



USING THE BUSINESS SHUTTLE APPROACH TO IMPROVE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN GAZA

LEARNING REVIEW 2018

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AN OVERVIEW OF THE ECONOMIC SITUATION FOR WOMEN IN GAZA

The dramatic deterioration of the humanitarian situation that occurred in the Gaza Strip throughout 2018 has carried over into 2019. In 2019, the blockade imposed on Gaza enters its 12th year, restricting the movements of people and goods in-and-out of the Strip. Recently, the challenges relating to availability and access of supplies in the Gazan markets have worsened. The lack of access to goods and limited movement of people have significantly affected business and economic activities, particularly for small and micro businesses. These restrictions have resulted in making 72 per cent of Gazans food insecure and 40 per

cent live below the poverty line. The unemployment rate exceeds 60 per cent and approximately 80 per cent of the population in Gaza depend on international aid.¹

Women (49 per cent of Gaza's population) are particularly impacted by the access restrictions and deteriorating social and economic conditions. They experience greater difficulties entering and remaining in the job market.² In fact, only one in fifteen women of working age in Gaza are employed.³ In addition, women experience restrictive regulations based on discriminatory provisions related to marriage, divorce, and child custody which further reduce their rights. Many women are forced to marry at a very early

age (approximately 40 per cent of women in the Gaza Governorate are married before 18)⁴ and as a result often abandon their education before men. In addition, legal counselling and assistance for women regarding residency, inheritance, property rights and access to humanitarian assistance is limited or absent.

THE BUSINESS SHUTTLE APPROACH

On this premise, Action Against Hunger developed the Life Palestine programme, a programme with the main objective to enhance the socioeconomic inclusion of the most vulnerable communities in the Gaza Strip. One component of this programme, called the Business

1 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Occupied Palestinian Territories. OCHA, 2018.

2 Gisha, 2018.

3 Unemployment in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, International Labour Organisation, 2018.

4 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017.

Shuttle,⁵ has a specific focus on supporting vulnerable Gazans (particularly women and youth) through livelihoods initiatives and income generating activities. The aim of the Business Shuttle approach is to support the development of capacity and opportunities for these socioeconomically vulnerable groups to develop innovative business ideas, thereby promoting increased employment and social integration. More specifically, Action Against Hunger has supported 479 female heads of households in the past three years by providing them with training on micro-entrepreneurship and mentoring support to establish their own businesses. In conjunction with financial literacy and post-training support activities, this has allowed these households to develop, diversify and reactivate a sustainable source of income.

KEY LEARNING FROM THE BUSINESS SHUTTLES

The primary aim of the Business Shuttle is the person's individual development. It aims to create personal transformation that leads to empowerment, by comprehensively working with the person on an individual level and through teamwork. It is widely accepted that traditional technical business training programmes are no longer suitable to face the ever-increasing complexity of markets and employment-related social problems. Unlike those, the Business Shuttle methodology tackles not only the

development of technical skills but also aims to develop participants' soft skills. For example, there is a strong emphasis on building teamwork by generating synergies and linkages among participants, with the assumption that increased cooperation will increase the chances of business success. Also, the design of a business plan is no longer the sole objective of the Business Shuttle coaching. Other tools and techniques such as creative thinking, the "lean start-up" methodology to test a new business idea, and using "strategic trees" to visualise a business model are included to comprehensively build the individual's capacity to develop enterprises that are financially sustainable.

Piloting the Business Shuttle at a small-scale allowed for the incorporation of new tools and methodologies for developing income generation activities and managing business risk. Through the shuttle approach, Business Shuttle staff have also been exposed to new training and coaching methods that give participants a chance to learn first-hand how to manage business-related risks. The combination of soft skills, technical knowledge and individual feedback was very well received by the participants and produced measurable results in terms of confidence and teamwork. The longer duration and higher intensity of the Business Shuttle increased the coach's knowledge of individual participants, therefore enabling more tailored advice.

Importantly, an interesting learning from this methodology was about the importance of the creative process for generating successful business ideas. This focus on the element of creativity addressed the need for innovative income generating activities in Gaza that account for the many contextual constraints faced by participants. The idea that participants worked first on the design of a prototype and then on a pilot led to successful financing according to the real needs of businesses at each stage of their development.

CHALLENGES: UNDERSTANDING MASCULINITIES IN GAZA

One challenge that Action Against Hunger has faced in the past is gender-dynamic related tension in households where the organisation has supported female breadwinners through income generating activities. In the Gaza Strip, war, occupation and blockade has made the shift of traditional gender norms and roles difficult, if not impossible. These contextual factors are actually reinforcing repressive gender roles and societal norms. For men, this has resulted in "thwarted masculinities", or "frustrated masculinities." That is, an inability to fulfil ones' gender roles. As a result, this leads to feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and in some cases, it can lead to increased gender-based violence (GBV) which is caused by an effort to reassert patriarchal

⁵ This approach builds on previous approaches used by Action Against Hunger Spain in other countries. To read more about the Employment Shuttle approach used in Georgia, see page 16 of the 2017 Learning Review: https://www.actionagainsthunger.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/learningreview_2017.pdf

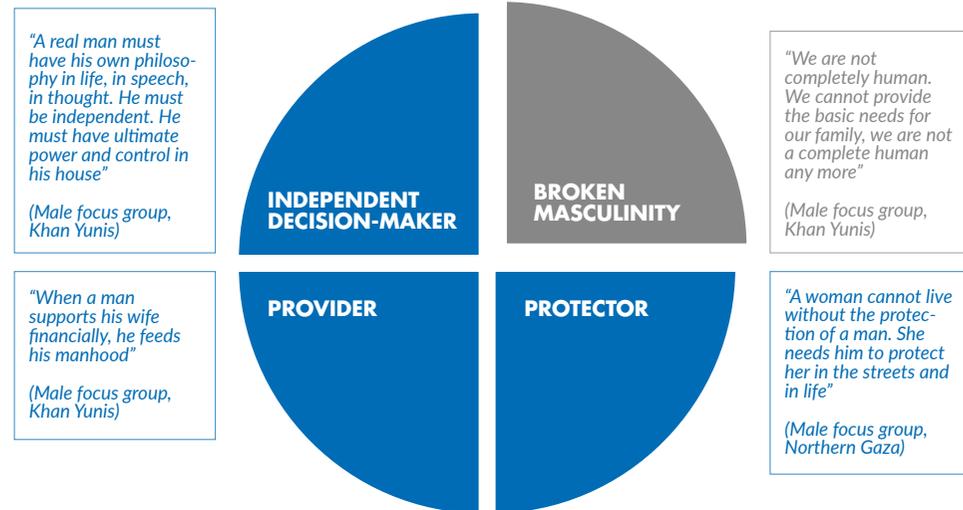
control over the households. For a programme aimed at increasing the economic power of women, this is a major challenge.

To address this challenge, the Action Against Hunger's Life Palestine programme (of which the Business Shuttle is a component), also undertook research aimed at better understanding men and masculinities in the Gaza Strip. This is reflective of a global trend where gender is increasingly understood in terms of identity. There is growing recognition of the importance of engaging men and masculinities in tackling gender inequalities and also the importance of context-specific and locally informed evidence-based policy and programming. As a result, Action Against Hunger, together with an external consultant, conducted a study on Masculine Identities in the Gaza Strip, with the aim to further enrich our work on gender equality. This study provided important contextual nuances, which ultimately can lead to more sustainable and long-term change from a normative standpoint. The graph (right) explains the analytical framework for this study.

FUTURE PROGRAMMATIC APPROACHES

The Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt) country strategy established the incorporation of the Business Shuttle methodology's approaches with an improved understanding of New Masculinities into future projects. The results of the study did not result in shifting away from supporting women run enterprises. It did, however, strengthen our understanding of power structures at the household level and provided key findings to ensure a more gender-sensitive approach when addressing communities, households and implementing organisations.

In 2019, our employment training activities will be implemented through an improved Business Shuttle methodology to increase the employability of participants by promoting personal development and empowerment. Simultaneously, the oPt country office is identifying key recommendations to apply to future programmes based on outcomes from the Masculinity Study such as: 1) piloting marriage contract negotiations for young female graduates, 2) running training sessions on New Masculinities for young participants in the Business and Employment Shuttles and, 3) testing new gender-sensitive approaches when developing Social Businesses models.



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