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COMMUNITY-LED APPROACHES TO REALIZE THE RIGHT TO FOOD AND ENHANCE RESILIENCE OF THE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM IN CRISIS IN GAZA, PALESTINE

About GUPAP and UWAF

The Gaza Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Platform (GUPAP) was initiated in 2013 as a participatory platform to bring together diverse agricultural actors and support the resilience of the local food system. GUPAP believes that the community should drive change, and therefore, facilitated the formation of the Urban Women Agripreneurs Forum (UWAF) in 2019. UWAF serves as an informal, independent community space for women-led Micro-Small Enterprises (MSEs) to build socio-economic resilience, share knowledge, advocate for their right to food and related human rights, and influence policies. UWAF has reached 500 women agripreneurs and represents the voices of 3,000 vulnerable women agripreneurs facing challenges in a fragile social, political, and economic environment due to a protracted humanitarian crisis. UWAF is divided into three main groups (Plant Production, Animal Production, and Food Processing) and 12 technical sub-groups.



Gaza's Local Food System

Despite Gaza's heavy reliance on food aid, with 80% of the population dependent on it according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), small-scale farms and urban agriculture thrive due to the local population's struggle for their right to food, food resilience and a robust local food system. Frequent disruptions to aid supplies and harsh conditions imposed by the blockade drive the community to seek self-sufficiency and reduce dependence on external sources. Culturally ingrained agricultural practices, passed down through generations, empower families to grow their own food, ensuring access to fresh, nutritious produce. Innovative methods like



rooftop gardening and hydroponics maximize limited space, providing essential food security and economic opportunities amidst high unemployment. Markets and informal trade networks play crucial roles in distributing food, while community-driven and participatory initiatives are indispensable in supporting the right to food for the local population.

Community-led Solidarity Marketing in Crisis

One such initiative is GUPAP and UWAF's Community-Led Solidarity Marketing in Crisis (CLSM) initiative, developed in 2022 with the slogan "From Women Producers to Poor Families." This initiative aims to enhance the resilience of women agripreneurs in the Gaza Strip while supporting marginalized, poor, and affected families. It achieves this by marketing a diverse range of locally produced essential food items from women-led Micro Small Enterprises (MSEs), ensuring their safety and nutritional value, and delivering them to needy families in collaboration with local women's NGOs and protection centers in the Gaza Strip.

The CLSM initiative has contributed to reducing malnutrition. Through five cycles of CLSM, around 18 tons of local agricultural products, including fresh and processed foods, were produced, purchased, and delivered to 1,425 households (7,100 individuals) from marginalized communities throughout the Gaza Strip. These households include those with no source of income, breadwinner women, children, persons with disabilities, older adults, and women victims of gender-based violence. Parallely, the initiative has increased the resilience and productivity of 200 women-led SMEs.

"Urban women agripreneurs are struggling to survive their displaced families, their family farming SMEs and resilience of local food system in crisis, at same time we continue our advocacy for right to food and nutrition during ongoing aggressive war in Gaza. I do believe that Gaza needs more than humanitarian aid"

Alaa Abu Jayab, GUPAP

Israeli Invasion - GUPAP and UWAF's Right to Food Actions

In the face of recent grave human suffering, death, and trauma, the UN's most recent food-security analysis has reclassified the situation as an imminent famine, with 1.1 million people, half of Gaza's population, facing catastrophic food insecurity. Amid these challenges, GUPAP and UWAF members have been forced to evacuate and displaced multiple times and have prioritized securing water, food, clothing, hygiene materials, and other necessities. They have acted as a local community network to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid, especially in the Middle Area and the South, collaborating with local and international NGOs. Additionally, GUPAP and UWAF members have facilitated two community-led kitchens at two shelter houses, each serving around 250 individuals, with a focus on women and children. UWAF members have also contributed to securing available food items for these displaced families.

Following the recent initial participatory rapid assessment of the needs and damage of women-led MSEs, it was found that 20% of women-led MSEs in plant production and food processing are still operating, albeit with limited capacity. GUPAP and UWAF plan a community-led solidarity marketing campaign targeting these functioning women-led MSEs with the slogan "From Women Agripreneurs Producers to Displaced Women Agripreneurs." The campaign aims to direct the products of these MSEs, individually or collectively, toward 300 women agripreneurs, their family members, and other women and children who have been displaced and are not receiving assistance from international NGOs. This will further enhance the social solidarity network of UWAF in times of crisis and a step toward rebuilding food resilience in Gaza.