



EUROMED Invest Academy Barcelona

**“Barcelona Declaration+20, Trade and
Investment for a Mediterranean of shared
prosperity”**

**Fostering Women Entrepreneurs in the Middle East
2012-2014**

**Success Story of the Lebanese women
Entrepreneurs**

Barcelona , 25-11-2015



The Bekaa Valley is one of the most under served communities in Lebanon, With limited entrepreneurship activity among women in the Middle East, Tomorrow's Youth Organization (TYO) and the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women (CBFW) recognized the immediate need to design and implement a project to strengthen women's role in the region's economies.

In November 2012, Tomorrow's Youth Organization (TYO) and the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women (CBFW) initiated a Programme to support women entrepreneurs in Zahle & Bekaa to increase their confidence, capability and access to financial services. It was a joint effort by TYO and CBFW as well as the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Zahle (CCIAZ) in Lebanon which acted as an incubator. The Programme spans a two-year period from November 2012 to November 2014. 16 months of training, coaching, mentoring and incubation support were delivered to soon-to-be businesswomen of the Bekaa!





Programme Phases:

The Programme was separated into three main Phases: basic business skills training; business coaching and business plan refinement; business incubation and access to financial services. It aimed at increasing women's roles as contributors to the Lebanese economies.





Phase I

During the First Phase TYO-L and in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, Industry & Agriculture of Zahle & Bekaa, have been laying the groundwork for the FWEME project with extensive outreach in the Bekaa Valley. Municipality and community leaders were met from Zahle, Anjar, Bar Elias, Ferzol, etc. We were able to reach almost 600 women in the outreach phase. Beneficiaries were selected from women who already had businesses and those who did not, even though the initial programme design only targeted women with existing businesses

This phase started us off with 47 women who participated in an intensive 4-day Business Training such as basic accounting, marketing, financial management, strategic planning, networking, e-commerce, as well as creativity and innovation and based on that, we selected 10 women to move into Phase 2,



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Phase II

Focused on business coaching, the development of business plans and access to finance. 10 beneficiaries from Lebanon took part in one-on-one coaching sessions as well as training sessions with financial institutions to introduce them to various financing options available to them. Women also received technical assistance and refinement to compile business plans to be evaluated by TYO to appraise and select beneficiaries for Phase III of the Programme.



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Phase III of the Programme :

During this Phase, 5 beneficiaries received high-level support to refine their business plans and access financial opportunities. The Phase provided incubation services such as computers, marketing materials, and legal advice as well as Business English and IT training.

We've observed considerable progress in each of our beneficiary's business plans. Through careful guidance, leadership, and business training women are developing appreciable local recognition.



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Project outcomes

The Programme produced several positive outcomes related to women's entrepreneurship including:

- **Increased confidence and self-esteem:** 100% of the beneficiaries felt that their confidence had increased.
- **Heightened awareness of financial opportunities and risks as well as the willingness, and ability to access financial services:** 96% of the women entrepreneurs said they were more aware of the financial opportunities available to them.
- **Elevated capacity to compile and implement formal business plans and operations:** 100% of the beneficiaries felt that their entrepreneurship skills had improved as a result of the programme.
- **Access to new markets and sales:** 70% of the women entrepreneurs were able to connect to a wider markets or new clients.
- **Greater knowledge of best practices and market dynamics:** 78% of the beneficiaries felt that they had benefited from information sharing with their peers.



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- **Increased access to market data and value chain information:** 75% of the respondents feel that they can now source and acquire the relevant information about markets and value chains in order to inform business decisions and expand their businesses.
- **Elevated women's empowerment:** The women entrepreneurs now better understand the link between economic independence and women's empowerment and expressed a change in their ability to influence their reality, both at home and in the workplace. Furthermore the women entrepreneurs in Lebanon expressed that they had become more engaged in the financial decision-making of the household and the operation of family businesses.
- **Access to larger business networks and mobility:** Psychosocial support to the LEBANESE entrepreneurs enabled them to overcome social and cultural barriers that prevents them from travelling outside of their immediate surroundings.
- **A range of business skills ranging from market research and positioning to conducting contextual analysis:** 74% of the beneficiaries had a greater understanding of market demand in local and international contexts.





Case Study:

It is a quite incredible to watch the growth of the women in the program. In an interview with one of the ladies, she says: “I have always wanted to develop my own school of art “Atmosphere” in the Bekaa Valley. I studied art for 3 years, which I really loved and was able to develop my skills throughout years. Even though I have 20 years of experience, developing and establishing a new project is a really hard task to do on my own. I didn’t know anything about developing a business plan before the training and I was a bit concerned about managing my family and work obligations, however, FWEME trainings and on the one-on-one coaching sessions put me on the right track and helped me to manage my time and pursue my ambitions. As a result, Atmosphere is on the way. Through it I want to create space for talented people to connect. I would like to thank the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Zahle (CCIAZ) in Lebanon and TYO-L for all the assistance and support that it has provided all this period of time.”





Conclusion:

Many women feel they face a unique set of challenges to starting a business. In addition to all of the normal growing pains associated with trying to market their ideas, establish a customer base, and turn a profit, they need to fight a traditional culture that tries to define their roles as limited to the home. The Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Zahle (CCIAZ) in Lebanon has been so proud to watch participants stand up and fight for their dreams and act as models to women in their communities.

