

Cultivating Hope

Palestinian Women Coping with COVID-19

Courtesy of CARE Palestine West Bank/Gaza*

For many mothers in the West Bank and Gaza, the lockdown was not a pleasant experience. Overburdened with endless household chores, childcare, psychological and emotional stresses, and home schooling, most women could not find time for themselves.

Bayan Farraj, a married mother of three children from Ramallah, is not so different from the rest. She had other responsibilities, however, that motivated her to create time for herself and her small business “Allure by Bayan,” a natural-beauty-products business. The pharmacist by training, who studied medicinal manufacturing for her master’s, planned well for the business that she started with support from OBADER.¹ Through OBADER’s partners’ support, specifically, the Business Women Forum, Bayan was able to practice what she studied and fulfil her passion.

Global evidence shows that women entrepreneurs are struggling. In a recent survey of women entrepreneurs, 93 percent of respondents indicated that they immediately experienced the negative impact of

the COVID-19 pandemic, and 4 percent believe that they will be impacted in the future. Of those already impacted, 44 percent have temporarily ceased operations and 3 percent have permanently ceased operations.ⁱⁱ A similar pattern is reported for Palestinian women, 95 percent of whom reported that their businesses were being negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.ⁱⁱⁱ

With the unexpected timing of the lockdown, Bayan, who was preparing for one of her peak-selling seasons, was particularly hard hit. “I prepared some beautiful arrangements for Mother’s Day on March 21, but none were sold,” said Bayan. Fearful of losing her small investment, Bayan was quick to react. Her training with OBADER’s project gave her the confidence to make timely adjustments to her business model by using online platforms that allowed her to continue her operations during the lockdown. “I reactivated my Instagram page and advertised my products. I even spent more time talking and explaining to clients about the benefits and value of the products.”

During the lockdown, Bayan continued to sell her products through social media. Her husband supported her in delivering some of the items to Ramallah. While under lockdown, she invested in producing products that require some time to dry, such as soap. She experimented with new products to be ready when the markets reopen.

Many businesses faced similar challenges during the lockdown – some were forced to cancel confirmed orders and thus lost many regular customers who changed their buying habits.



While it was never easy, Bayan tried different approaches to ensure that her business could continue to operate during the pandemic. She explored marketing tactics with a smaller margin of profit, provided special offers to customers, and delivered her products inside Ramallah. Her all-natural products, which are usually more expensive due to their higher quality, were

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected and will continue to disproportionately affect women and girls.



sold for the same price as regular products. For Bayan, staying in the market and keeping the trust of her clients was an effective business strategy.

Digital and online marketing became more important for women entrepreneurs across the world during the pandemic. Palestinian women had to develop their skills, start engaging online with customers, and use their social media platforms to sell products. They've also been offering virtual consultations to clients who want to know more about a product before making a purchase.

In the West Bank and Gaza, online marketing is still limited to social media options because of lack of familiarity with other e-marketing channels and problems in accessing payment gateways. Movement restrictions in the West Bank and Gaza mean that delivering goods is also limited and depends on the women themselves or their family members. While there are many

capacities to be developed and policies and regulations to be put in place to ensure proper and effective online marketing platforms, the fact that women such as Bayan are using the options available to them is encouraging and promising.

Bayan has never given up, remaining determined to be resourceful in the face of numerous challenges. She has adopted new marketing strategies and techniques, including using online and digital marketing tools that have allowed her to build a new local clientele and keep her business viable.

Women entrepreneurs such as Bayan are essential for the economic recovery of households, communities, and sectors during the COVID-19 pandemic recovery. Thinking outside the box, however, will always be limited by systemic barriers, including access to finance, ability to market products, social norms, and the level of awareness and capacities.

Since no one knows when this period will end, these women need extra support from the authorities, the chambers of commerce, and other stakeholders to ensure that they can stay in the market. Having a support structure of organizations in place to allow entrepreneurs like Bayan to network and learn from each other is critical because such organizations can identify common needs and trends and address them collectively.

Although women such as Bayan have found some ways to engage with their customers over social media, more support is needed to allow low-income Palestinian women and youth entrepreneurs to master

digital marketing and understand the legal and policy framework that surrounds it. Access to technology goes beyond the use of social media platforms. In a post-COVID-19 world, mastering new technologies and digital marketing will be crucial for any successful business.

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ⁱⁱ New research findings from the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women on the impact of COVID-19 on women entrepreneurs in low- and middle-income countries, available at <https://cherieblairfoundation.org/women-entrepreneurs-covid19-research/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://palestine.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/4/impact-of-covid-19-on-women-led-msmes-in-palestine>.

