



Gaza Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture Platform (GUPAP) workshop on 6 September 2015. Photo: Hana Saleh

ENHANCING MARKET-ORIENTED URBAN AGRICULTURE IN THE GAZA STRIP

Networking for policy change and resilience

The protracted conflict and the Israeli-imposed blockade have had a devastating effect on Gaza's economy. The movement of people and goods is severely restricted; 90 percent of factories and workshops have had to close; 80 percent of people are in need of aid; and exports recently fell to less than two percent. Oxfam is working as one of 50 member organizations of the Gaza Urban and Peri-urban Agricultural Platform (GUPAP) to increase support for small-scale producers and processors. This case study details how GUPAP will contribute to the planning processes of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of National Economy – with the aim of strengthening livelihoods, boosting the economy and improving food security and quality for consumers across Gaza.

1 INTRODUCTION

Given the specific context of Gaza, where economic opportunities are very limited, the project team has reached the conclusion that any market-oriented urban agriculture programme should focus on promoting a 'resilient local development approach' and making the best use of what is locally available. Markets for agricultural production play an important role in this, despite the imposed import and export restrictions that severely limit their development. Greater networking, coordination and exchange with relevant stakeholders are needed to shift the focus away from emergency aid only towards the integration of long-term economic development policies and initiatives, despite the difficult context.

The three-year project Facilitating Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture in Gaza is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and implemented by Oxfam and the RUAF Foundation.¹ The project is implemented with the aim to increase income for men and women engaged in small-scale urban and peri-urban agriculture in the Gaza Strip. The project's inter-related specific objectives (outcomes) revolve around service supply markets, extension services and enabling policy and governance frameworks.

Under the project's outcomes, new and revised policy strategies and measures for urban agriculture aimed at supplying the local market are expected to be developed and taken up by local and national government institutions. This aspect of the project is being implemented in close coordination with the Gaza Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture Platform (GUPAP) and its 50 member organizations – key stakeholders who represent various sectors including government, the private sector, civil society, universities and agricultural funding institutions.

2 WHAT HAS OXFAM LEARNED?

This project, and our role with GUPAP to enhance policy strategies, draw on learning from Oxfam's wider experience in Gaza. It aims to move from emergency aid to longer-term, more sustainable development – and to enhance livelihoods and food security in a fragile context.

- There is increasing recognition among Gazan stakeholders of the importance of urban agriculture approaches and practices.
- The challenges in strictly following the 'Markets for the Poor' (M4P)² approach, where systemic changes are to be pursued as much as possible by facilitating market and business dynamics, have to be adapted to the very specific, socially and economically challenging

context of the Gaza Strip.

- A significant shift in the project strategy – from direct implementer to the role of a facilitator who stimulates the market – has already taken place. It has been noticed and understood that external interventions are by nature artificial and may influence the system either positively (develop) or negatively (distortion).
- In the context of Gaza, the concept of food security relates very much to economic access to food, rather than to food availability.
- There is an increasing recognition and call from Palestinian professionals, organizations and ordinary people for more emphasis on economically sustainable and resilient development activities.
- Past agricultural projects implemented by international and local stakeholders have mainly focused on production support projects; however, these have always limited direct intervention to a small group of beneficiaries. This proposed urban agriculture programme will have a strong focus on local processing and local marketing as a key entry point in the value chain.

3 OXFAM'S WORK WITHIN GUPAP

In Gaza, the Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture (UPA) development project is aligned with a broader vision of supporting a more resilient agricultural sector that seeks to contribute to Gaza being more food secure, less dependent and vulnerable, and with its population having improved access to sustainable jobs and income, improved livelihoods and a safer environment. This will be achieved by the following strategies:

1. Increasing local production and the competitiveness of local products for a local market.
2. Reducing dependency on external imports and energy, and promoting and strengthening Gaza-based service supply and agricultural training and extension.
3. Facilitating a more favourable institutional and policy environment in which agricultural value chains operate and are sustained.

The Gaza Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture Platform (GUPAP) is seen as the main platform through which the policy objectives of the project can be implemented: it fulfils the need for a multi-stakeholder, interactive and participatory forum that brings together all key actors involved in the development of a resilient Palestinian agricultural sector in the Gaza Strip. However, the institutionalization of the GUPAP still needs to be reinforced.

Box 1: GUPAP vision

'The GUPAP seeks to see longer-term development and institutionalization of the platform to actively and successfully network and share knowledge, information, experiences and cooperation (locally, regionally and internationally) on urban and peri-urban agriculture to develop an agricultural sector featuring sovereignty and resilience among diverse stakeholders (government and non-governmental organizations, private sector institutions, research institutions, agricultural funding institutions and influential players in agricultural value chains) in the Gaza Strip. All members of the platform are committed to the comprehensive development vision of it, which is recognized locally, regionally and internationally as an interactive and participatory space to facilitate strategic planning, advice, lobbying and advocacy for policies of urban and peri-urban agriculture.'

GUPAP workshop, 6 September 2015

STRATEGIC ROLE OF GUPAP

The GUPAP will facilitate the coordination, networking and organization of market actors (for joint processing and marketing, for building consumer trust and for better service provision) and of policy and institutional actors (to work on a more enabling framework for the urban agriculture market sector as well as improved access to productive resources). By the end of the project in June 2017, the GUPAP seeks to be institutionalized – and if relevant, to officially register with the competent authorities– in a way that enables its continued contribution to strengthening the resilience of the agricultural sector in the Gaza Strip. In order to do so, GUPAP will seek to mobilize funding, capacity and potential to continue its activities effectively while taking into account the principles of transparency, participation and community ownership.

GUPAP LOBBYING AND ADVOCACY STRATEGY

In a GUPAP workshop on 6 September 2015, participants discussed policy review and lobbying/advocacy. As the key priority, members agreed to focus on strategies of both the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) – especially the upcoming three-year mid-term plan 2016–2018 – and the Ministry of National Economy (MoNE), in particular the new Consumer Protection Department three-year plan. The MoA and MoNE strategies are seen to be directly related to the project objectives and GUPAP vision. Clear policy gaps and opportunities – to which GUPAP could respond – have been identified for both ministries.

It was therefore agreed that GUPAP will support MoA and MoNE in their planning processes and will make use of project strategies related to dairy and date value chain development and processing, cold storage, Participatory Technology Development (PTD) extension, and

enforcement of food safety and quality control regulations. It was noted that increased interaction with universities that can support such services (through coordination in the GUPAP) is fundamental. Summaries of the action plans agreed by GUPAP members to feed into these two planning processes are outlined below.

4 GUPAP ACTIONS IN SUPPORT OF MOA AND MONE PLANNING

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE MID-TERM DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND GUPAP ACTION PLAN

In December 2015 and January 2016, MoA and GUPA co-chaired and facilitated a planning process to develop a new mid-term agricultural plan, with three workshops: workshop 1 to review/evaluate the previous mid-term plan (2013–2015); workshop 2 to update and develop the new plan; and workshop 3 to discuss the new plan widely with all agro-actors. MoA invited experts and heads of MoA departments, other related ministries (MoNE, planning, Palestinian Water Authority), NGOs, community based organizations (CBOs), universities, INGOs, private sector representatives and farmers to participate in this process. GUPAP members and other actors were able to contribute and present ideas, approaches and proposals. GUPAP used the opportunity to call for attention to project-related issues (dates and dairy value chain development, use of cold storage, PTD extension, etc.) and to enhance their inclusion in the new mid-term plan and budget.

To take full advantage of the planning process, it was concluded that GUPAP needs to develop the following specific actions:

Action 1

Elaborate a policy briefing (position paper) to input into the MoA review process. This will include: a. a further, in-depth review of the 10-year MoA agricultural plan/current mid-term plan (building on the already developed policy review); b. an additional/new review on food-quality standards and regulations; and c. the previous value chain assessments carried out by the Gaza UPA project. The brief will identify how the project supports the overall ministerial plans and programme, and determine what new/additional strategies, projects and programmes are needed. It will also describe in detail what MoA can/should commit to in

terms of activities, roles, procedures, monitoring indicators and budget in the various project-related areas. This brief has been discussed and agreed upon by all GUPAP members, and will be used as a key document for providing inputs into the MoA process.

Action 2

An analysis will be conducted of the needs and requirements of GUPAP members to successfully participate in the MoA process (as outlined above). This will be followed by targeted capacity building of GUPAP members and staff of the MoA Policy and Planning Department in participatory policy development and monitoring. This will enable GUPAP members to actively engage in the review/planning process and to participate effectively. The capacity building will also address gaps in current mid-term MoA plans, such as the lack of project-related activities and a clear monitoring system.

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL ECONOMY CONSUMER PROTECTION PLAN AND GUPAP ACTION PLAN

A MoNE planning process took place January–February 2016 to develop a new three-year consumer protection strategic framework. The review of food safety standards and guidelines, as well as the process of enforcement, is crucial to the development and implementation of this plan. It is particularly important given that the Consumer Protection Association of Gaza Strip was closed following the Palestinian political internal conflict (GUPAP is currently working with others to reactivate this association).

Quality control standards for dairy and dates are currently in place, but need to be updated. Standards and regulations are poorly applied, monitored, controlled and enforced (by MoA at farm level and by MoNE at the level of processing units). This can be seen in milk production, transport and processing. The lack of control and enforcement is due to the absence of personnel and shortage of funding at MoNE level; there is also a lack of training, qualified personnel and expertise among producers, processors and MoNE staff.

Dates and milk tend to be processed by unregistered, geographically scattered, individual women running household businesses, which impedes monitoring and control at this level; moreover, there is a lack of awareness and access to information among these micro-producers about the need for quality control. There is also limited information available at processing units and in the markets; and past quality control results are not accessible. The latter contributes to poor consumer knowledge and trust in the quality and hygiene standards of local

produce.

GUPAP will therefore focus on improving existing quality control and food safety regulations and the enforcement of these. It will also support the development of MoNE's new three-year consumer protection strategic framework. To support these objectives, it was concluded that the GUPAP needs to implement the following four actions:

Action 1

To review food safety control standards and regulations for date processing and milk production/transport/processing; to strengthen MoNE staff and beneficiary knowledge, awareness and expertise in these areas.

Action 2

To prepare a short policy (position) paper that: a. describes current quality control/ safety measures; b. explains the reasons behind the current lack of enforcement, training and information; and c. suggests revised food quality and safety criteria/standards/regulations. The policy paper will recommend procedures and responsibilities for MoNE, focused on the need to update existing food safety quality control guidelines and to apply corresponding monitoring activities. Recommended actions, strategies, operational and monitoring mechanisms and budgets will be outlined to be included in the new three-year consumer protection strategy. This brief was discussed at GUPAP's workshop in February 2016, as was GUPAP's role and participation in the MoNE planning process and further joint actions (for example, the organization of consumer campaigns or training).

Action 3

GUPAP members' participation in the development process of the new consumer protection strategy is being co-chaired by MoNE and GUPAP. Capacity building activities will be organized to identify and address critical capacity gaps and to ensure effective GUPAP member participation in the planning process.

Action 4

GUPAP will support the implementation of food quality control and safety, and will instigate a consumer information campaign based on the results of the planning process. GUPAP is also working to support the reactivation of the Consumer Protection Association of Gaza Strip, in cooperation with other related governmental and non-government actors.

NOTES

- 1 International Network of Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food Security.
See <http://www.ruaf.org/>
- 2 The term M4P, now more commonly known as Market Systems Development, refers to an approach in aid and development known as 'Making Markets Work for the Poor'. It seeks to change the way markets work, so that poor people are included in the benefits of growth and economic development. The aim is to tackle market failures and strengthen the private sector in a way that creates large-scale, lasting benefits for the poor. See <http://www.enterprise-development.org/implementing-psd/market-systems/>

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