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Agri-food Vocational Integration
In local Economies



FINAL PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT

Submitted by: BILADI

Submitted to: AVSI

Reporting period: 19 Jan – 30 September 2023

Date of submission: 15-09-2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lebanon is currently mired in a multi-layered crisis marked by a severe economic contraction brought on by exchange rate collapse, mounting public debt, skyrocketing inflation, and a weakened banking sector, as well as political disruption. In addition to the economic implications of the Syrian Crisis, COVID 19 outbreak and Beirut blast, Lebanon is currently facing the worst economic crisis since the civil war. Adding to that, the food price index recorded an inflation of 189.8%.

As unemployment rates are increasing among local and refugee communities, informal work characterized by low wages, long working hours and lack of protection measures, would increase. Refugees as well as Lebanese belonging to vulnerable families have employment difficulties due to the lack of previous work experience, low level of education and the peculiarities related to their social situation.

In this context, Biladi, in partnership with AVSI, is implementing a part of the Agri-food Vocational Integration In Local Economies (AVIE) program, which aims to integrate participants into a workforce specializing in food production. A total of 120 participants from North and South Lebanon aged between 14 and 24 will take part in the program, which consists of a 15-day training course on Mouneh and a 35-day On-the-Job Training (OJT) to be carried out “hands-on” at premises of relevant private sector partners, as well as a special 25-day training cycle and a 40-day CFW for 10 youth with disabilities.

Participants received a certificate at the end of the training course and the OJT. AVIE took place in Tripoli, Akkar, Marjeyoun and Nabatiyyeh in external centers or ATS schools. The teachers are professors specializing in food production from the ministry of agriculture, with 7 years of experience working on previous versions of the same training with Biladi. The training course focuses on food production, including the UNICEF-funded PSDP food transformation program.

As for the Special Needs Cycle, AVIE took place in AGONISTA Café in Jdeideh-Metn, led by a professional psychotherapist and specialized chef. The training course focused on hygiene and safety standards, food preservation, and 6 baking recipes.

BACKGROUND/PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Biladi delivered food production courses emphasizing safety and nutritional quality while preserving food, increasing by that the variety of diet available thus providing all the nutrients required for good health. The courses traditionally delivered will be updated based on the

workplace-based learning (WBL) methodology and will target 120 vulnerable students aged between 14 and 24 years old.

Moreover, 10 youth with disabilities received 100 hours of training on 6 recipes (Sablé, Cookies, Cinnamon rolls, Baguette, Plain bread and Crackers) during a 25-day training course and mastered this production in 40 CFW days, in order to include these products in the coffeeshop's menu and later launch them on the market as shelf products. The training material is developed by Biladi's technical team and a group of specialists to meet the youth special learning needs. Trainings will be delivered at Agoniste factory in Jdeide with the assistance of a shadow teacher to facilitate proper information transfer for youth.

After project description, participants (except Agonista) took a pre-test and learned about their rights and duties. The training course consists of numerous activities over 15 days, including: Ice-breaking exercise, watching educational videos, learning about hygiene principles and sterilization, learning about wheat, milk and pasteurization, molasses's and different kind of grains, making various types of bread and pastries, milk-based foods compote, jams, juices, pickles and infusions, making soap, pricing, raising awareness of the importance of reporting cases of sexual harassment and exploitation, making local dishes.

Following in-class training, participants benefited from OJT opportunities, as a fundamental component for the pursuing of the training goals and completion of the training cycle. 116 youth who successfully completed their in-class training period provided by Biladi were placed at identified private sector entities for a period of 26 to 35 days. During the OJT period, the beneficiaries benefited from hands-on training and experience. On-the-Job placement of youth at the private sector level entailed the signature of the Tripartite Agreement, in addition to an agreement signed between Biladi and the private sector, including a code of conduct to set up the framework, terms and conditions of the collaboration and guarantee a safe work environment for the youth; in return, the project provided the private sector with an in-kind gift of its choice within a limited budget. For the OJT Kits, Biladi distributed the amount specified according to the number of students enrolled in each private sector. Thus, after deducting $800 (AC for Agonista), each kit cost $170 and each private sector received kits in proportion to the number of students it welcomed as shown in the following chart:

AREA/ المنطقة	HOST NAME/ اسم المؤسسة	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	No. of Kits	Amount Paid
North	Kataiya sweet	18	5	$ 850
North	Green Lebanon Bakery	8	2	$ 340
North	Tito's Pizaa	4	1	$ 170
Akkar	Bassan Ajaj Company	6	2	$ 340

Akkar	Baldi	4	1	$ 170
Akkar	Furn el jinan	5	1	$ 170
Akkar	Manakish Al Donawi	6	1	$ 170
Akkar	Mohamad Ajaj Cheese and Yogurts	4	1	$ 170
Akkar	Labneh Al Hayat	4	1	$ 170
Akkar	Ghassan Ajaj Co	9	2	$ 340
Akkar	Mounet el Day3a	4	1	$ 170
South	Factory Moussa Ibrahim	4	1	$ 170
South	Factory Hannieh Joudieh	4	1	$ 170
South	Factory Nouhad Nasr	2	1	$ 170
South	Factory Ghayth Wanssa	3	1	$ 170
South	Bakery Mohamad Yassine	2	1	$ 170
South	Factory Ahmad Haidar	5	1	$ 170
South	Factory Imad Ghosn	3	1	$ 170
Nabatieh	Factory Zeinab Kabissi	2	1	$ 170
Nabatieh	Al Saffaa sweet	4	1	$ 170
Nabatieh	Cheeses and yogurts	2	1	$ 170
Nabatieh	Al Sadek Sweets	4	1	$ 170
Nabatieh	Al Imad Sweets	5	1	$ 170
Nabatieh	Al Ahmad Cheeses and yogurts	3	1	$ 170
Nabatieh	Factory Jihane Saad Badreldin (Soap)	2	1	$ 170

On-the-Job training was followed by Biladi monitoring system on daily basis, with the field officers in the regions and the office and the master craft using electronic monitoring tools specifically developed for this purpose. The tools allowed tracking of competencies acquisition, assessing trainees' progress and ensuring that the learning objectives are met.

120 students aged between 14 and 24 years benefited from the project and participated in a 15-day Mouneh training in ATS-Abdeh, ATS-Khiam, ATS-Nabatiyeh and Anwar El-Menieh organization and 116 participants took part in the OJT between 26 to 35 days (in the private

sector). 10 participants from Agonista with special needs participated in a 25-day training and took part in CFW activities for 40 days with Biladi and not in the private sector.

MAJOR PROGRAM RESULTS

The project provided 60 training hours for 15 days and 26 to 35 days of internship for each of the 116 participants, as follows:

- Tripoli: 30 students participated in the training that took place at Anwar El-Menieh organization's premises in 2 rounds.
- Akkar: 45 students participated in the training that took place at the Abdeh ATS's premises in 2 rounds
- Marjeyoun: 23 students participated in the training that took place at the Khiam-ATS's premises.
- Nabatiyeh: 22 students participated in the training that took place at the Nabatiyeh ATS's premises.





The project provided 100 training hours as well for 25 days and 40 days of CFW activities with Biladi for 10 participants with special needs:

- Agonista: 10 students participated in the training that took place at Agonista factory Jdeideh.





Biladi accompanied the beneficiaries from the moment of identification up until the moment of readiness for employment. This commitment reflects in the adoption of the Work-based learning (WBL) modality, which promotes and foster forms of learning that take place in real work environments, in this case, on-the-job training (OJT). WBL approach in vocational education strengthens the connection between education and practical application of learning through multidimensional skills acquisition, hence facilitating the transition into employment. In this framework, the course delivered will emphasize on: (1) technical and practical knowledge and performance of tasks and duties; (2) conditions of practitioners' performance; and (3) the standards to be met. Training and assessment are centered around learners achieving certain competencies according to clearly defined criteria and undertaken within workplace-like conditions.

The Food production course already includes part of the values chains prioritized by PSDP will be updated to include additional topics recommended such as sweet production, dry fruits and vegetables, ready-made meals for catering, tomatoes by-products, whereas the aromatic water for zaatar, sage and pines will be reintroduced under the program. In total, 7 training cycles were delivered to cover the following topics:

Dairy products

- Fruits and vegetables transformation
- Sweet production
- Dry fruits and vegetables
- Ready-made meals
- Tomatoes by product
- Aromatic water and soap

A positive evaluation noted an overall satisfaction among the participants, who had developed their skills and stamina to continue working in the field despite the difficulties encountered during the training and the OJT. The OJT final evaluation took into consideration 4 main aspects:

- Did the trainee implement the information/skills acquired during the course in the OJT?
- Does the trainee wish to become an entrepreneur and open his/her own business? If so, what type of business, and if not, why?
- How does the business owner assess the trainee's knowledge?
- Would the business owner hire the trainee after the training?

To ensure the highest level of efficiency in the OJT, participants were assigned based on their area of residence and their chosen field. In the private sector, the business owners were mostly satisfied with the results and provided useful insights for planning future training.

A number of trainees have been offered full or part-time jobs in the businesses where the OJT took place, and the owners have kept in touch with others for future work. In addition, several participants have received better job opportunities after the OJT.

A supportive work environment ensured the emotional development of students with special needs and enabled them to integrate into the workforce. Organized teamwork and strong communication skills enabled the trainees to gain autonomy in production.

Table 1: Training Course

	Participants/ Districts	**Date**	**Venue**	**No of participants (total/male/female)**	**OJT date**
Anwar El-Menieh organization	Tripoli 1	08-05-2023 26-05-2023	Anwar Center	10 Females: 6 Males: 4	29-05-2023 20-06-2023
ATS- Abdeh	Akkar	12-06-2023 05-07-2023	ATS- Abdeh	25 Females: 15 Males: 10	06-07-2023 15-08-2023
ATS-Khiam	Marjeyoun	09-06-2023 06-07-2023	ATS-Khiam	25 Females: 14 Males: 11	07-07-2023 08-10-2023
ATS-Nabatiyeh	Nabatiyeh	15-6-2023 10-07-2023	ATS-Nabatiyeh	22 Females: 20 Males: 2	11-07-2023 21-08-2023

Anwar El-Menieh organization	Tripoli 2	31-05-2023 20-06-2023	Anwar Center	20 Females: 9 Males: 11	22-06-2023 07-08-2023
ATS- Abdeh	Akkar 2	04-07-2023 19-07-2023	ATS- Abdeh	20 Females: 17 Males: 3	20-07-2023 23-08-2023
Agonista	Mont Lebanon	19-06-2023 21-06-2023	Agonista Bakery	11 Females: 4 Males: 7	23-06-2023 14-09-2023

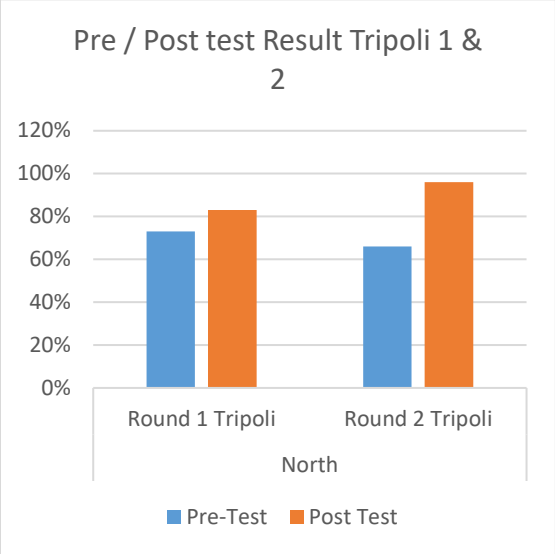
IMPACT—Monitoring and Evaluation

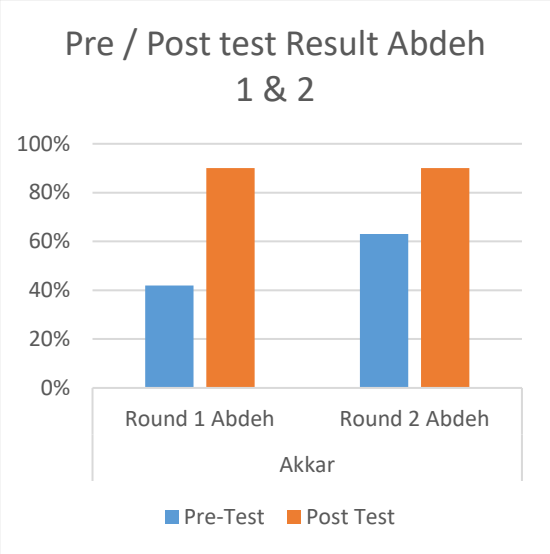
Cycle Tripoli 1: 10 students (training completed - OJT completed)
Cycle Tripoli 2: 20 students (training completed - OJT completed)
Cycle Abdeh 1: 25 students (training completed)
Cycle Abdeh 2: 20 students (training completed)
Cycle Marjeyoun-Khiam: 23 students (training completed)
Cycle Nabatiyeh: 22students (training completed)
Cycle Agoniste: 10 students with disabilities (training completed). Training started with 2 recipes: sablé and cookies and was followed by CFW for these recipes for 10 days. Training resumed in July for the remaining 4 recipes (cinnamon rolls, plain bread, baguette, crackers) and included training on workplace hygiene standards and a detailed explanation of product shelf life and preservation conditions. CWF activities then continued for the remaining 30 days.

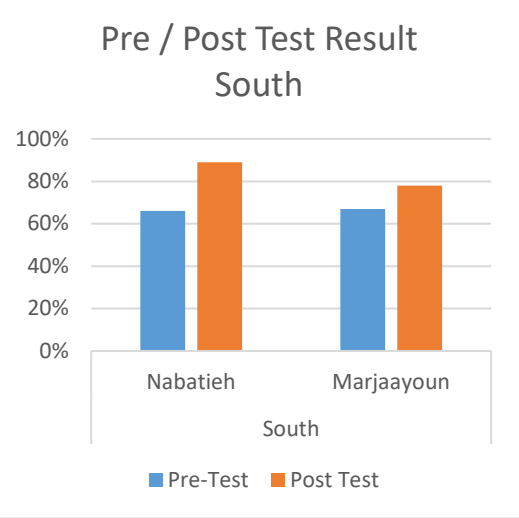
A quantitative evaluation was put in place for this training and included a knowledge-based pre/post-test. The test is personal and therefore follows the learning curve of every participant in the Mouneh training, with the evaluation aiming to assess the technical learning provided during the program. The test consists of a multiple-choice questionnaire covering Mouneh and Hygiene standards and food preservation, as well as the activities that took place during the training course.
The following are examples of the questions included in the test:

- what is the best way to wash fruits and vegetables?
- What is mastic used for?
- What is the shelf life of jam?
- What is the role of water in dough?
- What is the basis of a good relationship with the employer?
- What is the purpose of training?

The results of the pre/post-test based on the number of correct answers are as follows:







CHALLENGES and Lessons Learned

A- Mouneh Course and OJT:

During the training course, number of difficulties were encountered at all the training locations. First of all, the beneficiaries had a lack of education, or a low level of education close to illiteracy. They had severe learning difficulties that made them forget and obliged the teachers to repeat the concepts several times. At the start of the training, they were unable to sit down and follow the training because they were moving all the time, as it had been a long time since they had taken part in a training program. This forced the teacher to shorten the course and give them more time for practical exercises.
In addition, there were many difficulties in everyday life. The participants could not easily get to the training center for transport or personal reasons, and it was difficult to provide them with hygiene standards because they could not apply them at home. Nor could they do the exercise at home because they had no electricity or water and could not afford to buy the products.

Other difficulties occurred, but these were resolved:

Challenge	Solution
Dropouts	Dropouts were replaced
Technical difficulties: oven malfunction, lack of water, unpurified water …	- Renting baking ovens from private bakeries - Transporting water to the training centers - Providing purified drinking water
The electricity at ATS Abdeh make it very hard to run the machine to dry the fruits and vegetables for the PSDP food transportation program	The teacher used the theory method to explain the drying process, and then activated the machine overnight to review the results the next morning
Problems in respecting the working rules of the training and social integration with the participants	The students were explained the working rules on individual levels
Lack of climatization (Agoniste)	An AC 18000 BTU was installed in the center
The place was infected with pests (Agonista)	The bakery was closed for two days, and a pest control was carried out by a private company followed by a deep cleaning before resuming the activities
Lack of many kitchen equipment	All the needed equipment were provided

In the OJT:

Non-Lebanese trainees were confronted with social racism and segregation. Despite the program's efforts to empower these communities, the society is refusing to deal with them, and therefore with Biladi and its associates.

Some of the factories where the OJT took place were reluctant to employ non-Lebanese women and some refused outright, especially if these women are living in camps in dire conditions, citing personal hygiene as a main reason, which in some cases resulted in the loss of clients. The female trainees were relocated to other private entities (Tito's pizza and Katiya pastries).

In Minieh Tripoli 2, there was no dried fruit factory in the area and the only roaster available refused to train the participants in order to protect professional secrets. Instead, they trained the participants to sell the product in shops.

Many private sectors in Abdeh, expressed their desire to introduce drying into their businesses, but the power outage and its high cost prevented them from taking this step. Even the cooperatives that carry out this activity were unable to welcome students since they only operate on the basis of pre-orders, which have not been guaranteed this year due to the financial crisis.

Despite all these difficulties and obstacles, Biladi was able to carry out the training in the best possible conditions and learned that the program needed to be more flexible and that the difficulties on the ground required greater attention on a case-by-case basis.

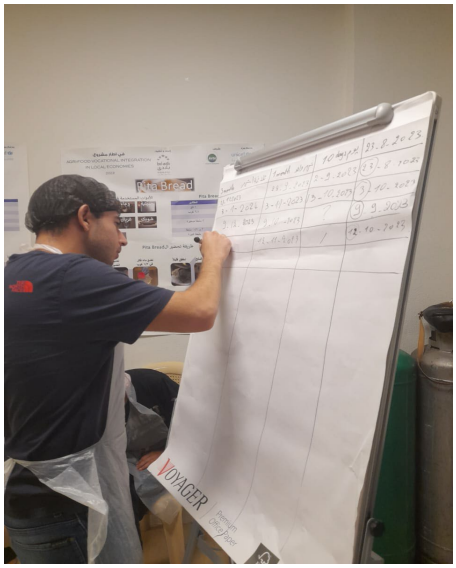




B- Agonista Course and CFW:

10 beneficiaries from a wide spectrum took part in the training, so Bialdi had to re-prepare the teaching material based on photos of the objects with posters on the walls for them to be able to repeat the activities. Since the training program agreed upon couldn't be carried out, several modifications took place, and Biladi therefore organized a training course on hygiene standards alone and another on hygiene in the cafeteria where they work, on food preservation and labelling.





The training began with an introductory game and, after assessing the group dynamics and individual disabilities of the trainees, a strategy was created to develop and maintain skills over a long period, inspired by the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) program. They chose to name the group Super chefs. The program included a range of activities in the form of games, such as hygiene standards in the kitchen, learning about kitchen appliances and defining rules and regulations.

The participants learned how to make 6 recipes (Sablé, Cookies, Cinnamon rolls, Baguette, Plain bread and Crackers) during a 25-day training course (100 hours) and mastered this production in 40 CFW days, and the group became proficient and independent in measuring, mixing, and baking. It should be noted that it took them approximately 6 days or more to memorize each recipe.
The CFW was applied partially in the presence of the chef and partially in the presence of the supervisor only. The participants faced many challenges. The participants did not receive training in time management and the variety of items when receiving a production order, i.e. preparing four recipes in four hours. This exercise was therefore completely unsuited to this group of trainees at this stage of their training, which had a negative impact on their professional

performance and their psychological and physical efforts. Therefore, we recommend additional training on this matter.

Another major Challenge was that Lebanon has no payment arrangements for people with mental health problems, we had to adopt a new procedure with BoB Finance to pay the participants.
It was the first time these participants had earned money and produced, which boosted their self-esteem and gave them a sense of self-productivity. They don't want to leave the program and don't understand why it ends when they are productive.