



Investing in rural people

A photograph of an agricultural field on a hillside. The field is filled with rows of young plants, likely tomatoes, growing in dark soil. Two workers are visible: one in the foreground on the left, wearing a pink headscarf and dark clothing, and another in the middle ground on the right, wearing a dark shirt and pants, working with a tool. The field is bordered by a chain-link fence. In the background, there are more trees and a large, multi-story building under construction or renovation, set against a backdrop of mountains under a cloudy sky.

JORDAN Rural Economic Growth and Employment Project



JEDCO

المؤسسة الأردنية لتطوير المشاريع الاقتصادية
Jordan Enterprise Development Corporation



Kingdom of the Netherlands

These photographs and stories encapsulate the essence of the Rural Economic Growth and Employment Project (REGEP) as seen through the eyes of its participants. This photobook is a window into how the initiative, funded by IFAD in collaboration with the Dutch government, has changed people's lives.

Small-scale farmers produce at least a third of the world's food but often face barriers to market access services, finance and knowledge. They are especially susceptible to the effects of climate change and other shocks. Since its inception in 2016, the project has impacted around 18,000 project participants with activities targeting the development of value chains, access to finance, capacity-building, and training farmers in modern agricultural techniques.

The project has also enabled farmers to adopt international quality standards, provided entrepreneurial grants, and addressed water scarcity and climate change issues, for example through maintenance of irrigation systems and cisterns.

Furthermore, the project has facilitated the formation of savings and credit groups, enabling farmers to invest in their businesses and grow their enterprises. This has resulted in the creation of approximately 6,000 new job opportunities.

The project also supported the improvement of product packaging, which played a pivotal role in marketing and pricing. The incorporation of barcodes and QR codes has enhanced consumer trust, and enabled producers to stay competitive in markets.

In the second phase of the project, deliberate efforts were made to ensure that Syrian refugees made up at least 15 per cent of project participants, reaffirming IFAD's commitment to reaching the most vulnerable and in need, fostering inclusivity and providing financial and capacity-building services.

REGEP has significantly contributed to achieving food security, economic development, and addressing unemployment and poverty in Jordan. The success is a testament to the results that can be achieved by investing in rural people, to create job opportunities and build the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.





Asmaa Weshah, 45

Asmaa Weshah wanted to be a nutritionist in her city Al Salt, in the Balqa region, northwest of Amman, the capital of Jordan. For a long time, she looked for job opportunities, but they were not easy to find. As someone who had struggled with gluten intolerance for years, she decided to take classes in home food manufacturing and how to make gluten-free jam.

A mother of four, in 2016 she embarked on a journey when she launched her gluten-free products venture. She got a significant boost when she secured an innovation grant through the REGEP project, which enabled her to enhance her equipment and expand her product range. Asmaa now boasts an impressive lineup of over 18 gluten-free items, including jams, *makdous*, olives and thyme-based products. These goods are readily accessible to customers throughout Jordan via her online store, as well as at local bazaars and supermarkets.

Asmaa shared some lessons from her entrepreneurial journey: “When I scoured the market for gluten-free products, I was disappointed by the limited options and high prices. This inspired me to launch my initiative, not only for my own benefit but also to assist others facing the same dietary challenges.”

Today, her team comprises five full-time employees and ten part-time workers, hailing not only from Jordan but also from Syria and Egypt. The entrepreneurship grant she received played a crucial role in acquiring machinery that has significantly improved her production efficiency, including the acquisition of a packaging machine.





“I found that gluten-free products are very expensive. They were also only available in big malls in Amman.”

Omar Ibrahim Farhan Al-Azaam, 62

In Irbid governorate, northern Jordan, Omar Al-Azaam has been actively involved in farmer field schools (FFS), where he has received extensive training and participated in various visits by agricultural specialists over the past year. The school taught him how to combat the diseases that had been affecting his almond trees.

Thanks to the school, he successfully conquered the disease and developed effective strategies to manage it. “Before that, we did not know the best time to spray the trees, so most of them got infected. This year, after we followed the right practices to use the pesticides, the trees did not get infected with any diseases.”

Reflecting on his extensive farming experience spanning 35 years, Omar said, “These almond trees are exceptionally rare and among the best in the country. As I see the positive results of our efforts and what I learnt from the farmer field school, I am now planning to apply for a grant this year through the REGEP project to further expand my business. This success in overcoming the diseases affecting my almond trees has inspired me to take this step forward.”





“For three years, we had suffered with a pest infection. The trees would produce less than half a kilo.”

Huda Muhammad Walid Al-Bundaqji, 37

Huda is a former accountant and a mother of three. She resides in Atamat within the Jerash governorate in the north of Jordan. A few years ago, she quit her job to focus on her entrepreneurial venture which centres around hydroponic farming. Collaborating closely with her husband, Amru Qarqoud, she started her business on the rooftop of her home with just two units. Through participation in REGEP's rural finance component, she got a low-interest loan of JOD 2,500 (US\$3,500). As a result, she was able to expand by investing in essential equipment, including an irrigation system and seeds.

Huda shared her concerns about water scarcity in Jordan. As it poses a significant challenge, hydroponic farming becomes a viable solution. It not only enhances the quality of production but also yields a much larger quantity compared to traditional farming methods.

“There are some risks but they all can be overcome through hard work and good understanding of the method. I am not an agricultural engineer, so when I face any issues I consult experts.” Her business has thrived. “Lettuce is easy to market because restaurants and sandwich shops always need to buy it,” she said.

“Since expanding my project, my income has doubled, greatly assisting my family and me in achieving financial stability.”





Huda Balasiya, 49

Huda lives in Al-Baraktain neighborhood in Jerash, and is a notable REGEF project participant. Huda's primary endeavour centres around honey production, but her vision extends beyond that. She decided to broaden the scope of her business by incorporating the drying of various fruits, including citrus, apples, apricots, oranges and grapes.

With a grant she received from REGEF, Huda invested in modern equipment, including a specialized drying device. This machine significantly streamlines the drying process, saving valuable time, while also ensuring the quality of her products. Additionally, she bought an air extraction device to prolong the shelf life of her products.

Huda's distribution channels span her personal network, and her products are also prominently featured in the Bait Al Asilat tourist resort showroom, where they gain visibility and attract a broader clientele.







Israa Al-Zoubi, 36

Israa is a mother of four and lives in Deira village in the Balqa region. She received an agribusiness grant of JOD 1,400 (US\$2,000) from REGEF.

She does not use pesticides or chemicals as she wants her product to be completely organic and healthy. “We had it examined at the Royal Scientific Society and received certification.”

Israa markets her thyme to local communities through Instagram and Facebook, and also among tourist groups that she got to know about through the project. “The project invites us to bazaars every now and then, in malls, hotels or parks,” she added.

“I received the grant along with some training and mentoring from the project. Before the project, I didn’t have a job, but now I have my own business and planted 6,000 seedlings of thyme in greenhouses.”



Mukhtar Awad Hassan Khalifa, 67

Mukhtar is from Al- Mazza village in Al Mafraq city where he heads the Al-Mazza Cooperative NGO. A key feature of REGEP is the implementation of farmer field schools, which focus on building the capacity of small-scale farmers in innovative and sustainable farming techniques. Mukhtar volunteered his greenhouse where he grows thyme to the project for the integrated pest management and farmer field school activities.

Through the Thyme school in Al Mafraq city, 17 project participants were trained in organic farming, from planting to marketing. This approach not only has reduced waste in production inputs but has also increased productivity and improved the quality of products.

“The last workshop was on how to make organic fertilizer from greenhouse waste so that we don’t need to buy fertilizer and are able to achieve self-sufficiency.”

“Since the COVID crisis, I started thinking about agriculture to achieve self-sufficiency for my household and the local community.”










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