

# ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE:

## RESULTS FROM A FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS PROGRAMME WITH INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES TO EMPOWER WOMEN IN GAZA

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*This article highlights the power of linking advocacy to programmatic data, no matter how small-scale the programme is.*

### BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Action Against Hunger has been working in the occupied Palestinian territory since 2002, aiming to reduce vulnerabilities and respond to humanitarian needs, while protecting and strengthening the resilience of Palestinian communities. In food security and livelihoods, our projects aim to provide viable and sustainable sources of income and livelihoods opportunities.

In the Gaza Strip, our food security and livelihoods projects target the most vulnerable communities through cash-based interventions, rehabilitation of agricultural assets, provision of agricultural inputs and managerial training. A decade under Israeli blockade and three full-scale wars has heavily affected the lives and resilience of two million Gazans, and certain groups such as female heads of household are known to be particularly vulnerable. Needs assessments have repeatedly underlined women's limited

access to resources and markets as an issue; it increases their vulnerability to poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition, which was again exacerbated by the 2014 conflict.

### SUPPORTING WOMEN THROUGH INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES

To address this, Action Against Hunger launched a food security and livelihoods project in 2016 specifically targeting 160 female single-headed households whose businesses were damaged or lost during the last war. The main objective of the programme was to support small income generating activities in order to increase disposable income for these highly vulnerable families. The income generating activities combined cash assistant for women's micro-business generating activities, managerial training courses and business plan development.

### USING A SMALL-SCALE INTERVENTION TO ADVOCATE ON THE BIG ISSUES

Because 2017 marked 10 years of blockade on Gaza, and 50 years of Israeli occupation in the occupied Palestinian territory, Action Against Hunger launched an advocacy campaign alongside the income generating activities programme. The campaign used the stories of 10 of the targeted women to advocate on the broader issues in Gaza such as:

- The impact of electricity black-outs and water shortage
- High unemployment rates, especially amongst women
- Lack of access to quality raw materials due to import restrictions
- The inability to expand businesses and export goods due to restrictions on exports and the movement of people.



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### ENHANCED DATA AS A RESULT OF STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS

Historically, we have found ourselves advocating on Gaza-related issues without being able to substantiate those messages with real-life examples from our programming. However, the nature of our income generating activities programme meant that we spent time building strong relationships with the targeted women, which gave us the data we needed to illustrate how the key issues in Gaza were affecting them directly. We were then able to create strong and targeted advocacy messages to attract the attention of and influence policy, decision makers, and donors.

### ONGOING CHALLENGES

**Demonstrating impact on a larger scale:** we want to demonstrate that our programme is having an impact on these women's lives, and to demonstrate how the situation in Gaza is affecting them, but to do so requires a lot of strong and timely data. This requires someone with the ability to crunch data and translate it into effective advocacy messages. During this project we had the resources to gather the necessary data but had to limit our expectations in terms of what impact we would be able to show as a direct result of our intervention. In part, this was because the short timeframe only allowed us to show the immediate impact of our

programming, rather than the longer-term change. The other element was that, as a small-scale intervention targeting 160 women and their families, we could not realistically state that the changes in their lives have influenced the economic situation in Gaza on a larger scale.

**Short-term funding:** short-term funding for interventions means that we cannot show the longer-term changes that result from our programming. This further limits the impact we are able to demonstrate in terms of the high-level results of the income generating activities and a continued advocacy campaign.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

- Continue monitoring beyond the lifespan of the programme if possible, and use the results to advocate for more funding and further action
- Monitoring and good data crunching are both crucial to creating strong and up-to-date advocacy messages
- Building relationships with beneficiaries in such a targeted intervention allows for greater programme learning, and can bring underlying issues to the surface, which might not otherwise have been captured.

## HOW IS THIS LEARNING INCORPORATED INTO OTHER PROGRAMMES?

- **Continuity:** this programme has been followed-up with a new round of funding from the same donor which enables us to build on the data, learning and established relationships we have with the women in this intervention.
- **Sustainability:** we are looking to support these women in gaining business licenses to grow their businesses, and build links between women and the traders, local authorities and ministries that can continue to support these micro-business owners in the future.
- **Changing policy:** the campaign was

used for advocating on broader issues in Gaza and in turn contributed to policy change, showing how effective this approach could be for future initiatives. Specifically, our advocacy messaging contributed to a stronger condemnation of the electricity cuts by the international community.

Additionally, the 'de-development' of Gaza is an argument often used by European Union Member States when advocating for longer-term interventions in Gaza.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This small project resulted in some big wins from our advocacy push in Gaza, while also having an impact on the lives of the 160 targeted women and their families. For future programmes, we should consider continuing or doing more of the following:

**Ensuring good monitoring and follow-up:** this is key to measuring impact, and requires sufficient planning, resources and time to be effective.

**Celebrating the small successes:** Despite this being a small-scale intervention, the impact it has had on the women and their families, as well as the advocacy impact it brought, is well worth celebrating.

**Establishing good collaboration between teams:** A good working relationship with the technical team

supporting the beneficiaries and gathering the data, and a common understanding of your advocacy messages, is key to making the advocacy campaign as effective as possible.

**Being realistic:** Your advocacy messages need to be credible to be effective, and it is therefore important to work with the technical team to manage expectations and set a realistic target for your campaign.

**Supporting women:** this should be done in even the smallest interventions, as this can have great impact on the situation of both women and their families. It can also lead to changes in perception of women's role in society, as was the case in this intervention where the women reported increased trust and respect from male traders.

## APPLICABILITY

Although Gaza is a very particular context, an income generating activity programme targeting women is relevant in all contexts where women's access to food is limited due to a lack of access to markets and/or resources.

The learning related to linking an advocacy campaign to a specific intervention is applicable to any context where advocating on broader issues can be helped by substantiating those messages with real-life examples from our programming.