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CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON DISABILITIES
AND EMPLOYMENT OF SPECIAL POPULATIONS

**Promoting and Developing
Business Entrepreneurship
among Bedouin Women in the Negev**
Evaluation Report

Suzan Hassan-Daher

The study was initiated and funded by TEVET



RESEARCH REPORT

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Executive Summary

1. Background

The program, Bedouin la-Asakim, Promoting and Developing Entrepreneurship in the Bedouin Sector in the Negev, was developed by the TEVET employment initiative at JDC-Israel to equip the Bedouin population, specifically women, for self-employment. The strategy of the program is to focus on areas that appear to present an opportunity. Its main goal is to enable participants to start a business of their own or – if they are unable or unwilling to do so – to find salaried employment in those areas. In early 2008, the program focused on three areas – fashion design, physical coaching, and early childhood care – and it had a number of stages: vocational training, empowerment workshops, a course on entrepreneurship, and personal business support. This report describes the findings of the evaluation study of the program, commissioned by TEVET: its trial implementation in 2008-10, its outcomes and the assessment of its contribution and achievements by both participants and implementers.

2. Study Goals and Design

The study had two main goals:

- a. To provide feedback to program heads and implementers on the process of implementing the program stages among the Bedouin population
- b. To examine the outcomes – the employment status of participants in the year after vocational training ended (the rate setting up their own small businesses, the rate finding salaried jobs, and the characteristics of their employment in terms of type of work, salary, satisfaction and so forth).

The study population numbered 56 women who entered the program between January and March 2008 and completed training in the three vocational tracks: fashion design, physical coaching, and early childhood care.

Data were collected from participants at two points in time: at the end of group training (about a year to a year-and-a-half after the start of the program – March-September 2009), and a year after the end of the training (two to two-and-a-half years after the start of the program – March-October 2010). At the first point, data were collected by means of focus groups and face-to-face interviews (56 interviews); at the second point – by means of telephone interviews (48 interviews).

Simultaneously, data were collected from the implementing staff: directors, coordinators and instructors, by telephone, using a semi-closed questionnaire (7 interviews).

3. Characteristics of Participants at Time of Joining the Program

- ◆ **Demographic characteristics:** The age range of the participants was 18-50; about two-thirds were 35 and under. In the physical coaching group, most of the participants were under the age of 30; in fashion design, nearly half were over 36. Most were married (43 out of 56).
- ◆ **Education and vocational training:** A quarter of the women (14 out of 56) had up to 11 years of schooling; more than half of the women (33 out of 56) had 12 years of schooling, and the rest had post-high school education. More than a quarter of the participants reported having a vocational certificate. In the groups of younger participants, the level of education was higher.
- ◆ **Financial status:** About half of the participants (26 out of 56) reported that they did not manage to cover basic household expenses.
- ◆ **Work experience:** Half of the participants had work experience of at least three continuous months in the five years preceding the program. Participants that had not worked in this period cited such reasons as childcare, not finding suitable childcare arrangements for their children, and not finding work near home.

4. Assessment of the Implementation of Program Courses and Training

The assessment of program components emerging from the interviews with participants and staff was as follows:

4.1 Vocational Training

- ◆ **Extent of participation in training:** There was high to very high attendance at training sessions in all tracks. Some women reported that they occasionally had difficulty attending due to transportation problems.
- ◆ **Satisfaction with training:** In general, most of the women (48 out of 56) were satisfied or very satisfied with the vocational training. According to their reports, this was due to the positive implications of their participation for increasing their chances to find work and improve their financial situation as well as for other aspects of their personal lives.
- ◆ **Problems in implementing training:** The main problems reported were the lack of practical-training sessions in fashion design and physical coaching; difficulties in understanding the language of instruction among older, less educated participants; dissatisfaction with the atmosphere and personal attitude of the instructors among some of the participants; a lack of equipment in the fashion-design course, and too quick a study pace in the view of some participants.

4.2 Empowerment Workshop

- ◆ **Extent of participation in empowerment workshop:** The extent of participation differed from one track to another. In early childhood care and physical coaching, the women participated in most sessions. However, in fashion design, most of the women reported low to moderate attendance mainly because they did not find the workshop content interesting.

- ◆ *Satisfaction with the workshop:* Most participants reported satisfaction with the empowerment workshops. A few reportedly felt that the workshops had been superfluous.

4.3 Business Entrepreneurship Course

- ◆ *Extent of participation in entrepreneurship course:* Participation in the course was rather limited compared with the vocational training sessions. Attendance was irregular due to lack of interest in the course content, for two reasons: some of the participants were to begin with not interested in starting a business, and some of the older ones evidently found it difficult to understand the material.
- ◆ *Adapting course content to participants:* The instructors and some of the participants reported that the courses were especially suited to the young with middle-level education and the will and motivation for self-employment. They cited the physical coaching course as an example of a high degree of participant suitability.
- ◆ *Satisfaction with the entrepreneurship course:* Most of the participants reported that in general they were satisfied or very satisfied with the course.
- ◆ *Problems of course implementation:* Some of the participants were not interested in business entrepreneurship; most of the older participants found the course material difficult to understand; there was a lack of basic equipment; the premises were unsuitable; there were communication problems between the implementing staff and the participants.

4.4 Process of Employment Integration

Setting Up a Business

Some of the participants decided to start a business in the field that they studied.

They received assistance and professional support from program staff, yet found the task a great burden.

- ◆ *Success in setting up and managing a business – assessment of participants:* The main factors of success, according to participants, were their interest in the field of work; the support and counseling they received in the program; their will to get ahead; and their financial status, which enabled them to set up and finance a business.
- ◆ *Difficulties in setting up and managing a business – assessment of participants:* The main difficulties, according to participants, stemmed from insufficient training; ignorance of the field of advertising and marketing; the small returns of the business; working at home despite the unsuitable physical location and conditions; a lack of equipment, and problems with clientele such as dealing with dissatisfied clients or collecting payment.

Business Support

- ◆ About half of the participants reported that they received business counseling from the staff during their participation in the program. The main topics were how to receive loans to set up a business and tools of financial management.

- ◆ *Satisfaction with the business support:* Almost all the participants who received business counseling reported satisfaction with it. Some noted the need for more personal sessions with the financial advisors.

4.5 Employment Integration in the Year after Group Training Ended

More than half the participants (26 out of 46) worked at one job at least *in the course of the year* after training ended. Twenty participants (out of 26) were still working also after a year had passed, i.e., they retained their work up to the time of the post-training interview.

This is a somewhat lower proportion than in similar programs with other populations. However, in view of the special problems of integrating women from the Bedouin population into the world of work, particularly into private enterprise, and compared with other endeavors in the field, these outcomes represent considerable success. Perhaps, too, the time of the examination – a year after the group training ended – was too early to measure outcomes and compare them with the employment status of the participants prior to joining the program.

Employment Characteristics and Satisfaction

From the start of the program, 26 participants worked at 29 jobs (some worked at more than one). An examination of the characteristics of their employment revealed that:

- ◆ The main employment was in areas of the vocational training provided by the program: most occupations were in physical coaching, and teaching elementary school and kindergarten (20 out of 29 jobs); a quarter were in sewing and dressmaking (7 out of 29).
- ◆ In more than half the occupations (16 out of 29), salaries were paid by an employer or a workplace; in more than a third (9 out of 29), the participants were self-employed.
- ◆ Most of the occupations were part-time (24 out of 27).¹
- ◆ For more than a quarter of the occupations (8 out of 27) – monthly earnings were up to NIS 1,000; in nearly a fifth (5 out of 27) – they were NIS 1,001-2,000; in almost half (12 out of 27), they were NIS 2,001-3,000; and in the rest – they were NIS 4,000 and more. On the whole, the level of earnings related to the limited number of working hours.
- ◆ Most of the participants reported satisfaction with the type of work; a relatively small number reported satisfaction with the earnings and chances of advancement at the workplace.

Reasons for Non-Employment

The common reasons for not starting a business, according to participants, was lack of confidence about their ability to manage one and lack of financing to purchase equipment. The common reasons for not working at salaried jobs in the areas of their training were, according to participants, a lack of jobs in general, and in the areas they had trained, in particular, and a lack of means of transportation in the Bedouin villages in the Negev.

¹ For 2 of the 29 jobs of participants in the year after training ended, no information was received on the number of working hours, earnings or satisfaction.

Looking for Work

More than half of the participants not employed in the year after the training ended reported that they were looking for work in the areas of their training. Most reported that they intended to start their own businesses in the areas of training.

4.6 Contribution of the Program: Participant Assessments

- ◆ ***The contribution of vocational training:*** According to most of the women, participation in the training courses could – to a large extent – increase their chances of joining the workforce, whether as self-employed or employees. Nonetheless, a large proportion stressed the need for more advanced, additional content in specific training areas and for more opportunities of practical training to boost self-confidence.
- ◆ ***The contribution of the entrepreneurship course:*** According to many of the women, participation in the entrepreneurship course could contribute moderately to their joining the workforce. Participants interested in salaried employment reported that the course did not deal sufficiently with topics relevant to them, whereas those interested in self-employment said that it had not been intensive enough to prepare them properly for starting a business.
- ◆ ***Recommending program participation to others:*** All the participants said they would recommend to other women in similar situations that they participate in the program, mainly because it offers enrichment and personal knowledge, and it increases the odds of employment.
- ◆ ***Positive aspects of the program:*** The most common positive aspects cited by participants were their gaining self-confidence in their ability to find employment and set up a business; the professionalism of the program instruction staff; the acquisition of a vocation and vocational certificate; the acquisition of professional tools in the sphere of business entrepreneurship.
- ◆ ***Negative aspects of the program:*** The most common negative aspects noted by participants were the failure to live up to the promises that had been made about assistance in finding jobs and establish a business – in terms of extent and ongoing support and in terms of finding places of work; the limited scope of training relative to what had been promised; the changeover of instructors and changing times of sessions; too brief a duration of training, and insufficient content.

5. Conclusions and Programmatic Directions

The following conclusions may be drawn from the study findings:

- ◆ ***Fine-tuning the criteria defining the target population suited to the program:*** The program population was heterogeneous in background characteristics. Some of the participants had valuable resources facilitating the processes of learning, training and employment integration. Other participants, however, were older, poorly educated and far removed from the labor market. These barriers were reflected in the extent of satisfaction with the training and the difficulties that cropped up in the process of finding employment. If the target

population were defined beforehand, and the criteria adhered to, it would be possible to recruit more homogeneous groups better suited to the model.

- ◆ ***Improving the implementation of vocational training:*** Many participants expressed a desire to learn more advanced content in their fields of training and be given more opportunities for practical training. The main difficulties emerged mainly among older, poorly-educated women. To deal with these, it is worth considering the suggestions of participants and implementation staff, for instance – to reduce the theoretical sessions; to expand and lengthen practical-training sessions; to divide the groups into homogeneous sub-groups in terms of ability and experience, and – from the very start of the courses, to make sure that there is suitable, high-standard equipment.
- ◆ ***Expanding the personal support of participants:*** The findings reveal a need for more support of participants who do decide to set up a business. Long-term support may help them cope with the difficulties involved in starting and managing their own business. Furthermore, it appears to be important that participants not suited to or not interested in self-employment be taught job-search skills and offered placement assistance as salaried employees, perhaps by connecting them with complementary employment programs providing the necessary tools for job search and successful placement.
- ◆ ***Matching the business entrepreneurship course to participants:*** Older, poorly-educated participants often had difficulty understanding the course and course content; those interested in starting a cottage industry (small business at home or finding salaried work sometimes found the material irrelevant or did not always receive the training they needed to do so. Thus, a need arose to better match the participants' background characteristics and their expectations of self-employment with the course level and content. This could be done by recruiting participants with at least middle-level education and an interest in business entrepreneurship; by offering course instruction in simpler language, and by adding content related to starting small businesses at home.
- ◆ ***Model of business entrepreneurship in general and its adaptation to participants:*** The proportion of participants who opened their own businesses was relatively small. Moreover, the businesses were tiny cottage industries yielding low profits. These findings, alongside the unsuitability of the course for some, raise basic questions about the appropriateness of the business entrepreneurship model for participants. It is recommended that thought be given to modifying the course components: focusing on training and support for setting up small businesses at home for participants interested in this; creating a special track for participants interested in salaried employment and helping them find workplaces – and avoiding the expense involved in referring such participants to courses in business entrepreneurship since it is reasonable they will make no use of them.

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