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The Grow Tunnels Project for Food Security

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This study was part of a multifaceted research program for the Government of Israel's five-year plan to promote the well-being of the Bedouin in the Negev, carried out in cooperation with the Department for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bedouin Society in the Negev



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About the research program of the five-year plan for the Bedouin in the Negev

The research program was jointly funded by the Department for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bedouin Society in the Negev and the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute. It spanned 3.5 years and includes an array of topical studies, including education, children with disabilities, employment, and local government, as well as cross-cutting studies evaluating the five-year plan work programs; the values, strengths, and challenges of the Bedouin population and their leaders; key indicators of the health, economic, and social well-being of the Bedouin population; and an integrative assessment of the five-year plan.

The research program was carried out as a cooperative effort between the Department for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bedouin Society in the Negev and the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute (MJB). The Department led the choice of issues to be studied and provided feedback on the research. MJB coordinated the research program and was responsible for the quality of the studies.

Abstract

Background

The Grow Tunnels Project for Food Security was jointly launched in the Bedouin town of Segev Shalom in 2015 by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services (hereinafter: MOLSA), the Negev district in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Ministry's Department of Socio-Economic Development of the Negev Bedouin.

The project was designed to empower Bedouin families treated by the local social services. Its goal, as stated in the [Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development website](#), was "to develop business entrepreneurship in the field of agriculture in order to create opportunities for women from financially distressed families to increase their income. The project is based on the construction of small greenhouses (grow tunnels) in house courtyards for growing vegetables and fruits for both self-consumption and sale on the market." Currently (as of 2020), the project is conducted in four Bedouin communities: Kseife, Hura, Segev Shalom, and Lakiya, with 31 families taking part in the endeavor.

In the framework of a follow-up study of Government Resolution 2397 – the five-year socio-economic development plan for the Bedouin population in the Negev: 2017-2021 – the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute was asked by the Department of Socio-Economic Development of the Negev Bedouin to identify the key factors likely to contribute to the successful implementation of the project – by gathering and analyzing relevant performance data.

Study Goal

To identify the key factors likely to contribute to the successful implementation of the project, as seen by both the families taking part in the project and the professional team involved in the implementation of the project.

Study Method

The study was based on 21 semi-structured interviews with the professional staff at the project headquarters and field personnel in the participating Bedouin communities as well as with the families taking part in the project.

Key Findings

It emerges from the study that the project is conducted with due cultural sensitivity and respect for the Bedouin tradition, enabling the participants to achieve personal growth and development without violating the cultural norms of the Bedouin population. The project also enables the acquisition, preservation, and assimilation of knowledge in ways effectively customized to the Bedouin population's needs. And while the project is of a limited scope compared with other projects conducted by MOLSA and the Agriculture and Rural Development Ministry's Department of Socio-Economic Development, it has a far-reaching impact on the participating Bedouin families, first and foremost, on the women. Its impact was reflected in the interviews held with the project participants, where they talked about the enriching contribution of the experience and its influence on their lives. The professional team conducting the project reported a similar impression.

Along with the recorded feelings of satisfaction, field reports emerged of challenges and difficulties requiring due attention. As this study was carried on, no clear, commonly accepted goals were in place for the project and no strategy defined for its conclusion.

Thus, the project's success is not described in the study in absolute, measurable terms. Rather, the project's success seems to be subject to inter-community politics and negatively affected by the absence of a stable budgetary framework in some of the communities, factors that, in turn, bear on the participants' sense of security. It should be noted that the study team has been notified that following the presentation of the study's interim findings, the project leaders set to the task of preparing a formal document detailing the desirable results of the project, its outcome measurement methodology, and the work procedures for the project.

Recommendations

The government ministries running the project should define clear, commonly accepted goals for the project, specify its stages and delineate a strategy for concluding the project. A well-structured mechanism should be developed for hiring a professional team for the project and selecting eligible families for participation in the project. In this context, it should be confirmed that families satisfying the appropriate conditions are selected. Inter alia, no political considerations should come into play in the process, and agricultural experience as well as the family's capacity for work should be decisive criteria for participation in the project. The study team has identified the advantage women have in operating the greenhouses and the importance of conducting the project with due cultural sensitivity, and both factors should be held in mind. Before launching the project in a

specific community, work procedures should be discussed and agreed with the local authority head and any other relevant officials. Commitment to the project on the part of the local social services should also be assured. The project leaders should coordinate expectations and jointly set goals with the participating families, specifically addressing their ability to meet the costs of participation in the advanced stages of the project. It is further recommended that the agricultural guide accompanying the families keep on his work following the project conclusion. Finally, the project should differentially answer the needs of the participating families according to their circumstances and capacities and thus help them improve their and their children's quality of life.