

## Building Synergies under Capacity Building Activities

### BACKGROUND

In oPt, the handicraft sector's prosperity and growth is generally proportional to the country's tourism levels. During the Intifada period, the sector was greatly affected by the reduction in the number of tourists, which forced many souvenir shops and handicrafts establishments to shut down and lay off workers.

There are 18 different varieties of handicrafts in the Palestinian territories. Olive wood is the dominant handicraft, representing 36% of handicraft market in 2003, while mother of pearl accounts for 10%. Around 19% of handicraft establishments are located in the Gaza Strip and 81% are located in the West Bank (BCCI, 2004).

The impact of handicrafts in the Palestinian economy is difficult to measure. Economic data on handicrafts are not compiled, instead lumped into the "manufacturing" section of industrial statistics.

### PROCESS

A capacity building programme targeting young designers from the West Bank and Gaza was implemented, in which participants received training from a regional expert in handicraft production. The goal was to train participants to apply traditional methods and crafts to innovative purposes such as furniture, or home design and appliance. Marketing and management training was provided as well, and micro-credit loans were given to some trainees.

All selected trainees were unemployed architects and designers. After the capacity building programme and the small grants they received, new jobs were created and additional income was generated. Participants joined a "placement programme" through which 70 handicraft-producing women in remote areas received the innovation training as relayed by the initial trainees.



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**Outcomes** The programme resulted in new, innovative crafts designs based on traditional skills, but suitable for modern markets. The initiative provided a creative space for handicraft producers to create pilot designs for famous companies, and also involved women from remote areas whose products have since been promoted by national galleries at local and regional levels. Through the initiative, the newly-created network of handicrafts producers and young designers were able to identify market opportunities that were previously inaccessible to them in an effort to establish sustainable livelihoods and stable employment. In fact, 7 young designers have since found employment through the new relationships they established. Following its success, the initiative was officially included in the Ministry of Culture's new policy and strategic plan.

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