation, the proposal (single form), progress reports, field reports and partners' reports etc.;
- Review tracking forms of individual projects, if any;
- Other related documents.

This stage assisted the evaluators in getting acquainted with the project, its rationale, its progress, main activities, main strengths and gaps. It also informed the process of designing the different evaluation tools including guiding questions to key informant interviews and focus groups.

Based on the findings, Riyada developed the various evaluation tools including the guiding questions prepared for different interviews and focus group discussions. Questions were submitted to Oxfam for feedback and then finalized.

Stage II: Field Assessment:

The evaluation employed a participatory approach to the fieldwork in order to undertake an in-depth analysis of the Food Security Project & its implementation from both stakeholders' and beneficiaries' perspectives. Activities included semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, group meetings and field observations.

Key informant interviews were held with the following stakeholders:

- Oxfam GB management team in Jerusalem and Oxfam GB team in Jerusalem, Hebron, and Gaza.
- Local Partners: UWAC, ESDC and MA'AN;
- The Operation's field staff;
- Representatives of partner cooperatives.

Focus group discussions targeted the direct stakeholders and beneficiaries of each project activity. Focus groups discussed the strengths and weaknesses of project implementation and impacts on the beneficiaries.

In addition, two case studies were documented to reflect on the different components of the project. A more in-depth interview and analysis of the project activities were conducted through the case studies. The findings complemented those of the focus groups and informant interviews.

[Annex B removed]

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