



Creating job opportunities for young adults in Kurdistan

**Joining Livelihoods and Psychosocial
support expertises**

IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT AND SELF EMPLOYMENT IN A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS CONTEXT

Nowadays, unemployment is widespread both in developing and developed countries, and particularly affects populations and systems in countries facing humanitarian crises : companies loose profitability, local markets are partially or completely destroyed, infrastructures are not working properly. The workforce is also weakened and may not fit employers' requirements .

Employability includes all sets of transferable skills and qualifications that reinforce the ability of people to take advantage of education and training opportunities that are presented to them in order to find or keep a decent job.¹

Inequalities in accessing job opportunities are important, and are even more acute in times of crisis. Women do usually experience bigger challenges than men to find out a decent job or start their business, as they are often assigned to household activities and care practices. Gender gaps with regard to employment are particularly high in the Middle-East,² Northern Africa and Southern Asia. The youth also suffers from poor access to qualified jobs. The global youth unemployment rate reaches 13.2%, when it "only" affects 5% for the overall population. The rate of young women unemployment can be twice as high as for young men in some areas. Discrimination also hit people living with disabilities, displaced populations and refugees.

Action Against Hunger (ACF) considers employment, business creation and restoration as fully complementary, and has developed a solid expertise thanks to the development and implementation of various employability projects, throughout the developing world. ACF has been particularly investigating the link between individual psychosocial status and employability, and developed an operational approach that fosters an integrating programming between livelihoods and psychosocial supports. Improving someone's employability has a positive effect on his/her psychosocial status, and an individual with a good psychosocial status is more likely to access and keep a decent job, or create his/her own business. This approach proved particularly effective with crisis-affected populations in the Middle-East and Sub-Saharan Africa.

¹ International Labor Organization's definition of employability

² Source of all the data from International Labor Organization database at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/>

ACF FRANCE PROGRAMS JOIN LIVELIHOODS AND PSYCHOSOCIAL EXPERTISES TO IMPROVE EMPLOYABILITY

ACF mostly operates in countries affected by crises, where local populations lose livelihoods, self-esteem and self-confidence, while the social fabric of the communities ends depleted. Our employability programs take into account these harsh situations and offer solutions adapted to the contexts and their populations, through an integrated programming.

Assessment stage

Targeting vulnerable people

ACF pays specific attention in giving access to the labor market to vulnerable and businessable individuals. Internally displaced persons, refugees and host communities receive information about the program and modalities of their participation. Skills, capacities, behaviors are assessed and the action is designed to foster inclusiveness and maximize effectiveness.

Assessing the Labor Market

An in-depth labor market assessment is systematically conducted during the inception phase of the program. The diagnosis is the opportunity to acknowledge the level of market development, the barriers and potential leverages. Both supply and demand sides receive the required attention: companies, business centers, training centers, job seekers, associations, etc. ACF has therefore the capacity to identify hiring companies and industries in viable market segments.

Implementation stage

LIVELIHOODS

Employment - Self employment

Business training

Project beneficiaries develop capacities in business plan development, basic accountancy and marketing strategies. Some of them restore and strengthen a fragile family business, while others start a brand new company.

Vocational training

Livestock rearing, carpentry, barber shop, sewing shop, clothes shop, bakery are examples of existing training modules. They are shaped to fit the needs of the beneficiaries and adapt to diverse contexts.

Employment training

Job seekers included in ACF programs receive both individual and group support to design curriculum vitae and letters in support of an application. They also gain essential communication and presentation skills.

Apprenticeship program

ACF supports matching between companies and young adults in the scope of an apprenticeship program. ACF also provides a financial support to the companies for a limited period, contributing to the salary share of the apprentice. Companies are sometimes hiring the apprentices afterwards.

Working with local partners

ACF works with local trainers from Vocational Training Centers, companies, job seekers, business creators. ACF works with registered companies and help them register when it is not the case. ACF acts as a broker between those local actors and provides technical support, as well as financial and in kind support to achieve its employment and self employment objectives.

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Psychosocial support

Psychosocial workers are integrated in the project teams, to accompany the most vulnerable beneficiaries and to make sure that a specific attention is given to their psychological, psychosocial and protection status. The psychosocial support is proposed during all the program duration. The psychosocial workers follow the beneficiaries for months, they develop a genuine relationship through support groups and individual counselling sessions, which allow well-being improvement and psychosocial resources increase.

Life, social and emotional skills training

The life, social and emotional skills sessions are set up in order to work on specific skills with the beneficiaries, like self-confidence, self-esteem, communication, decision making and positive behavior change.

Improving the quality of the program

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are essential to an effective program management and learn lessons. Quality is scrutinized thanks to the systematic follow-up, evaluations and capitalization workshops. ACF monitors outcomes such as beneficiaries' satisfaction, psychosocial status, businesses' viability, employment situations and the improvement of the socio-economic status.



Creating job opportunities for young adults in Kurdistan

Living in Zakho district, Kurdistan Region of Iraq

In the district of Zakho, in the Kurdish Area, are living many Internally Displaced People (IDP), Syrian refugees and people from host communities. They intend to resume a normal life after the recent humanitarian crisis. For many young people, there are fewer opportunities of employment or life improvement. Many young people suffer from psychosocial trauma. The loss of beloved ones affected their ability to work, take care of themselves, of their family, and they hardly believe in a brighter future. These families are still living in camps and are still not able to return home because of the huge need of reconstruction and of the lack of basic infrastructures. For four years these people have lived in precarious conditions, and are now trying to make ends meet, which involves employment.

ACF developed and implemented a program adapted to the needs of the vulnerable population of Zakho. This programme focused on the issue of employability, using a multisectoral approach, that combined Livelihoods and Psychosocial support and expertises.

Objectives of the programme

- Support young adults to access job opportunities
- Promote growth of successful companies in Zakho, through qualified and skilled employees
- Match between young adults searching for a job and companies in Zakho
- Improve the economic situation of vulnerable host communities (HC), Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and refugee families through the creation of new businesses

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

98% of beneficiaries declared a positive impact of the project on their daily life

37% of beneficiaries declared better household living conditions

 1 market assessment



248 beneficiaries in total, 127 HC, 103 IDP, 18 refugees, (including 107 women, 141 men)



54 employees hired in 16 private companies



80 men and 84 women completed the livelihoods trainings : Life, social and emotional Skills, Business skills, employment Skills training



102 companies supported with grants and startup kits (for an average amount of 5.282 USD) established, 78 out of 102 generating new incomes at the time of the evaluation

LESSONS LEARNED

Thanks to a regular monitoring during the project cycle and an external evaluation, the MEAL team was able to share some lessons learned related to the Zakho project.

While targeting the beneficiaries, it is essential to have a particular attention to the most vulnerable job seekers. Developing a business can be stressful and exhausting, and good balance needs to be found to ensure the viability of the businesses created. A strong commitment from the companies is required in order to promote long term employment and a solid apprenticeship program. A particular attention should be given to the inclusion of the women, the refugees, the IDP, and to the people with disabilities since they are the most likely to suffer from discriminations. Interventions from psychosocial workers are critical to ease the difficulties and tensions emerging during livelihoods activities and employability action plans.

International data show that a large share of companies stop their activity in the first years. A long term monitoring is thus critical to guarantee the businesses' viability and detect needs of additional support. The duration of the program needs to be set in adequation with those challenges. An exit strategy should be set to secure the viability of the program.

SUCCESS STORY

Saadya has thirty years of age and cares for her six children. She has welcomed us in her house, and told us her day-to-day life. She talked about her business, a shop that sells clothes and makes alterations to clothes. Just like many other displaced people, she had to flee the area of Sinjar, situated at the west of Mosul, in 2014, upon the arrival of ISIS. Saadya had the opportunity to join the employment programme. She received trainings and support to open her boutique, as well as psychological support.

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“There lies the real strength of this project, many people we have been counselling have overcome extremely difficult situations that have affected their capacity to manage everyday life, that of their family or that in the workplace. Thanks to the psychological support, we are seeing a huge improvement. It makes me happy seeing these changes and seeing these independent women succeed working and getting out of this situation.”

Alhan, psychosocial support on Zakho's programme³

“I received two sewing machines, a generator, everything I need. I never imagined that one day I would receive all this. My situation has completely changed. Some of my clients are old neighbours that I have not seen for years. We have become friends.”

Saadya

³ More information at : <https://www.actioncontrelafaim.org/en/embedded/saadya-a-fight-for-dignity/>