
ITC and UNDP join forces to bring Palestinian women back to business

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Ramallah - The International Trade Centre (ITC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in partnership with the Business Women Forum-Palestine (BWF), today launched a new project to empower Palestinian women business owners and help build capacity to ensure that they are better enabled to sell their goods and services.

By responding to the needs of women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises, 'Enhancing Women SME Development in the State of Palestine' seeks to increase income opportunities for women and improve the livelihoods of women-business owners in the State of Palestine. The project will work towards improving the competitiveness of Palestinian women entrepreneurs and business owners, and create a platform for them to sell their goods with the long-term goal of expanding exports sustainably.

Opening the launch event of the project in Ramallah, H.E Jawad al Naji, Minister of National Economy, said: 'Launching this project is in line with the strategy of the Palestine Government to enhance women participation in the economy and development.'

'Palestinian women have historically been part of the economic cycle although often informally. The Ministry of National Economy has established a gender unit to foster women participation and affair with regard to economic activities.'

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, women comprise around half of the population but female participation in the work force stands at only 17.4%. That is significantly lower than in the rest of the Arab world where female participation in the labour force stands at around a quarter of the population. This is among the lowest in the developing world.

The number of Palestinian women business owners involved in the export industry is negligible, amounting to 2.7%, according to a UNDP study. Limited trade opportunities and lack of export market diversification are additional reasons for this narrow involvement of women in the export sector. Today nearly 90% of Palestinian exports, totaling USD 85 million in 2013, are destined for Israel, where more than half is re-exported to other export markets.

'By supporting women entrepreneurs access more markets, we can contribute to creating a more vibrant Palestinian economy, recognizing that trade has historically always been a central driver of the Palestinian economy,' said Ms Helen Clark, Administrator of UNDP.

ITC Executive Director Arancha González said: 'Today we build on this partnership to promote trade by Palestinian women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises.'

'Together we will be working to address the numerous constraints facing women-owned SMEs so that they can be more competitive, grow their business and create jobs. We need to improve production capacities, to improve the business environment, to facilitate their access to trade and help connect them to regional and global markets.'

Ms Maha Abu Shousheh, Chair of BWF-Palestine, said: 'The BWF supports 2,500 Palestinian women. Through this partnership, it will help build the capacity of women-owned SMEs to meet market requirements.'

'This project has the potential to impact far beyond the confines of what we will sign today. It is a signal that Palestinian women owned enterprises are "open for business",' said Ms González. 'It is a sign that there is an economic dimension to cooperation with the State of Palestine which can be deepened.'

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