

## Rural women's crucial role in achieving the SDGs

In the Arab region, only 22% participate in the labour force in contrast to 77% of men, making it the highest gender disparity worldwide. At the same time, women are averagely paid only 50-80% of a man's salary, and their unemployment rates are twice as high as men's according to the Human Development Report. While progress towards gender equality has been made, women's economic situation has not improved in recent years, and conditions for rural women are even more challenging.



To shed light on this issue and discuss the most promising solutions, UNDP's regional project "Mosharaka" and UN Women joined the Arab Women Organization (AWO) in holding a side event at the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 62) on 16th of March in the ECOSOC chamber in New York, bringing together Ministers from Arab States and UN officials. Representatives of the governments of Jordan, Tunisia, Mauritania, Palestine and Morocco as well as from the League of Arab States were engaged in different panels during the event.

*"The 2030 agenda and the SDGs offer an opportunity to promote gender equality across all development goals. This ambitious agenda –and its principle of leaving no one behind –can only be achieved if the barriers that hold women back are properly addressed"* stressed Sarah Poole, UNDP's Deputy Director of the regional Bureau for Arab states in her speech.

Together with her, the over 200 participating professionals engaged in flourishing debates and agreed on a joint position that the CSW62 participants from the Arab region represented during the plenary session.

The focus of the event was to highlight the importance of empowering rural women, as it is directly linked with the advancement of several SDGs. For instance, releasing rural women's economic potential in agriculture could provide additional food to 100-150 million people, a tremendous success on the way to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), following FAO estimations.

Mervat Tallawy, head of AWO called for action: *"We need to make it easier for the rural [woman] to be part of programs and policies and to provide her with technical assistance, training and equipment in order to do better and to gain better. [...] Ministries in charge must take into consideration women's needs and role while planning projects; because women work hand in hand with men, but their efforts are unrecognized, unpaid and unregistered [...]."*

With the double burden of being female and living in a rural area comes a longstanding pattern of exclusion that is interwoven with the overall role of women in Arab societies. One of the region-specific difficulties is the low number of women holding political positions, where the lack of influence disadvantages the development of gender-sensitive frameworks that could potentially favour rural women.

As a regional project to foster the empowerment and inclusive participation of women, Mosharaka

has long been working to address these obstacles. In addition, through its country offices, UNDP Arab states works with other UN Agencies, governments and civil society organisations on projects all over the region to enhance women's economic opportunities in rural areas from literacy to new income methods.

On this occasion, Ms. Poole also noted: "We are especially delighted to be partners with AWO in the forthcoming AWO-UNDP Manual of Gender Responsive Implementation of the SDGs, from Strategy to Action. This joint effort is a reflection of our shared view on the centrality of women's role in achieving the SDGs".

This holistic manual (covering the 17 SDGs) is a practical roadmap that explores SDGs targets and indicators from a gender lens. It will provide recommended policies, best practices, monitoring and evaluation tools for decision makers to mainstream the gender element in their national development plans and policies. The manual, which will be both in Arabic and English, will be available by May 2018 at AWO and UNDP's official websites.

## A more resilient future for the village of Ghazze

**Ghazze is a village in the heart of the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon.** The village had 6,000 Lebanese inhabitants prior to the outbreak of the Syria crisis. Over the past five years, it has hosted more than 30,000 displaced fleeing violence and conflict. With such a massive and rapid inflow, the village now hosts almost 2,000 tents distributed in 11 camps. The pressure on Ghazze has been significant, putting a strain on services and the labour market.



*"We found ourselves in the eye of the crisis"* –said Mr. Mohammad Al Majzoub, the Head of the Ghazze Municipality –*"and we struggle every day to address the growing challenges"*.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with the generous support from the OPEC Fund for International Development, in partnership with the Ministry of Environment, has worked hand-in-hand with the municipality to respond to its call for support. **Thanks to this collaboration, Ghazze today has a sanitary landfill for proper waste disposal.**

Just one year ago, due to the absence of functioning municipal solid waste management facilities and the increased waste produced by the growing population, an open unsanitary dumpsite was posing numerous environmental and health threats to Ghazze and its inhabitants. **The dumpsite had reached an area of 7,000 square meters, and housed a volume of 50,000m<sup>3</sup> of mixed municipal waste;** it was contaminating the soil and groundwater particularly given its proximity to the Litani River. In addition, odours, flies, rodents, disease vectors were affecting a nearby informal settlement, constituting a public health threat to refugees.

**The UNDP intervention focused on the rehabilitation of the dumpsite, by constructing a sanitary landfill that could receive the existing and future waste.** The first sanitary cell of the landfill has been already filled and closed, while the second one will meet the waste disposal needs of Ghazze for the coming years, depending on the amount of waste that will be produced. In this regard, the project also undertook awareness raising sessions for citizens on waste reduction and sorting at source through material recycling and reuse, in addition to the supply and distribution of the necessary bins.

*"Although the crisis is still unfolding, we need to be forward-looking and start from now to build a*

*better future for the population of Ghazze, irrespective of whether they are Lebanese citizens or refugees*", stressed Mr. Al Majzoub.

**This intervention can be considered as a tangible example of a resilience approach, which serves both humanitarian and development needs.**

*"On the one hand, closing the unsanitary dumpsite has addressed the urgent health threat to refugees, and on the other hand it has developed a proper waste management facility for the years to come"* said Ms. Celine Moyroud, Country Director of UNDP in Lebanon.

The construction of the sanitary landfill has also created work opportunities.

*"One year ago, this area [the dumpsite] was a pile of garbage. Now, you cannot even smell it"* noted Wissam, a local citizen who was hired by the municipality to control the daily work at the landfill.

And not far from there, Ghofran, a Syrian refugee also pointed out that the living conditions in the informal settlement have improved since the dumpsite odours are dissipated, the number of rodents has decreased and children are not exposed to the garbage anymore.

## Sustainable water solutions strengthen the resilience of Jordanian host communities

With the objective to **strengthen the resilience of the host communities most affected by the impact of the Syria crisis**, the partnership between the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) and UNDP has led to remarkable and tangible results in Jordan. The project, started in late 2016, aimed in particular at **providing innovative and sustainable water solutions** in targeted locations to cope with the increased pressure on water resources resulted from the massive inflow of Syrian refugees.



Through this initiative, **17 rain water harvesting and 28 greywater systems were installed in 38 public buildings of five Jordanian governorates, namely Irbid, Mafraq, Zarqa, Jerash and Ajloun. Around 60,000 people benefited from these interventions**, including through the awareness raising sessions that were conducted to local communities and students.

The project is an exemplary application of the concept of resilience, as discussed with the beneficiaries during a closing workshop held in Amman on 31 January. Salameh Mahasneh, from the Ministry of Water and Irrigation pointed out that *"the water crisis in Jordan is not a recent phenomenon but it has been aggravated by the impact of the Syria crisis. For this reason, through these interventions, we can address the short-term needs of local communities while strengthening the long-term sustainability of water use"*.

The main success factors of this project lie in the **strong partnerships established by UNDP Jordan with local communities and local organizations**, to ensure full ownership of the process and appropriate targeting of needs. To do this, UNDP partnered with three NGOs with robust links to local communities, namely the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, the Royal Scientific Society and Future Pioneers for Empowering Communities.

One of the targeted location was the 7,000-inhabitant village of Nahla, in the Governorate of Jerash. There, the Nahla Society for Development is a local association that provides services for the community such as spaces for weddings, funerals and other social gatherings. During the

closing event, Mansour Zoubi -representative from the Nahla Society- stressed that thanks to the water harvesting installation the association now has enough water to keep the building clean, hygienic and welcoming for any ceremony.

With social cohesion being undermined by the new local dynamics as a result of the massive refugees' influx, **the project has focused on public buildings given their important role in bringing and keeping the community together –including Syrian inhabitants.** This is particularly valid for schools, which have been under severe stress (often resorting to double shifts) to provide quality education to both Jordanian and Syrian students.

The Ajloun University College, which has around 3,000 students, is one of the schools that has benefit from this project. In addition to a water harvesting system with the capacity of 60 m<sup>3</sup>, an innovative system has been constructed to collect and filter the water from washbasins and reuse it for cleaning purposes and toilet flushing.

Project activities went beyond the construction of water solutions. Through the three partner NGOs, **awareness raising sessions were organized in schools and local organizations.** Through discussions, presentation and games, beneficiaries learned how to efficiently make use of water in their day-to-day lives, were familiarized with water-efficient hygiene practices and provided information about water harvesting and grey water system that could be installed in their households.

A teacher from Al Khaldeya Secondary School for Girls stressed that given the chronic water scarcity that affects Jordan, educating children to more efficient water use is pivotal. She added that such awareness raising sessions should be introduced as integral part of school curricula, not only as component of development projects.

As an important sustainability part of the project, **UNDP developed a manual on installation and use of water harvesting and grey water systems.** This toolkit, which gathers challenges and best practices emerged throughout the project, will be distributed to academic institutions, civil society organizations, local communities and individuals to further promote sustainable water use across the country and the installation of additional water solutions. **For a more resilient and sustainable Jordan in the years in to come.**

With the spillover effects of the Syria crisis affecting the entire sub-region, the collaboration between OFID and UNDP goes beyond this project. As part of its broader regional support to address the challenges brought about by the Syrian conflict since 2011, OFID has also extended financial support to assist UNDP in its ongoing response to manage the incremental quantity of municipal solid waste in Lebanon, which currently hosts around 1.5 million Syrians.