

SUCCESS STORY

Women’s Rural Development Association in Lebanon Grows out of Seasonal Success



Photocredit: ACDI/VOCA

WADA staff stuff grape leaves, a traditional Lebanese appetizer, following LBLI’s facilitated linkage with specialty food supplier Gardenia Grain d’Or.

The **Lebanon Business Linkages Initiative (LBLI)** is an Associate Award under the FIELD-Support LWA. LBLI works with leading firms in agribusiness and tourism to promote sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction in rural Lebanon. LBLI supports the efforts of local industry groups to develop competitiveness strategies, identify solutions that address constraints to growth, establish backward linkages, and encourage increased productivity and coordination.

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In Lebanon’s fertile Beqa’a Valley, a women’s rural development association has transformed its food-processing business from a seasonal activity to a year-round source of income for its members. Dunia El Khoury, president of the Women’s Association of Deir El Ahmar (WADA) used to close her organization’s processing center every summer, putting 20 women out of work because of decreased local demand for its products. Despite only being able to offer seasonal work WADA knew the processing center had the potential to increase their business. However, without the financial resources to expand the business, or connections to processing or exporting companies, seasonal work was all the association could offer.

With the support of the USAID-funded Lebanon Business Linkages Initiative (LBLI), the women of WADA are now busy all year long, preparing stuffed grape leaves—a traditional Lebanese appetizer—under a contract for Gardenia Grain d’Or, one of Lebanon’s leading food companies. LBLI is working with WADA to foster relationships that strengthen the association’s business model by tapping into the full network of value chain actors, including processing, packing, and exporting companies who have direct connections to specialty food markets. The program has also provided training to WADA’s president and management team to improve the group’s operations and recently assisted WADA to conduct a feasibility study to better price products and improve marketing and labeling, which has since boosted profits. To date, WADA has earned more than \$16,000 USD in new sales.

WADA’s partnership with LBLI has also lead to greater consumer demand for the association’s specialty food products locally. After the initial contract with Gardenia Grain d’Or to supply stuffed grape leaves proved popular, the company offered WADA an additional contract to produce stuffed eggplant, and has since expressed enthusiasm in a long-term agreement with WADA to purchase stuffed grape leaves and eggplant. With growing consumer demand and new-found economic security through contracts with Gardenia and others, WADA is now able to operate through the summer months, a feat WADA President Khoury describes as the “first firm step towards the center’s sustainability.”

LBLI’s work with WADA is just one example of many sustainable business linkages among produc-

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ers of fresh fruits and vegetables, food processors, and fresh packers the program has helped to facilitate. By targeting market driver firms in agribusiness, tourism, and information and communication technology (ICT), LBLI supports the efforts of industry groups to become more competitive, resolve value chain and business bottlenecks, and increase productivity, which helps to foster sustainable economic growth to reduce poverty in Lebanon.