

BREAKING THE CIRCLE OF POVERTY:

The Impact of DEEP in Empowering Vulnerable Palestinian Families

In the heart of Palestine, where resilience meets adversity, the struggle against poverty and unemployment hangs heavy over much of the population.

Around three out of every 10 Palestinians still found themselves below the poverty line in 2017 - a protracted situation rooted in historical conflicts and ongoing occupation.

In the years following the 1948 war, more than 1.5 million Palestinians were displaced - forced to rebuild their lives in refugee camps after their communities were shattered and their livelihoods lost.

The DEEP Program:

Amidst these challenges, the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) took a pioneering step in 2006 with the establishment of the Deprived Families Economic Empowerment Program (DEEP).

It was a ray of hope, aiming at lifting out vulnerable Palestinians from overlapping deprivations and from the reliance on humanitarian aid to promote active participation in society.

Gaza fisherman Kamel Rajab Abu-Odah was always going to follow his father and grandfather and earn a living from the sea.



The 50-year-old lived in a small three-room house with his wife, two sons, daughter, daughter-in-law and two grandsons but was finding it very difficult to provide for his family. In November 2009, DEEP granted him a US\$4,000 grant to buy a new net to catch different types of fish. This vital piece of equipment, along with his sons and brother joining the project, brought an upturn in the business.

His monthly income was previously as low as US\$250 but it rose to as much as US\$1,500 – which Kamel could track after DEEP provided advice on bookkeeping skills.

“This was a remarkable increase of income. I was very glad and very thankful for all those who supported me,” he said.

“I have even started to save some money because I had my biggest dream – to buy a boat.”

By March 2010, he had already bought a new boat for US\$8,000 – paying half initially and committing to the rest over flexible instalments.

Vulnerable families such as Kamel’s are identified by DEEP through meticulous assessments using techniques such as the Poverty Score Card and Sustainable Livelihoods Approach. Then NGOs and Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) become involved to offer:

1. Promotional and Protective Social Safety Net Activities:
2. Economic Empowerment Grants: Providing seed capital grants to families with potential for income-generating activities.
3. Economic Empowerment Non-Financial Services: Offering training, entrepreneurship skills development and market linkages to boost productivity of micro-enterprises.
4. Islamic Microfinance: Offering asset-transfer financing to support business ventures, aligning with the preferences of Palestinian households for Islamic financial instruments.
5. Capacity Building: Enhancing the capabilities of partner organizations to efficiently execute poverty reduction interventions.

Sameer Al Hams’s family in Gaza were also helped by DEEP when he became dependent on aid after twice losing his livelihood.

The 51-year-old father of five used to travel from Gaza to work in Israel but, after losing his work permit in 1996, and then the taxi he afforded to get, he could not find nor sustain any job, living in despair and vulnerability.

“All my savings had gone into the car, and it was destroyed. We had gone from being comfortable to having no income,” he said.

In the years that followed the family struggled with poverty.

Sameer began working with his son in law, who was an electrician repairing washing machines, but the business was too small to pay him a wage.

With DEEP's help, Sameer, who had taught himself the mechanics of washing machines, was able to buy more repair equipment and the business quickly grew.

"Income earned by my own hand is much better than any other kind of money," he said.

"When you work, everything tastes better. You can send your children to school, and you do not feel like a beggar. I have regained my self-esteem."

Impact and Results:

Since its inception, DEEP has established more than 16,000 income-generating projects - 43% of them owned by female entrepreneurs and more than 52,000 jobs created in total, with almost half taken up by women.

These jobs directly impacted the livelihoods of at least 215,000 citizens of which 60% were children. The initiatives resulted in 37% of beneficiaries escaping poverty and significantly reduced reliance on aid for a massive 96% of participants.

DEEP's holistic approach extended beyond economic betterment, also offering vital support in education, health, and housing to 12,773 families.

Building upon DEEP's success, IsDB launched the Economic Empowerment Fund for the Palestinian People (EEFPP) in 2018, with a US\$500 million commitment.

DEEP is a shining example of the transformative impact of targeted interventions to empower marginalized communities.

By addressing the root causes of poverty and fostering economic resilience, DEEP not only enhances livelihoods but also paves the way for sustainable development in Palestine.

