



Fact Sheet on

Enhanced Market Share of Urban Women Agripreneurs Opportunities, Barriers and Way Forward



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1- Introduction

The economic crisis in Palestine in general and In Gaza strip in particular caused significant deterioration in all economic sectors and resulted in high rate of unemployment. The ability of economic sectors to offer jobs is limited. This has affected all job seekers but most particularly women. About One Fourth of the participants in the labour force in Palestine are unemployed in the Second quarter of 2022¹ Largely due to the blockade, poverty, high unemployment rates and other factors, nearly 80 per cent of Gazans now rely on humanitarian assistance. More than half of Gaza's just over 2 million people live in poverty, and nearly 80 per cent of the youth are unemployed². Unemployment in Gaza is still much higher among women than among men, reaching 65.1% in the second quarter of 2022, compared to 65.6% in the previous quarter and 64% in the second quarter of 2021¹.

The number of females in Palestine reached 2.63 million out of the total estimated population in mid-2022, comprising a percentage of 49% of the total Palestinian population. Women headed about 12% of households in Palestine (12% in the West Bank and 11% in Gaza Strip in 2021³). Still the economic participation of women in economic sectors are limited. Due to wide range of barriers women are not given the chance to actively participate in work forces. The formal The PCBS data reports that only 1.4% of the female workforce is employed in the agriculture, fishing, and forestry sector, compared to 7.9% of the male workforce employed in this sector.⁴The Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture claims that 20 percent of 66,000 farmers in Gaza are women who either own farms or work as farm employees.

Women economic engagement is essential not only to enhance economic development but also to ensure economic and social empowerment⁶ of women. In particular women play significant role along food production value chain in Palestine as they play a prominent role in the agricultural sector and contribute to achieving one of main pillar of food sovereignty, which focuses on fulfilling people's food needs through local production. Women participation in food production and processing faces less cultural barriers and allows for enhanced economic participation of women in work force. No accurate or reliable statistics were found about the number of women-led agri-enterprises; this is because a great portion of small firms operate within the informal sector and are not officially registered.

¹ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), Press Release on the Results of the Labour Force Survey 2022.

² OCHA, 2022, Fifteen years of the blockade of the Gaza Strip.

³ PCBS | H.E. Dr. Awad, Highlights the Reality of the Palestinian Women on the Eve of International Women's Day, 08/03/2022

⁴ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. (13 Feb 2020.) "Labour Force Survey: (October-December, 2019) Round (Q4/2019). Press Report on the Labour Force Survey Results." Ramallah -Palestine.

http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_13-2-2020-LF4th-en.pdf

⁵ Economic Development is programs, policies or activities that seek to improve the economic well-being and quality of life for a community.

⁶ Process by which women gain power and control over their own lives and acquire the ability to make strategic choices.

However, it has been established that approximately 1,000 women-led agri-enterprises are located in the Gaza Strip, representing a large cross-section of the country's food system⁷. Other estimates indicated that there is around 2,000 to 2,500 registered and unregistered women-led agri-enterprises. Indeed, these women-led farms and agri-enterprises maintain seed banks of locally cultivated crops and produce a great diversity of foodstuffs - fresh vegetables and fruit, herbs, salted fish, poultry, eggs, mushrooms, cheeses, olive oil, honey and traditional ingredients such as ajweh (date paste), maftool (hand rolled couscous), stevia sweeter, jam and pickles. It has been found that 50% of Gaza agri business is shouldered by women⁸.

This factsheet aims at describing major opportunities to enhance their role in the sectors, defining major barriers that limits urban women Agripreneurs economic to access higher market share and the needed intervention strategy to overcome these barriers. These are identified through desk review of related studies and statistics and qualitative primary data collected through FGD with urban women Agripreneurs.

2- Market Opportunities

Understanding the market system potentials for urban women Agripreneurs economic engagement is the key determinant of the success of any economic empowerment intervention. The design of economic empowerment program should be based on an existing market opportunities of the women led enterprises. Women economic engagement can be only guaranteed when the market system allows for sustainable higher share in food production system along value chains.

Major women opportunities for enhanced women market share as Agripreneurs are presented in this section of the fact sheet.

2.1- Importation substitution

Palestinian economy has the potential to improve the food production using local resources and developing the economic engagement of unemployed people including vulnerable groups women and youth. In 2021, Palestine imports live animal and food items for a value of 1958.93 M US\$⁹. In Gaza, despite of the potential to locally produce some food items, major portion of food is imported. For example Gaza imports around 70 percent of the dairy products sold in its markets, the vast majority from Israel, costing approximately \$8m every month¹⁰. Items that has sustainable and growing demand presents significant opportunity for agri entrepreneurs to substitute the imported food items. The availability of natural resources and the technical and economic viability to produce main food items.

⁷ [Rebuilding Women Owned Farms in Gaza | Sustain](#)

⁸ [WL40_11_the_role_of_women.pdf \(ciheam.org\)](#)

⁹ Trading economic cited from: <https://tradingeconomics.com/palestine/imports-by-category>

¹⁰ Small Enterprise Center Association, "The Scale of Production of Plain Yoghurt, Flavored Yoghurt and Feta Cheese in the Gaza Strip", March 2016.

This implies on wide range of food items that requires not only production of the raw material but also processing. Women contribution to the processing sector is culturally acknowledged and presents significant opportunity for economic engagement of women through agripreneurs.



2.2-Horizontal integration

Major challenge of women agribrenuers Palestine is the limited size of their enterprises. The smallness of the enterprises limits the entrepreneurs capacities to invest in the development of the technical, economic or marketing performance. Therefore, small scale producers usually have weak market completion capacities. Economy of scale¹¹ serves large scale production units as they can purchase bulk inputs for cheaper prices, invest in improving technical efficiency of the production system, reduce the production costs and have improved marketing channels. Participants of women Agripreneurs revealed the relevance of the economy of scale limiting the ability of women to compete in the market. Women stated that their production size cannot compensate the needed cost to improve their production and marketing approaches. Women tend to market their products through direct channels with limited outreach either through direct marketing to the end consumers or through marketing agents who collect the production from small scale producers. Horizontal integration of women led agricultural enterprises can achieve improved economy of scale through several forms of horizontal integration. Horizontal integration means to organize a group of small scale producers to work together in certain activities achieving improved economy of scale. Platforms, clusters, producers organizations and cooperatives are among the several forms of horizontal integration. The selection of the optimal model depends on the context and the needs of the participating production units.

Horizontal integration allows for participating small scale producers to exchange knowledge, experiences and jointly invest in improving their production and marketing efficiency. Collective purchase of inputs and selling of products are among the wide ranging benefits of horizontal integration.

¹¹ Economies of scale refer to the cost advantage experienced by a firm when it increases its level of output. The advantage arises due to the inverse relationship between the per-unit fixed cost and the quantity produced. The greater the quantity of output produced, the lower the per-unit fixed cost.



2.3- Improved production and marketing capacities of small scale producers

Major complain of women participated in the FGD was related to the limited ability to expand their market share. Their products hardly can compete with imported products or products that are produced by innovative technology. Traditional production systems and limited products varieties can limit the ability of women agripreneurs competing in the local market. Improved production techniques and innovative products profiles can ensure improved market share. The current production technology, packaging methods and marketing approaches are traditional. This reveals the need to think about improvement of relative advantage of the locally produced products. The relative advantage can be improvement of quality of products, development of innovative packaging methods, utilizing cost saving production technology and/or different supply time to meet low supply from other market competitors.

The improvement of the technology of production and working on improved marketing approaches can integrate wide range of ideas. This should be based on value chain specific analyses that explore the potential to improve the comparative advantage of the traditional products. It is essential to technically assess the current production system from technical, economic and marketing perspectives and define the gaps and opportunities of applying innovative approaches to ensure improved market competition. The relative advantage can be achieved through innovative production techniques that save production costs, supply new product that have good demand in the market, or For example, the freezing and primary processing of fresh vegetables and fruits and supplying them out of the season can lower the production costs and improve market share for small scale producers.

Women in FGDs has also complained about the lack of specialized and safe channels for women entrepreneurs› products. the Allocation of safe spaces for women entrepreneurs products at the public markets for free or at least subsidized fees can help them to ensure improved market share.



2.4-Solidarity marketing

The Palestinian cause and its negative implications on women is internationally recognized. This opens the horizon for international solidarity marketing. This option is however challenged by export associated problems including the Israeli restrictions and lack of scale to invest in export. Development of National solidarity marketing labels that serves women entrepreneurs and organize collective action to export their products under the solidarity labeling should help supporting the economic success of their small businesses. Additionally, coordination with National and International agencies distributing food aid to vulnerable families in Gaza strip can be good option to support women agripreneurs. GUPAP was successful to coordinate several institutions to purchase the locally produced products to be distributed to vulnerable families in Gaza strip.



2.5-Climate adaptive production technology

Climate Change has caused observed and proven climate related impacts and vulnerabilities on Palestinian farming especially in terms of the decrease in freshwater availability, high levels of evaporation, shortages in sufficient supply of reliable and safe water for cropping and livestock rearing, shifted and shortened agriculture season, change in cropping pattern, increased pests/pathogens, and deteriorated animal health and production. Repeated climate shocks undermine vulnerable smallholders' capacity to cope and adapt to a changing climate and struggle to maintain their agriculture resilience.

FGD with women agripreneurs revealed the technical challenges they face as a result of the adverse impact of climate change. The agricultural production system in Palestine is significantly negatively affected by the climate change resulting in increasing the plant and animal diseases, increasing the production costs, increasing the risk of losing production assets, changing the cropping calendar and decrease the availability of water. These effects leads to significant losses of farming activities and decrease farming income and affects the economic success of agripreneurs.

Climate change adaptation is not only an opportunity to develop the urban women agripreneurs but it is a necessity to ensure the sustainability of agricultural production system. Several climate adaptation production techniques were introduced in the recent years. The climate change adaptation varies to include wide range of modalities. Improvement of climate adaptive agricultural farm practices and management, introduction of water saving production technology (hydroponics farming as example), improvement of weather data and warning systems, development of extension programing and capacities of extension practitioners, and investment in climate adaptive farm assets (such as water storing facilities, improved design greenhouse and animal shelters) are among the major climate change adaptation interventions that can help small scale producers to overcome the adverse climate change impact.



2.6-Green economy production modalities

Agricultural production systems are challenged by the high cost of energy and the conventional production system that increase the consumption of natural resources management. It additionally produces huge amount of solid waste. This contribute to the decrease of the farming income in addition to the environmental negative impact on the ecosystem. The problem here presents a potential for introduction/scaling up green economy production modalities that use the energy and natural resources efficiently and can recycle the produced solid waste as cheap raw material. Such opportunity can support solving the environmental hazards and enhance the economic resilience of small scale producers including women agripreneurs.

Among the most popular and successful green economy production modalities in agricultural sectors is the use of alternative sustainable energy in agricultural production and processing activities and the

utilization of organic waste of agricultural activities produce compost. Safe farming production, labeling and marketing is also is a good model of green economy business models.

3- Barriers to change and recommended interventions

The above described challenges and the responsive opportunities show the potential of change. As described, the problem reflect the potential for positive change. The questions remains, if the opportunity exist, why change is not occurring. This indicates the importance to understand major barriers of change as basis to design responsive interventions to overcome the barriers. This can ensure sustainable change where change can only be facilitated if the system structural barriers are overcome. The barriers were defined based on desk review of several related studies on market system analyses of Gaza agricultural products and entrepreneurship ecosystem in Palestine as well as the primary data collected through FGD with women entrepreneurs and key experts.

The barriers can be categorized into three pillars that reflect the market system. Following is presentation of the barriers under each pillar. The presented barriers are general ones that are relevant to most of the small scale producers of agricultural products. However, the analyses of specific agricultural value chain may reflect the level of relevance of certain barrier to the analyzed value chain. The first pillar represent the market system actors to overcome with market system related barriers that limits the economic attractiveness of creating business linkages with women agripreneurs. The second pillar focus mainly on women agripreneurs to overcome lacking capacities to capture the existing market opportunities. The third pillar focuses on the ecosystem which deals with barriers in the institutional settings, policies, cultural and social barriers and support services provided to the women agripreneurs.

The interventions under each pillar of the three should not stand alone as the integration with the other two pillars is essential to ensure the positive change is achieved. The market actors will be ready to work with women agripreneurs when their capacities are built and when the supporting ecosystem is enhanced.

3.1-Market system dynamic

Market dynamic in agricultural sector is not supporting the economic engagement of women agripreneurs. As stated by them in FGD they face several challenges limiting their ability to compete with other market actors. For large scale producers, processors and services provider, working with large scale actors is easier and more cost efficient. The ability of small scale producers to initiate business linkages with all actors along the value chain is limited. For part because of their limited capacities that will be described under the second pillar but also because of the lack of economic attractiveness of their products/ services to other actors along the value chain. For example, large scale processing facility may not see the economic attractiveness working with small scale supplier of raw agricultural product (milk for example)

as this would involve higher cost and risk. The production system and the business model may support the work with large scale actors. The need to work with different market actors to change their production system and business plan to enhance the economic attractiveness of working with small scale producers can support the economic engagement of women agripreneurs. For example supporting the private sector to introduce production technology that can utilize the inputs of small scale market actors. Set of interventions can be made overcome the market system related barriers. All of them should be designed to work with other market actors including large scale producers, food processing, post harvesting services providers. Input suppliers, traders along the supply chain. Their capacities can be improved to enhance the economic attractiveness of establishing business linkages with women agripreneurs.

The responsive interventions can be designed to improve the market system for a selected value chain that have greater potential for women agripreneurs. The selection of value chain should consider the presence of economic opportunity of women agripreneurs and the feasibility of their economic integration. The market opportunities within the selected value chain and the barriers that shrinking the market share of women entrepreneurs can then be explored through gendered market system analysis. Gendered market system analyses focus on how to expand women role along the value chains, explore barriers that limits women improved market share and support the designing responsive intervention strategies that overcome the barriers and ensure positive structural change in the market dynamics.

Under the first pillar Build capacities of market actors, namely traders, food processing units, input suppliers, large scale producers and services providers can be built through provision of needed knowledge, skills, financial services and introduction of innovative technologies and new markets. The interventions can also include facilitation of market linkages with women agripreneurs and supporting market actors' access to support functions (R&D, infrastructure, info, technologies, business development institutions, market development institutions, support services, etc..).



3.2-Capacities of entrepreneurs

The interventions under such pillar aims at filling the gap of knowledge and skills that limits the women agripreneurs to capture the existing market opportunities along the value chain of their products. The capacities gap of women was reflected through FGD as they were not aware of possible potentials to improve their market share, do not have the skills or the financial means to enhance the production quality and marketability. The work with other market actors can be fruitful only when the capacities of women entrepreneurs can meet their expectation to reach win-win situation that serves improved economic return for both the market actors and women agripreneurs.

To ensure such matching between the two parties, the interventions under the second pillar focuses mainly on the enhancement of capacities of women agripreneurs to capture, benefit from opportunities,

and improve their positions within improved market systems. Different types of barriers can be identified under the selected value chains including the small scale fragmented production, lacking knowledge and experiences in technical, managerial and marketing skills and limited capacities to establish win-win business linkages. Responsive interventions can be designed to respond the specific barrier of the selected value chain but may include enhancement of the access to integrated resources and support services to promote entrepreneurship market contribution through networking with support services, provision of training and market facilitation.



3.3-Enabling environment

To ensure integrated effective sustainable positive change, intervention strategy need to consider overcoming the gaps in the con system that affects the performance of market actors benefiting from market opportunities. The challenges stated by women in FGDs reflected several gaps in the ecosystem that limits the economic success of their enterprises.

Barriers under this pillar include side ranging and diversified issues such as the weak institutional settings and capacities of all supporting services such as financial institutions, business and market development institutions, extension services and enabling organizations. Working on building the capacities of those institutions and enhancement of networking with women entrepreneurs should promote their economic success. Policies and regulations were among the main challenges stated by women agripreneurs in FGD. Gaps related to protection of the local products and reduction of fees and customs on imported raw material are of major concern for small scale producers. Advocacy towards policy change is essential to support an enabling environment for women agripreneurs.

Women agripreneurs also suffers of unsupportive consumption norms limiting local products' share in the market. Interventions under this pillar need to consider market facilitation and campaigning to enhance consumer confidence; capacity building on standards and marketing campaigns. Development and enforcement of national standards for locally produced products are also essential to ensure the improvement of the quality and the ability to compete the imported products. Ministry of National economy has worked with women agripreneurs to register their products and develop labeling system to enhance the marketability of their products. This was appreciated by women entrepreneurs as they stated the positive impact on the marketability of their products. Last but not least, women are disadvantaged by the cultural settings that limits their ability to be economically engaged. The cultural settings in the Palestinian communities puts several types of restrictions on women rights and limits their economic participation¹². The culture defines certain roles for women and men. Women acknowledged roles along the agricultural sector value chains are limited and thus the ability of women to expand their market share is negatively affected. Awareness programming to support women role in the economic activities is vital to achieve the wished positive change.

¹² Schuster, R., et al, (2019), Measuring community norms around women's empowerment in the West Bank: Opportunities and challenges of a novel approach using cultural consensus. *SSM - Population Health*, Volume 9.



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