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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The project is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and delivered by Oxfam in consortium with the RUAF Foundation. The aim is to **increase income for women and men engaged in the local urban agriculture sector in the Gaza Strip** by promoting value chain improvements and developing a sustainable policy environment. The intervention focuses on **promoting the adoption of low-cost and locally available resources** for a more self-reliant and resilient local agricultural sector. This acknowledging the importance of **strengthening market systems in the Gaza Strip, boosting local competitiveness and reducing reliance on food imports**.

TWO PHASES	Inception phase July 2013 - May 2014		Implementation phase July 2014 - June 2017		
LEADING APPROACHES	Markets for the Poor (M4P)/ Market System Development (MSD)	Value Chain Development	Participatory Technology Development (PTD)	Policy Dialogue Facilitation	
AGRICULTURAL VALUE CHAINS	Dairy/Fodder		Dates		
BENEFICIARIES	460 small-scale producers and processors	6 dairy and dates processing units	100 training and extension institutes	50 institutional and governmental stakeholders	3600 members of households
COORDINATION TOOLS	Field Learning Schools	Local Value Chain Platforms	Gaza Urban and Peri- Urban Agriculture (GUPA) Platform	Advisory Committee	

ACTIVITIES UPDATE - the following activities have been launched since the third quarter of 2015

Boosting the service supply markets to urban agriculture processing enterprises

1. Technical and managerial support to seventy women processors and small scale farmers
2. Installation of two out of five solar based cold storage to improve efficiency along value chains through co-financing to processors
3. Improvement of marketability of processed products by development of new approaches, linkage to market actors across the Occupied Palestinian Territory and facilitation of new trade deals

Strengthening the training and extension service delivery in selected urban agriculture sectors

1. Training of trainers for extension and training staff in Participatory Technology Development (PTD) implemented
2. Training of dairy and dates producers in PTD implemented
3. PTD experiments on alternative green fodder varieties, including Alfalfa, Berseem, Moringa and Rhodes started

Facilitating improved policy and governance frameworks for local urban agriculture market systems

1. Gap analysis on food safety, sanitary and quality criteria, regulations - with a specific focus on date processing and milk processing and transport - and assessment of consumer protection division conducted by GUPA Platform
2. GUPA Platform supported Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of National Economy "consumer protection" planning processes



KEY ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHT: Building bridges between Gaza and West Bank in market development

The gap of technical advancement and corporate cooperation between the West Bank and Gaza has enlarged significantly since the beginning of the blockade in 2007. As a facilitator, the project acts as a convener to bring together diverse stakeholders involved in the dairy and dates value chains to effectively link up small-scale farmers with processors, key sector representatives, and service suppliers.

The project builds bridges between the West Bank and Gaza and facilitates enhanced cooperation between the most important market players, with aim to contribute to facilitate market systems changes throughout the sector. Agricultural policies and stakeholders in the West Bank and Gaza are being mapped and assessed, while the GUPA Platform supports current planning processes through cross-sectoral and institutional coordination, amongst others with FAO.

The current gap in technology and marketing can be narrowed down by the facilitation of exchange visits, trainings and trade deals between dairy and dates businesses active

in the West Bank and Gaza. In the following two months intensive training sessions shall be provided to farmers from Gaza and extensionists by leading companies in the Jordan Valley. Investments in Gaza's dates industry are being promoted, with an aim to market Hayani palm dates in the West Bank and abroad. Simultaneously private firms in the West Bank have started to provide technical training to processors and producers in Gaza, in order to upscale the quality and quantity of processed dates and maximize market opportunities in the Gazan market.

There is a need to adopt improved and appropriate post-harvest technology (such as cold storage systems and small scale processing machinery), which would increase the shelf life of fresh produce, decrease transportation costs and promote agribusiness enterprise development through better coordination and planning in input procurement. Also within the dairy Value Chain, production, processing and marketing structures in Gaza need to be improved in order to capitalize on these identified market demand and substituting imported dairy products.

OPINION COLUMN

by Prof. Nassar Abu Foul & Dr. Ahmed Abu Shaban -
Al Azhar University

What is the role of Al Azhar University in the GUPA project?

The Faculty of Agriculture and Environment plays a significant role in the GUPA project. As an academic institution, the Faculty produces knowledge and disseminates it through academic programs and extension services. In the GUPA project, the faculty is responsible for identifying major technical, economic and marketing challenges of urban farming sub sectors. Academic staff and postgraduate students from the faculty conduct applied participatory research to identify challenges, find out practical solutions and test their applicability in the local context. The recommendations of these researches can help policy makers and all other stakeholders to upscale the performance of urban farming at all levels. This helps the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of National Economics to design proper macro policies to support farmers, processors and traders in improving the competitiveness of local production.

Additionally, technical and marketing studies' results can help farmers and processors of agricultural products to produce better quality, with lower costs and higher profits. The faculty disseminates the knowledge from research findings through the academic programs to ensure that agricultural engineers have proper knowledge to mitigate the challenges of the agricultural sector in the Gaza Strip. It also works through a PTD approach that was introduced by the GUPA project to ensure knowledge accessibility to producers of urban farming products.

At the moment we are conducting a study to investigate the optimal cold storing practices for dates. Additionally, we have initiated contact with academic institutions in the United Arab Emirates to import proper plant protection methods to control palm red weevil, which is a significant pest that threatens the palm date production in the Gaza Strip. Both efforts will help farmers and producers to decrease the waste, increase the production, and thus increase profits and income.

Let's talk about dates... Why is the innovation regarding cold storage of dates important in the context of Gaza?

Palm date production in the Gaza Strip is seasonal and lasts for a relatively short time (October and November).

Cold storing will prolong the storing period out of the season. The impact of cold storing will be at different levels:

At farm level: it will increase the economic value of dates as they can be marketed out of the season.

At processing level: (1) it will increase the period for processing; (2) it will mean sustainable income for women in the processing units; (3) it will create more employment opportunities.

At consumer level: it will offer good quality wet dates that have similar characteristics to fresh dates all year round.

How are dates currently stored in Gaza? What are the main challenges with these methods?

Most storing practices in Gaza are traditional as farmers use freezing at -18 c for a maximum period of 2-3 months without any standard scientific method. The challenges include frequent cut in the power supply, high running costs (including generators maintenance and fuel), and lack of technology for alternative energy supply.

Given these challenges, we would like to test some other methods for date cooling and freezing. Our current experiment aims at providing the knowledge for all value chain stakeholders on optimal cold storing practices. The experiment applies scientific research methodologies to test the different cold storing approaches and assess their efficiency and quality. We will test different cold storing mechanisms and test the following criteria. These include temperature of cooling, period of cold storing, quality of cold stored fruits and packaging and loading practices. If we are successful with this experiment, we will achieve some very important improvements across the palm date value chain.

Prof. Nassar Abu Foul is the dean of the faculty of agriculture and environment at Al Azhar University in Gaza. Prof. He obtained his Bsc., Msc. and PhD. from the faculty of agriculture at the Alexandria University in Egypt. Prof. Abu Foul has conducted significant research in the field of food technology. His scientific articles are published in national and International journals.

Dr. Ahmed Abu Shaban is assistant professor in agricultural economics at the faculty of agriculture and environment at Al Azhar University in Gaza. He obtained his PhD. in agricultural economics from the University of Hohenheim (Germany) in 2007. Dr. Abu Shaban has performed significant applied researches in value chain development and marketing of agricultural products, focusing on a wide range of aspects such as agribusiness opportunities, water resource management and organic farming.



A WORD WITH...

Rasmia and Ashgan from the Al Ahliya association for female date processors. Al Ahliya and the GUPA project work jointly in empowering women-led businesses in the palm dates processing sector. Al Ahliya collects fresh dates from 30 small and medium-scale female producers. A total of 120 palm dates processors working with Al Ahliya are being supported with technical and managerial training in order to improve their business models and efficiency. Al Ahliya's work includes support to business planning, facilitating access to capital, improving processing techniques and creating linkages to new markets.

What are the main challenges you face as female dates processors?

Rasmyya: I face many obstacles to increase my business. These obstacles include my need for capital, which would allow me to buy more dates and equipment, and employ other women. It's hard to get a loan. I also don't have the right place to produce big quantities at home as my house is too small.

It's a shame that many restrictions I face are due to the fact that I am a woman. The only way I have to face this struggle is to achieve significant success to show others that I can also lead a business.

Ashgan: Adding to that, we succeed in marketing our products, but we still face problems at two levels. At the association level because Al Ahliya is not well known among customers in the market and it needs more advertising efforts. At the household level I produce for neighbours and relatives who buy my products but I am struggling to find new customers that like local products.

What would you like to achieve in the following five years? How could the project support you in this?

Rasmyya: My plan is to develop my work until I have a



small factory to produce processed dates with a great quality reputation. I wish to increase my work and to employ more women who need work. I hope this project can help me to have a source of capital to establish this factory.

Ashgan: I wish to develop myself from a worker to a business owner, to help my family and to develop my skills to be able to lead a business. This will help me solve my economic problems and engage more in helping others. I joined this project to improve my managerial and marketing skills.

How can more women be successful actors in the Gazan dates industry?

Rasmyya: With more awareness about the laws that can protect women's rights in managing businesses, or in advocating for our rights. To be successful actors we need training on how to lead in a participatory and sustainable manner.

Ashgan: I see that the local institutions don't support us enough, especially the governmental institutions, but with their support in enhancing our role in businesses we can achieve success. Our society needs more awareness about the importance of our role as women.



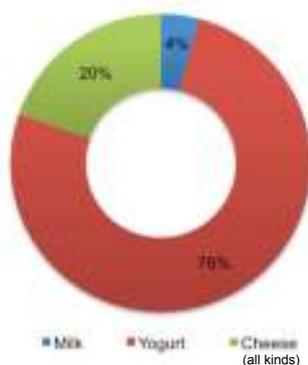
FACTS & FIGURES

DAIRY PRODUCTS

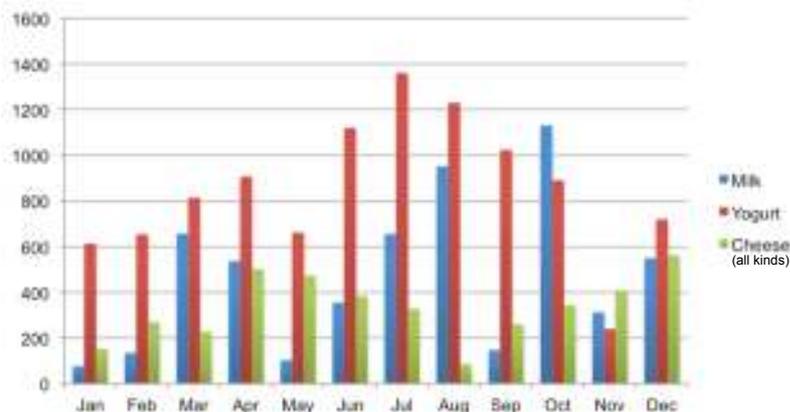
Type of product	Average monthly local production in 2015 (ton)	Average monthly imports in 2015 (ton)	Total available product (ton)	Local production (% total)
Milk	0	100	100	0
Buttermilk	82	300	382	21.5
Yogurt	116	500	643	18
Cheese (Baladia)	60	100	160	37.5
Cheese Vita	65	200	265	24.5
Labneh	25	100	120	20

According to the MoNE, 60 percent of dairy products are imported from Israel, while 40 percent of dairy products are traded from the West Bank. There are no exports of dairy products from Gaza.

Traded and Imported Dairy Products to Gaza 2012-2014 (% total)



Traded and Imported Dairy Products to Gaza in 2015 (ton)



DATES

Fresh dates

Total number of palm trees	250,000
Number of productive trees	150,000
Potential production (ton)	22,500
Actual production (ton)	12,000
Locally consumed (ton)	8,000
Locally processed (ton)	600
Traded to West Bank (ton)	270
Surplus production (ton)	3,130
Average farm gate price (NIS)	0.8-0.9
Average consumer price (NIS)	1.0

Traded and Imported Fresh Dates to Gaza in 2015 (ton)



According to the MoNE, 60 percent of fresh dates are imported from Israel, while 40 percent of fresh dates are traded from the West Bank.

Processed dates

Locally produced (ton)	200
Locally consumed paste (ton)	1,200
Imported from Egypt (ton)	107
Locally processed from imported dry dates (ton)	900