

Investing in Women's Economic Empowerment in Iraq

Project Overview

In alignment with the Iraq National Strategy for Empowering Women, World Vision International in Iraq (WV Iraq) implemented a livelihood and women's economic empowerment project in West Mosul entitled, "Building Resilience through Inclusive Economic Recovery Interventions in West Mosul," from October 2019 to December 2020 funded by World Vision Australia. The project aimed to target 62 vulnerable households through cash transfers, micro-grants, business literacy training and nutrition assistance to support them in generating income through employment opportunities.

The planned project outcomes were:

- Outcome 1: Improved the income-generating capacity, productivity and competitiveness of women entrepreneurs through a number of livelihood activities
- Outcome 2: Improved financial and social inclusion of vulnerable women
- Outcome 3: Evidence generation and advocacy for women economic empowerment.

The ultimate goal of the project was to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable women through economic empowerment in West Mosul in line with World Vision's Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (WV GESI) framework. The final evaluation of the project therefore took into account the WV GESI domains of access and participation, decision-making, systems and well-being, notably for the most vulnerable women and displaced populations to judge the effectiveness of the approach.

Project Rationale

The socio-economic situation for Iraqi women has declined steadily since 2003. Conflict, climate change, and most recently COVID-19 have diminished the livelihoods of millions of Iraqis. Women have been disproportionately affected by these events as they are exposed to higher rates of poverty and food insecurity due to lower overall income levels, and less access to quality education, employment, and adequate shelter.

What we learned from the project

During the life of the project, 89% of the women who provided feedback were appreciative about the project and positive about the results. An impressive result of this project was that WV helped link women entrepreneurs to suppliers and markets and assisted them to generate savings totaling USD 13,280.79 that would have otherwise been spent on more expensive goods, services and suppliers.

Project Evaluation along the lines of the WV GESI Domains

The evaluation for the Women's Economic Empowerment project in West Mosul overall has shown positive results in transforming the lives of women on a number of GESI Domains as follows in the coming page:

¹16 sewing, 15 grocery, 5 livestock, 5 kitchen cooking businesses, 5 cosmetics, 4
electrical device maintenance shops, 3 hair dressing, 3 stationary and photocopy shops,
2 taxi cars, 2 bakeries, 1 spice shop, 1 bicycle shop



PARTICIPATION & ACCESS

Improved self-sufficiency through access to employment: The evaluation clearly demonstrates that there was a reduction in the financial dependency of beneficiaries on family, friends and community. This correlates with the diversification in the source of livelihood opportunities among beneficiaries which, after project's end, included an increase in skilled labor, unskilled manual labor and agricultural waged labor. These findings support the project's success in combating negative coping strategies among beneficiaries, such as taking on debt or selling off assets to support livelihoods.

What is your primary source of livelihoods?		
Source of Livelihood	Baseline	End-line
Family/friends/local community support	35%	22%
Unskilled manual/agricultural waged labor (cash for work, etc.)	17%	22%
Skilled wage labor (skilled construction, etc.)	14%	16%
Low skill service industry (janitor, waiter, etc.)	10%	10%
Government assistance/social welfare (MoDM, MoLSA, MoT, etc.)	8%	10%
Government pension	6%	7%
Practitioner of trade or vocation (carpenter, electrician, etc.)	5%	5%
No income	3%	2%
Commercial business or retail trade	2%	0%
Support from NGOs	0%	5%

WELL-BEING

Improved nutrition: The multi-purpose cash assistance contributed to improved food consumption of the beneficiaries. The table below demonstrates that by the end of the project it became clear that 91% of beneficiaries experienced improved food consumption due to the project.

Categories	Baseline	End-line
Poor	41%	9%
Borderline	35%	55%
Acceptable	24%	36%



DECISION-MAKING & SYSTEMS

Improved confidence of beneficiaries: The evaluation found that there was a significant improvement in the self-confidence of the beneficiaries as a result of attending business development training integrated with gender equality training.



SELF-CONFIDENCE: There was a significant increase of 37% in the proportion of beneficiaries who felt self-confident (from 46% of beneficiaries at baseline to 83% at end-line).



VOICE & DECISION-MAKING: Additionally, beneficiaries reported feeling that their opinions were valued by their families and households which increased from 55% in baseline to 84% in end-line.



RESPECT: Women felt that they were treated with more respect by their families come the project's end, with an increase from 51% at baseline to 79% at end-line in beneficiaries who reported respectful treatment by their families always.



MOBILITY: Furthermore, within the household-level, the sense that women could move freely had also significantly increased from 16% in baseline to 74% in end-line.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Scaling up similar projects in Ninewa as the crises will continue to have deep-rooted impacts on financial security in the region, and to deter secondary displacement due to the high influx of returnee populations following the closure of IDP camps throughout the Governorates of Iraq.
- 2 Ensure that the project itself, and the business plans proposed by beneficiaries, use remote management tools and are resilient to travel restrictions; with an emphasis on online business training and tools for remotely selling products and services and managing employees.
- 3 Establish Community Volunteer Groups and cascade trainings in the community to scale up the positive impact of the financial management and gender equality training on the positive behavior of families towards women, increase their knowledge about their rights, and improve self-confidence of women.
- 4 Establish a performance measurement mechanism for new entrepreneurs and business owners with support from business coaches and mentors responsible for monitoring business milestones, and business success indicators while also providing adequate training and support to achieve those indicators.

