

# Obstacles Faced by Women Social Entrepreneurs And the Efforts of Support Organizations in Creating an Enabling Environment for Entrepreneurial Activities in Lebanon – A Case Study



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## MEDUP!

Oxfam Italia in partnership with several North and South Mediterranean partners is implementing an EU funded Action entitled "MedUP! Promoting social entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean region" over the course of 4 years that has started in March 2018 in 6 countries of the MENA region namely Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The aim of this project is to increase economic inclusiveness and employment in these countries where adequate policies on social entrepreneurship are in place, public-private dialogue and exchanges of practices are promoted and high-quality services for social enterprises are provided. The action will intervene at three different levels to promote national ecosystems where social enterprises can contribute to tackle socio-economic and environmental challenges:

- the micro level explores the challenges faced by and opportunities available to social entrepreneurs to help them develop their enterprises.
- the meso level examines support provided to social entrepreneurs while identifying social entrepreneurship support organizations (SESOs) and the types of services they provide including technical skills, business development, access to financing, networking, mentoring...
- the macro level looks at policy and advocacy initiatives and public-private dialogue to improve regulatory and policy environments.

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## ACRONYMS

**KII** : Key Informant Interview

**SE** : Social Entrepreneur

**SESO** : Social Entrepreneur Support Organization

**WSE** : Woman Social Entrepreneur

# Obstacles Faced by Women Social Entrepreneurs And the Efforts of Support Organizations in Creating an Enabling Environment for Entrepreneurial Activities in Lebanon – A Case Study

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study was developed to examine how SESOs are taking the barriers that WSEs face into consideration when designing their programs and to identify the gaps that still need to be taken into consideration. In addition, this study explores the challenges faced by WSEs when applying for entrepreneurial competitions and investigates what make women come together and collaborate. Ultimately, the purpose of this case study is to provide recommendations to be adopted for future initiatives in terms of best outreach/recruitment process and coaching strategies to create an enabling environment for women to become social entrepreneurs.

In this regard, this case study relied on qualitative data collection tools (9 KIIs; 3 with SESOs and 6 with WSEs) to understand, analyse and provide insights and recommendations for future program design efforts. This research is divided into 4 main parts: Introduction and Methodology, Literature Review, Analysis and Findings, and Recommendations.

This report looks at the findings from data collection tools and addresses key findings and arguments before elaborating on the recommendations retrieved from the participants as well as those drawn from the analysis of data. The data analysis part is divided into 4 sections and revealed the following key findings.

- SECTION 1: MAIN WSEs CHALLENGES IN TIMES OF CRISIS

WSEs with no international exposures and access to fresh Dollars are mainly facing huge challenges to survive based on the hardship and consequences of the current financial, economic and social crises. However, in some cases the lockdown opened up new rooms for self-development and work life balance. On the other hand, women who are more educated, skilled, financially capable, well connected, having previous career guidance and able to

think innovatively and creatively, were more likely to view the crisis as an opportunity to scale the business through technology and reaching international markets. Many of the participants in the surveys reported that WSEs showed more flexibility in coping with change, while men who lost their livelihood are trapped in negative emotion cycles. This depends greatly on the family dynamics, the culture of each household, and their openness to change.

- SECTION 2: SUPPORTING WOMEN TO BECOME SESOs

Despite the fact that SESOs are taking into consideration the barriers faced by women to become social entrepreneurs, some WSEs expressed their malcontent on projects design and implementation. In their opinion, SESOs are focusing more on how to reach the greatest number of beneficiaries rather than helping them overcoming their challenges. SESOs and WSEs showed that the best value of an entrepreneurial program is to provide practical approach training through one-to-one coaching and mentoring from local and international mentors and coaches. Several responses suggested that SESOs programs should provide a special focus on delivering soft skills sessions helping women in building their entrepreneurial mindset and also helping men to support women in their entrepreneurial journey. The significant comment was the focus on validating the potential business ideas based on true market assessment since most women are always struggling and eager to know if their ideas are solid enough to be able to take it further.

- SECTION 3: WSEs COLLABORATION AND TEAM WORK

Several activities could be made to encourage women working together and collaborate like showing them the benefits of being part of a team and teaching them how to develop internal procedures for better management and control. Most of WSEs showed a need on how to build a solid organizational structure allowing them to develop a successful team.

#### SECTION 4: CHALLENGES OF ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETITIONS

Several complaints emerged from the discussion about the challenges faced by women who were not selected in entrepreneurial competitions, among these were: the reasons of not being selected were not communicated, selection criteria were broad, communication with SESOs team was misleading, and there was no added value in terms of enhancing or adjusting the gaps in the pitched ideas. In terms of needed support, the most common comment was to provide capacity building sessions on how to write correctly a business plan and how to pitch a business idea. Another significant comment was the necessity of listing the reasons of not being selected in order to understand the gaps and move forward in the business plan. On the other hand, after not being selected, most of women who believed in their ideas continued applying for other competitions and only few of them were not interested anymore in this kind of programs.

Building on the data that was discussed and analyzed, the researcher developed a set of recommendations for program design officers to better design future initiatives promoting women social entrepreneurship. The recommendations are divided into 3 main sections:

- Recommendations on the level of outreach
- Recommendations on the level of recruitment
- Recommendations on the level of coaching.

This research is the result of two weeks of data collection starting in the midst of February 2021. The research data collection phase was successfully completed without facing serious challenges and the analysis of the data was concluded by end of March 2021. However, results could not be generalized due to the small sample size and the lack of previous research studied in this field.

## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Lebanon has been facing the worst economic and financial crisis in decades, and has been in a state of general mobilization since mid-March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Beirut Blast, which took place in August 4 and caused the destruction of one third of the city, added another layer of hardships that affected individuals and businesses. Therefore, these unprecedented dire situations compounded by the failure of the government to act on pressing issues induced a deep social crisis that impacted people's lives by leaving thousands of them outside the labour market and with a very low purchasing power due to currency devaluation and highly restricted access to deposit accounts<sup>1</sup>.

Women in Lebanon have always faced obstacles, even since before the crises where several obstacles and limitations hindered their entry to the business/ entrepreneurship field and prevented them to build their business, to grow and thrive. As per the Enterprise Surveys<sup>2</sup> Lebanon 2019 Country Profile conducted by the World Bank economic experts, the top 10 ranking obstacles are: Political instability, access to finance, corruption, tax rates, practices of the informal sector, electricity, customs and trade regulations, business licenses and permits, inadequately educated workforce, and transportation.

Given the worldwide growing of complex social problems in terms of health, education and environment, social entrepreneurship has become increasingly popular due to creating a venture for the purpose of making a social change<sup>3</sup>. Findings from studies conducted by Oxfam proved several social, economic, and cultural obstacles that hindered Lebanese women to become social entrepreneurs.

Oxfam is implementing MedUP!, a project funded by the EU which aims to promote an enabling environment for the development of the social entrepreneurship sector as a driver for inclusive growth and job creation. Its specific objective is to increase economic inclusiveness and employment through (i) promoting country and cross-country policy, advocacy initiatives and public-private

<sup>1</sup> ILO. (2020). Rapid Diagnostic Assessment of Employment Impacts under COVID19 in Lebanon. International Labour Organization, Country brief. Geneva and the ILO Regional Office for the Arab States, Lebanon. [ILO Country brief: Rapid Diagnostic Assessment of Employment Impacts under COVID-19 in Lebanon](#)

<sup>2</sup> Enterprise Surveys [www.enterprisesurveys.org](http://www.enterprisesurveys.org) The World Bank Group

<sup>3</sup> Forouharfar, A. (2018). Social entrepreneurship strategies by the Middle Eastern governments: A review. In Entrepreneurship Ecosystem in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (pp. 189– 264). Springer, Cham.

dialogue to create an enabling regulatory and policy environment (macro level); (ii) reinforcing social entrepreneurship support organizations through capacity-building and networking activities (meso level); (iii) providing financial and technical support to 10 social enterprises (micro level).

Under this framework, this case study was developed to examine how SESOs are taking the barriers of WSEs into consideration when designing their programs and to discover the efforts that still need to be adopted. In addition, this paper explores the challenges faced by WSEs when applying for entrepreneurial competitions and investigates what make women come together and collaborate. Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to provide recommendations to be adopted for future initiatives in terms of best outreach/recruitment process and coaching strategies to create an enabling environment for women to become social entrepreneurs.

**To this end, this case study consists of four main research questions:**

- Q1:** What are the main challenges that inhibit women to become social entrepreneurs in times of crisis (General Overview)?
- Q2:** How do organizations (SESOs) take barriers faced by women into account when planning social entrepreneurship support programs? And, what efforts should SESOs make to create an enabling environment for women to become social entrepreneurs?
- Q3:** How to motivate women to become part of a team instead of working alone?
- Q4:** What are the challenges faced by women who applied for entrepreneurial competitions and were not selected? And, what is the needed support to overcome those challenges?

The research design and data collection procedures aiming to answer these research questions relied on primary data and collected through KIIs according to a semi-structured interview guide (See annex 1). The instrument was developed to target two different samples: Social entrepreneurship support organizations (SESOs) and women social entrepreneurs (WSEs). Data were collected through nine one-to-one in-depth interviews; Three with SESOs and six with WSEs who mainly applied for entrepreneurial competitions and were not selected. The KIIs were conducted online through zoom platform and recorded accordingly. The choice of these participants was driven by the focus of the

research and by Oxfam recommendations. Data were anonymous and confidential.

The KII instrument was developed in English language. The approach used to analyze the KIIs is content analysis. Each recorded interview was transcribed and saved into an electronic file. Responses were coded as per themes and sentences were chosen as a coding unit of analysis. All sentences collected form the qualitative data were checked precisely in the purpose of searching for emerging themes. Then, the selected themes were classified into content categories such as: Main WSEs challenges in times of crises, SESOs support for women to become SEs, women collaboration and team work, challenges for entrepreneurial competitions, and best outreach, recruitment and coaching strategies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews some of the Literature's most important findings stemmed from two main research papers provided by Oxfam team which deemed relevant to the topic at hand. These reports are: "Women and social entrepreneurship: A regional perspective in the southern Mediterranean countries submitted by Rabih Jamil and Bernadette Daou; and Women Economic Participation and Entrepreneurial Activity: Drivers and Barriers conducted by Inforpro research in 2020". These two studies tackled the obstacles faced by women in becoming active members of the labor force and specifically in being entrepreneurs or social entrepreneurs.

These reports highlighted the role of social enterprises in filling the gaps of countries under crisis where the adequate access to basic needs and services is dysfunctional. They also indicated the important role that social enterprises could play in constituting a favorable place for addressing the sustainable development goals (SDGs) to achieve a better future for all. Additionally, authors pinpointed the well recognition of Lebanon in its strong entrepreneurship culture with a high concentration of SMEs where women could play an active role in the entrepreneurial ecosystem and consequently in creating jobs. However, the authors of these studies showed that several social, economic and cultural obstacles are hindering women to become social entrepreneurs. Among the biggest obstacles were the balancing between work and family life and the society gender role expectations especially in rural areas. Also, authors found that there is a great gap in supporting women's work from home since

informal labor is not regulated or protected by the Labor Law.

Moreover, the reports showed that the social norms and the cultural traditions context in Lebanon like favoritism for males and unequal access to opportunities and resources, discouraged women from pursuing their entrepreneurship journey. In this regard, the researchers highlighted in their reports the main top business challenges for women to become entrepreneurs and among these were the following: Access to capital and funding opportunities, networking activities and access to market, learning skills and capacity building, expensive public services, and the costly legal and administrative procedures (capital, time, and paper work). These all obstacles intersect and put women's career aspirations as secondary, and marginalize them from following their passions and being part of the economic development.

Given all the of the above, it becomes clearly evident that the ecosystem surrounding women's entrepreneurship in Lebanon is not very inviting and requires extensive serious reforms to close the gender gap and to promote women's social entrepreneurship.

In this vein, one of the objectives of this study is to investigate how SESOs are taking the barriers of WSEs into consideration when designing their programs and to discover the efforts that still need to be adopted to create an enabling environment for women to become social entrepreneurs.

As per the findings of Oxfam previous studies, authors showed that the engagement of SESOs in the provision of support services to SEs was driven by the donors' agenda where there are limited options to design customized programs. They revealed that almost all SESOs do not have a concrete gendered approach and they lack the ability to outreach social entrepreneurs (men and women) from outside the urban centers. Additionally, they lack the development of Arabic content curriculum even for applications. On the other hand, researchers indicated that SESOs were mainly focusing on supporting projects having viable and scalable business plan and in most cases anchored in the technological advancement while overlooking other fields and the ability of underprivileged social groups. In their opinion, this focus is deliberately driven to have successful stories in order to ensure a stable flow of funds through donors' grants. As a result, the underprivileged applicants with low pre-

requisite set of skills are most likely not selected in entrepreneurial programs.

In this regard, the objective of the study is also to understand the challenges faced by women who applied for entrepreneurial competitions and were not selected and to investigate their needed support, in addition to explore what make women be part of a team and collaborate.

## ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted online through zoom platform. Three of them were done with SESOs and six with WSEs who mainly applied for entrepreneurial competition and were not selected. These KIs were conducted to understand how to create an enabling environment for women to become social entrepreneurs and what make women come together and collaborate in order to develop recommendations for best outreach, recruitment and coaching strategies.

### SECTION 1: MAIN WSEs CHALLENGES IN TIMES OF CRISIS

There was a strong consensus that the challenges are impacting everyone, men and women social entrepreneurs. Most of WSEs and especially the ones with no international exposure and access to fresh U.S Dollars mentioned that they are facing severe problems due to the current economic, financial and social crisis. The currency devaluation is limiting their purchasing power and access to imported raw materials, the lockdown is reducing the social commitments and consequently the sales. On top of that, the huge restrictions on accessing banking accounts are limiting their spending and expansions, and forced them to use the fresh cash instead of using savings. Furthermore, there were several specific complaints about kids online schooling challenges, house care work, and taking care of elder people affected by COVID-19.

On the other hand, some women declared that working from home could create room for self-development and especially if the family supports, starting with the husband and kids, and if help in domestic work is available. One WSE said: *"Working from home helped us to have a better work life balance by spending more time with our kids, growing up with them while working at the same time."*

However, many of the SESOs acknowledged that SEs have a big role to play in times of crises. They



indicated that women who are more educated, skilled, financially capable, well connected, having previous career guidance and who are able to think innovatively and creatively, were more likely to view the crisis as an opportunity of scaling the business through technology and reaching international markets. In this situation, entrepreneurs could have access to fresh dollars and their margins will not mainly rely on the internal market that is suffering nowadays. One WSE explained : *“The first thing that we started to do [when the crises started] is to directly leverage our connections outside Lebanon and sought to have projects and businesses overseas. We were successful to establish contracts with Qatar, UAE, and Turkey, and we are trying further to develop these relationships.”*

Several respondents mentioned that women in particular were good in handling crisis management and coping with change. As per the answers of SESOs, WSEs participated in lots of mentoring programs and appreciated the deliverables. However, participants mentioned the negative consequences of job losses on the family, specifically the men who are finding themselves jobless and falling into a negative emotional cycle. It's important to note that the challenges could affect men and women differently based on the family dynamic, the culture of each household, and their openness to change.

## **SECTION 2: SUPPORTING WOMEN TO BECOME SEs.**

Generally speaking, most of the participants assured that SESOs are taking into consideration the barriers faced by women to become SEs. Usually, SESOs conduct a market assessment based on surveys to understand the needs of the targeted communities. However, the design and implementation of the program should always be aligned with the terms of donors' criteria and agenda. SESOs mentioned that they are often developing entrepreneurial competitions and tailoring programs based on KPIs to be able to assess the effectiveness of the projects' outcomes. In most cases, they offered two stages of support: Capacity building for all the applicants at the first stage and one-to one customized approach for the winners at the second stage.

However, some WEs expressed malcontent about the programs' designs and implementations. In their opinion, SESOs are mainly focusing on the success of the project in terms of reaching a great number of beneficiaries rather than focusing on helping women overcoming their challenges

to succeed. A statement which was echoes by other participant was: *“SESOs' programs lack the assistance in project's sustainability in terms of financial and customized technical support.”* On the other hand, other women highlighted the fact that SESOs are doing great efforts in times of crisis by delivering training on crisis management and providing grants in fresh dollars to overcome the currency devaluation.

In this regard, most women called on SESOs to put further effort in understanding their needs throughout all the projects' phases by conducting site visits, asking them repeatedly about their new challenges and the needed support, and offering them customized professional coaching.

To create an enabling environment for women to become SEs, SESOs suggested several activities, among these were the following:

- Provide awareness sessions on the entrepreneurial culture and mindset in addition to deliver training on how to cope with uncertainty and crisis;
- Integrate the entrepreneurial culture in schools and universities curriculum to embed the entrepreneurial mindset and character through education.
- Help in building linkages to find more opportunities abroad;
- Support on the level of funding and building strong networking between different stakeholders for exchanging knowledge and expertise;
- Facilitate customized mentoring and coaching sessions from local and international mentors;
- Develop customized training guiding WSEs through all the supply chain phases.

One of the main initiatives that is considered highly important for WEs was the validation of the potential business ideas to be able to move forward with solid structure. Relatedly, One of SESOs said *“Provide guidance and personalized feedback on validating potential business ideas is essential for beneficiaries to move forward in their business modeling and cashflow forecasts, coaching, mentoring etc... This guidance will empower women to strongly believe in their ideas and move forward towards become entrepreneurs. It's a shame and it is unfair to encourage woman to take that step blindly without really making sure of having something solid to work on”.*

One the other hand, there were several mentions of WSEs describing the efforts needed to create an enabling environment for women to become SEs, among these were the following:

- Improve the quality of trainers;
- Validate the business idea at the beginning of the program;
- Focus on practical trainings rather than theoretical ones;
- Deliver practical approach training through one-to-one coaching and mentoring; Reallocate donors' budget to support accessing new international markets through market linkage initiatives, e-commerce platforms and scale in technology;
- Deliver trainings on soft skills to help in building entrepreneurial mindset and to enable overcoming failures;
- Conduct online trainings accessible to every woman regardless her location;
- And finally provide capacity building sessions for men to help them change their mindset in supporting their spouses' entrepreneurial journey and help them to thrive. In this vein, the most commonly cited between WSEs was: *"What we really need is to improve workshops delivery outcomes by improving the quality of trainers and by accompanying us at different stages throughout one-to-one coaching and mentoring sessions to develop effectively our business especially in reaching international markets and scale in technology."*

The majority of WSEs said that SESOs programs should always be followed by real assessment based on KPIs to make sure from the effectiveness of the program's implementation. One of the WSEs explained that some programs provide seed money without doing a deep assessment on the use of the money; Therefore, money could be used ineffectively. Relatedly, SESOs should conduct on-site visits to check the strengths, weaknesses and achievements of entrepreneurs. Another woman asked SESOs to train their team management on how to deal with marginalized and vulnerable communities. And few women who lived in rural areas preferred attending online trainings that could be accessible regardless how far the location is.

Finally, SESOs and WSEs strongly called on helping women who are passionate about solving

social problems in finding the right business idea. Therefore, trainings should start by understanding the local and international challenges, and be followed by ideation and design thinking sessions to inspire women on how to properly come up with very exciting idea based on valid needs. The majority of WSEs asked SESOs to allocate experts to conduct market needs assessment in each of the program targeting areas for the purpose of helping women find out the best business ideas for solving the existing social problems; Furthermore, at the ideation session, experts should be listening to every participant's idea in order to assess if the project is doable before moving to the next step.

### **SECTION 3: WSEs COLLABORATION AND TEAM WORK**

Most of the participants viewed that being part of a team depends not only on women's culture and background but also on company's sector and size. The vast majority of SESOs saw that the values of collaboration should be fostered indirectly and in a natural way while designing the program selection criteria. For example, women couldn't benefit from any technical and financial support without coming together and collaborating. One of the SESOs highlighted the positive effect of showing the benefits of being part of a team through sharing inspiring local success stories about women who collaborated and succeeded. Those successful women could also play a role in mentoring and guiding other WEs in their collaboration journey.

Another SESO mentioned the importance of introducing in the program design training sessions on topics such as learning to communicate your needs, sharing skills and expertise, importance of delegation and collaboration, organizational structuring, corporate governance, and work life balance. Most of the participants saw that these topics could be extremely helpful to walk the talk. One of the SESOs called for organizing legal awareness sessions explaining the importance of having formal legal entity to be able to grow and evolve. The legal sessions could include inspirational examples like sharing real cases of failures and real cases of successful organizational structure. The difference between these cases could absolutely drive to consider team work as essential part for any success.

On the other hand, one of the SESOs described that the traditional way of training is becoming dry and boring, and suggested that learning through playing could be more effective. She explained that *“Learning through playing is something super interactive that could be used to encourage team building through playing. Therefore, by laughing and being silly, WSEs could learn important lessons on how to collaborate and be part of a team.”*

Finally, all SESOs revealed the importance of integrating in their programs inspiring networking activities. For example, some SESOs mentioned that they are already doing pop up workshops on monthly basis, gathering all the beneficiaries from women entrepreneurial programs, engaging them to share their stories and present their products and services through stands, and ending up by concluding a formal communication and networking between each other. This kind of activities let them get together and join efforts to expand and access new markets instead of being competitors.

On the other hand, the discussion with WSEs about what make them work together and collaborate was centered on the need of knowing how to build a solid organizational structure and how to develop internal procedures to deal with employees and allocate specific tasks for a better management, implementation and control. The most commonly cited by WSEs on how to push women being part of team was the following:

*“We need to be taught on how to manage and deal with the team of our organizations since we are several members and most of the time we are not coming up with a healthy comprehensive discussion. We are wasting our time on non-productive discussions and ending up by losing our energy and positive vibes. We need to know how to set up a healthy collaborative environment by knowing the rules of the game.”*

#### **SECTION 4: CHALLENGES FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETITIONS**

The vast majority of the women who applied for competitions and were not selected said that they didn't face any problem in applying and the team was helpful. However, the most common significant complaint that emerged from the discussion is that women were not informed about the reasons of not being selected. Having said that, the applicants need to understand the weaknesses of their applications in order to know how to move forward in their

action plans. Relatedly, women continued on this theme by expressing their personal malcontent and challenges when applying for competitions such as miscommunication with SESOs teams, wasting lots of time and efforts to apply, ambiguity of specific criteria for specific sectors, and literacy in writing proposals and pitching business ideas. One woman mentioned the following comment:

*“I have applied for Badael program and I was not selected. I didn't find any challenges in applying to this program and I have attended all the trainings and meetings that were done at different stages of the program. At the beginning they were very positive with me; they visited my workshop and I have showed them all my products that are environmentally friendly. I was very transparent with them by showing all the necessary details and on top of that I let them take photos about how I produce my candles. My proposal was to buy a machine and molds for producing candles. But unfortunately, my project was rejected and I was really disappointed as I was informed by message on my mobile without any clarification for the reason of rejection. I felt like someone interfered my life to only take my idea and not giving me anything in return. After a period of time, they have contacted me to apply for another program but I lost interest and enthusiasm as it took a lot of time and efforts to apply for the first one without any results.”*

However, SESOs viewed the main challenge for women applying in entrepreneurial competition is the lack of knowledge and expertise in writing proposals or business plans. In this vein, one WSE shared her testimonial in writing the proposal: *“If I didn't have the support of a Spanish guy who is knowledgeable in writing proposals, I would have not gotten the opportunity of being selected in MedUP. Therefore, SESOs should basically hold our hands and guide us through the whole process to prepare us as professional candidates.”*

Speaking on the needed support, a number of WSEs expressed the necessity of conducting online sessions clarifying the project's objectives and selection criteria and in case of not being selected to list the reasons of rejection. Another WSE asked SESOs to not judge the feasibility of the project without conducting a market assessment to figure out if the project is answering the community needs and solving social problems. Also, an effort could be done to connect women working on the same ideas to join efforts instead of competing.

On the other hand, one of the WSEs highlighted the importance of building capacities through competitions that could end up by not only selecting the best projects but also by learning how to prepare a correct business plan and be ready to enroll future competitions.

When asked to comment on what women are doing after not being selected, SESOs said that some women gave up and others continued applying and sometimes they changed their whole ideas. It highly depends on women's ability to adapt and being flexible. Most of the interviewees didn't give up and applied for other competitions and enrolled in others programs with different SESOs. However, only one of them was not interested anymore in competitions and considered it as waste of time. Another woman has resorted to a full-time job as an employee, in order to be able to save some funds to implement her business idea at a later stage. She said the following: *"After being not selected I didn't allow the rejection of my project to stop my dream in implementing it and achieving my goals. After my rejection, I have contacted the tissue culture department in the Lebanese Agriculture Research Institute in order to check if the idea of creating tissue culture for the Damascus Rose is feasible. I would like to be the pioneer in introducing this type of roses in Lebanon mainly in Bekaa area; however, I am still interested to apply for entrepreneurial competitions at any time. I have never had the plan to be an employee but lately I took a job in order to have an easy access to finance that allowed me to fund my project or any other potential project in case I couldn't get any support from any organization."*

Finally, SESOs continued on this theme by adding that the best thing that could be done for the women who were not selected is to make sure they are part of SESOs' communication and be always updated about any new opportunities for others programs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

After years of work and programs seeking to empower women in the social entrepreneurial field, there are still challenges inhibiting the creation of this ideal environment. Many barriers are cultural, social and structural, and will take many years to overcome. However, there are real and practical steps that can be taken today to promote women's access and success in business, as well as build on the important existing potential in the country. Based on the analysis of findings, this case study provides

recommendations to better design future initiatives promoting women social entrepreneurship in terms of best outreach and recruitment process in addition to coaching strategies.

### ON THE LEVEL OF OUTREACH

1. Conduct market assessment based on KPIs.
2. Highlight the target beneficiaries' selection criteria in terms of age brackets, educational level, geographical area, and business idea...
3. Find the right channel tools. Social media is a key point in spreading the message. However, directing the outreach through partners, organizations, NGOs, universities, chamber of commerce, municipalities, and any other well-known organizations in each community could provide a wide network to reach a great number of targeted women. Not to forget the role of sheikh or shawish in the camps of Syrian and Palestinian refugees.
4. Use encouraging messages depending on the program design and the target beneficiaries' profiles.
5. Assure that the partners data are updated and the beneficiaries' names are not commonly shared with different SESOs. If not, this process could result in having the same beneficiaries for different programs.
6. Recruiting an outreach officer could also be an option. The officer should be well connected in the targeted areas and consequently could know the existing hidden talents.

### ON THE LEVEL OF RECRUITMENT

1. Prepare the application format in Arabic and English language. Application should be based on the goals and objectives of the program.
2. Conduct one-on-one meeting after the screening process to choose the right candidates based on the selection criteria and personality traits.
3. Communicate the reasons of not being selected for candidates who are not accepted in the program.
4. Create a pre-course for candidates who were not selected and who showed an eagerness for being part of the entrepreneurial program. This kind of activity could help in building the capacity of a great number of women and prepare them for

future programs.

5. Provide a small financial incentive for encouraging beneficiaries' commitment in case the program is targeting vulnerable communities.

### **ON THE LEVEL OF COACHING**

1. Understand beneficiaries' challenges to tailor the best supportive approach based on clear milestones and objectives.
2. Connect entrepreneurs with prominent incubating firms that are building regular workshops aiming to answer beneficiaries concerns and enhance the networking between people.
3. Form a pool of local and international coaches and mentors. International coaches and mentors could play a major role in reaching new markets.
4. Develop awareness sessions to train women on the job of coaches and mentors. The aim is to teach them what kind of questions could be asked to benefit from their experiences.
5. Assess the effectiveness of coaching sessions through KPIs.

To sum up, this case study showcased the efforts that should be done to create an enabling environment for women to become social entrepreneurs and to work together and collaborate. At the same time, it highlighted some gaps to be addressed while women applying for entrepreneurial competitions and who have not selected. Consequently, designing any program should be based on specific selection criteria and a real market assessment and at the same time be aligned with the donors' desired goals and objectives. Then, the outreach, recruitment and coaching strategies can be set accordingly and assessed through KPIs.

## ANNEX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

### THE INTERVIEWER:

- Introduces herself and thanks the participants for taking the time and making the effort to join this session.
- Asks the participant to introduce herself.
- Displays the objectives of the case study
- Reminds the participant that her participation is confidential and anonymous unless she specifies otherwise.
- Informs the participant that the conversation will be recorded for analysis purposes only.

### QUESTIONS:

**Q1:** Recently, we are going through multiple crisis at the same time (economic, financial, banking, currency devaluation and inflation, health, social, high unemployment and poverty rate.....); from your experience and in the time being, what are the main factors that hinder women to become social entrepreneurs in Lebanon?

**Q2:** How do organizations (SESOs) take social, cultural, and economic barriers faced by women into account when planning social entrepreneurship support programs?

**Probe:**

- o When designing supportive programs, how the SESO's approaches/strategies/measures take into consideration the barriers that women face to become SEs?

**Q3:** What efforts should SESOs make to create an enabling environment for women to become social entrepreneurs?

**Probe:**

- o What are the SESO's approaches/strategies/measures that still need to be adopted to reduce those barriers?

- What kind of supportive programs do they need to offer? (Example: Capacity building: topics, locations..., Financial support: donation, send funding, venture capital, debt..., Networking activities: developing networking platforms for SE..., Technical support: going online, accessing new market, new pricing strategy...)

-From your experience, do you think that

there are other areas that need to be tackled and resolved when implementing or improving programs supporting women to become SE?

**Q4:** As we know from previous studies, most of women prefer to work alone from home due to many factors related to social, cultural and economic obstacles; How do you think can we create an environment that will push women to be part of a team and not continuing to prefer working alone?

**Probe:**

- o What makes women come together and collaborate?

**Q5:** Many women applied to competitions but were not selected; What are the challenges that these women faced when applying for competitions, and what is the support they need to overcome those challenges.

**Probe:**

- o What are your alternative plans? To apply again? To find a new job? What are you doing now? Future plans etc.

**Q6:** According to all these barriers faced by women to become WSE, what are your recommendations for future initiatives seeing to promote women social entrepreneurship in terms of best outreach and recruitment process in addition to coaching strategies?

**Q7:** Please do share any final thoughts you have.

Thank you,