

FINAL REPORT

Final Programme Evaluation: Path to Economic Recovery: Facilitating Decent Jobs in Gaza Strip

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and Training

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Final Programme Evaluation: Path to Economic Recovery: Facilitating Decent Jobs in Gaza Strip

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Atfaluna	Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children
BTI	Business and Technology Incubator
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GIZ	German Agency for International Development
GCT	General Consulting and Training
G-Gateway	Gaza Gateway
IsDB	Islamic Development Bank
IPs	Implementing Partners
IRADA	Programme for Empowerment of People with Disabilities
JCP	Job Creation Programme
KfW	German Development Bank
KII	Key Informants Interviews
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoL	Ministry of Labour
MoNE	Ministry of National Economy
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
NGOs	Non- Governmental Organizations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PalTrade	The Palestine Trade Centre
PARC	Palestinian Agriculture Relief Committee
PFI	Palestinian Federation of Industries
PICTA	Palestinian ICT Association
PITA	Palestinian Information Technology Association of Companies
PEF	Palestinian Employment Fund
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UCASTI	University Colle for Applied Sciences Technology Incubator
UNDP	United nation Development Program
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistant framework
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report includes the findings of the thematic evaluation of the UNDP's "Path to Economic Recovery: Facilitating Decent Jobs in Gaza Strip," program; hereinafter, the 'programme'.

The programme targeted the youth, women, and other marginalized groups in Gaza Strip by providing them with greater access to decent productive work in the private and public sectors and contributed to sustainable and inclusive economic development. The programme's implementation approach focused on providing opportunities for the development of the skills of the youth, women, and people with disabilities (PwDs) in Gaza Strip through supporting entrepreneurship, business incubators, vocational training, and onsite intensive skills development, in addition to supporting MSMEs technically and financially. The programme was implemented throughout June 2019 to December 2022.

This multi-donor programme was implemented with funding from the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), Qatar, Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), Norway, Japan, German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), Denmark, and German Development Bank (KfW). The total budget of the programme was US\$ 25 million. The programme had four outputs, including:

Output 1: Gazans are provided with greater access to short-term decent work opportunities in private and public sectors. This output was evaluated at the end of 2021 under a separate thematic programme evaluation.

Output 2: Gazan youth capacities in technical and vocational education and training are improved.

Output 3: Young entrepreneurs are provided with greater access to medium and long-term job opportunities.

Output 4: SMEs capacities in sustaining and growing their businesses in the market are strengthened.

The main purpose of this thematic evaluation is to assess the results achieved by the UNDP concerning programme outputs 2, 3 and 4, which were funded by SDC, Japan, Norway, and Denmark. The evaluation focuses on assessing the extent to which the activities under these outputs contributed to 1) Youth skills' enhancement, 2) Increasing the employability of youth and 3) Ensuring increased sustainability and growth of existing businesses.

For this thematic evaluation, a theory-based approach was utilized, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies during the evaluation process. The purpose was to gather information on the key indicators of the program outputs, in order to determine the extent to which the program's planned changes were achieved and to evaluate its effectiveness. The approach analysed the ability of the programme approach to link short-term and longer-term outputs, and how the selected programme strategies achieved the planned outcomes, including objectives and assumptions. Analysis of findings will be used for further improvement of UNDP's approaches and activities under the programme and other similar interventions. Output 1 of the programme is not included in this evaluation since it was the focus of another thematic evaluation conducted in October 2021.

Main Findings of the Evaluation:

Relevance: The programme was implemented in line with the State of Palestine’s National Policy Agenda (NPA) *Putting Citizens First (2017-2022)* and was aligned with two of the Ten National Priorities, namely 'Economic independence' and 'Resilient Communities'. The programme contributed to achieving SDGs “Leave No one Behind” principle, through immediate job creation and enhancing long term competitiveness of the private sector to build an independent economy.

The programme interventions were perceived as highly relevant to fulfilling the needs and priorities of young men and women, especially enhancing their economic empowerment and improving their living conditions and livelihoods. The programme bridged certain gaps in matching skills with the labour market needs, leading to better employment opportunities for the targeted group. About 95 percent of the targeted youth reported that the training and support they received during the programme matched their skills and capacities. They also confirmed that 70 percent of the support they received through the programme was relevant to the needs in the labour market and would increase their employment potential.

Most private sector companies (80 percent) reported, during the FGDs, that the programme approach was consistent with their needs through provision of workplace learning opportunities for targeted youth in their companies after completing the TVET course. The owners of these companies further indicated that it was important to improve the matching mechanism between the competencies of the beneficiaries and the needs in the private sector, which would enhance the potential for future employment for the targeted youth. About 71 percent of the surveyed MSMEs reported that the technical support they received was relevant to upgrade their operations and production capacity. While 52 percent of the supported MSMEs indicated that they expected more support to cover other needs and challenges facing their business, such as market linkage support, and provision of equipment and tools to improve production capacity.

Approximately 68 percent of respondent of the supported MSMEs in the survey confirmed that the support through the programme enabled them to resume operation after being affected by COVID-19 pandemic. The programme also enabled them to recover following May 2021 hostilities towards Gaza by maintaining their machines, equipment, and production lines that were partially damaged. The respondents indicated that the amount of support needed to be increased based on comprehensive needs assessment and upgrading plan for the enterprise, adding that the interventions under this component of the programme need to be scaled up to ensure full recovery of the targeted MSMEs. Female beneficiaries of the supported MSMEs agreed that the support through the programme helped them build their capacity to increase income, hence, improving livelihoods and living conditions.

The programme applied an integration of human rights and gender sensitive approaches through its interventions and addressed, to some extent, the needs of vulnerable groups. The programme adopted several measures in line with UNDP Strategic Plan (2018-2021), Outcome 1.1.2, to ensure that women and PwDs were empowered to gain universal access to basic services and financial and non-financial resources. The programme directly responded to the issue of high unemployment amongst the PwDs, through a tailor-made training programme, followed by job placement period in the private sector, this component was implemented by Irada and Atfaluna. However, during the implementation phase, the program faced number of challenges related to the limited capacity of

Gaza's private sector to provide suitable working environment for women and PwDs in particular as a result of the ongoing economic difficulties.

Coherence: The programme outputs were integrated, and they complement each other, to some extent, to achieve the programme objective of ensuring decent work and economic recovery in Gaza. Synergies and interlinkages were considered between the programme and other interventions carried out by UNDP in the same sector, taking advantage of the ongoing activities implemented by UNDP in relation to job creation, building entrepreneurship skills, and support to the startups and micro-businesses.

The programme was built based on other actors' interventions within in the socio-economic recovery sector to ensure sustainability of results, particularly the World Bank interventions. UNDP successfully established strong partnerships with national actors, especially in entrepreneurship and youth employment which helped enhance its good standing in these areas. Coordination between IPs could be improved to support achieving planned results. While the coordination between UNDP and local actors was high during the implementation of the programme, a limited coordination was found with the key international actors, particularly to develop a unified strategy for the recovery and reform of the private sector.

Effectiveness: All planned targets of the programme and key results for the various beneficiary groups were achieved despite the challenges faced during the implementation of the programme interventions such as COVID-19 pandemic and hostilities towards Gaza in May 2021.

The programme strategy was effective in adopting innovative approaches to address the needs and challenges faced by the youth in Gaza. The approaches included quality vocational training and provision of apprenticeship opportunities in the private sector, supporting young entrepreneurs and start-ups, and strengthening MSMEs. The majority of TVET beneficiaries in the survey (above 82 percent) reported that the programme supported them to learn new knowledge and skills, and they felt it would help them find job opportunities in the future.

The programme faced certain challenges during the implementation phase related mainly to the current economic crisis in Gaza. On the other hand, the implementation of the job placement component in the private sector faced some difficulties due to the limited capacity and lack of infrastructure and resources in some of the hosting businesses to provide safe working environment for women and PwDs.

The programme supported the economic recovery of targeted MSMEs through provision of turnaround management support. It enhanced direct recovery of MSMEs in key economic sectors affected by COVID-19 and the last military escalation in May 2021. About 78 percent of supported enterprise indicated that the support enabled them to resume operation after being significantly affected by the hostilities and COVID-19 and positively enhanced resilience and stabilization of businesses of these enterprises. Approximately 79 percent of the enterprises were able to increase profitability as a result of the programme support. The interviewed representative from the private sector added that the support by the programme needs to be coupled with larger scale interventions to enhance the private sector long term development.

The programme contributed to improving the capacity of IPs, business incubators, and TVET centres to design and implement interventions to develop the skills of young people, especially women, and people with disabilities (PwDs) on the basis of the needs of the labour market.

Considerations of gender sensitivity and human rights, including ensuring equal opportunities, had positively contributed to the achievements of the programme's outcomes for both male and female beneficiaries. The cultural issues and specific women's needs were taken into consideration.

Efficiency: The use of the available financial resources to implement the various interventions of the programme was efficient. This was conducted in cooperation with the implementing partners. The budget allocation will be reviewed in future programmes so as to allocate more funds to ensure significant change and enhancement of the capacities of the businesses.

The selection of partners and partnership strategies have been efficient and effective to build an enabling environment for Gaza youth and strengthened the private sector ecosystem. However, the evaluation found certain level of overlapping of the roles and responsibilities and lack of coordination between the IPs over the various programme outputs.

While the programme framework consisted of specific indicators of key outputs and outcomes, the impact indicators were developed to reflect the tangible impact of the various interventions on the direct beneficiaries and the wider community. These indicators included quantitative indicators that measured improved living conditions of the targeted youth and the impact on the development of the private sector.

Overall, the programme management was responsive and flexible to overcome obstacles and manage the precarious conditions of Gaza. The management team demonstrated strong commitment to support the implementing partners during the implementation of the various interventions of the programme. This process was guided by the experience of the management team in economic empowerment and its vision and leadership to achieve programme outcomes.

Potential impact:

The programme had specifically contributed to social and economic empowerment of young people in Gaza. According to the findings of the survey, most targeted youth reported that the programme had a positive impact on their overall well-being, this was also confirmed by the FGDs' findings. The programme supported the targeted PwDs to generate income to become independent and potentially help their families through start-ups and self-employment support.

This positive impact meant improved sustainable livelihood opportunities and support to face economic challenges and low standards of living resulting from unemployment. In addition to the impact at individual level, the programme also had impact at community level. It increased degrees of social integration between youth and their surroundings, enhanced opportunities for income generation, and overall higher confidence to become independent and able to contribute to the community development process.

The programme had strong impact on targeted MSMEs in Gaza Strip to support economic recovery process. Furthermore, the programme was able to build the capacity of the IPs and relevant

stakeholders within the entrepreneur ecosystem to provide similar services and interventions once the programme was completed.

The selection of partners and partnership strategies contributed to increasing the capacity of the IPs in youth employment and private sector development. Consequently, IPs acquired the capacity to lead and implement similar interventions in the future. According to the evaluation, there are certain levels of overlapping of specific roles of IPs and limited level of coordination between IPs with respect to various programme outputs.

Potential sustainability: The programme improved consistency between the skills developed by the TVET centres who benefited from the programme and the labour market and private sector needs. To increase sustainability, the programme interventions can be enhanced to create better enabling environment and greater opportunities for young entrepreneurship, in addition to enhancing the technical and financial support to ensure sustainable function of enterprises and start-ups.

To enhance sustainability, the programme approach extensively relied on including local actors and service providers during the implementation of the programme interventions. IPs pinpointed certain positive change toward sustainability, which was evident and manifested in various ways as a result of the programme support to expand collaboration and networking with the local actors in the same sector.

The active involvement of local partners in the design and implementation phases of the programme took sustainability issues into consideration. However, growing economic challenges require rethinking the partnership model to expand partnerships with other donors and main actors including the public sector and may take up a high share of the budget.

Conclusion:

Overall, the programme was successful in achieving the outputs of its objectives. Moreover, the programme dealt with various challenges Gaza Strip had faced over the past few years, particularly COVID-19 pandemic and May 2021 hostilities towards Gaza.

The programme had efficiently used the available financial resources to implement its various interventions, which were conducted in cooperation with local partners. The planned targets and key outcomes were achieved by the programme. Innovative approaches to address the needs of young people and the challenges they face helped achieve this end. The programme proved to be highly relevant to the needs and priorities of the youth, PwDs, and women. It was able to respond to the most pressing challenges they faced by ensuring sustainable livelihood opportunities to improve their living conditions.

The programme strengthened MSMEs' capacities to sustain their businesses in the market. It also built the capacities of the IPs to provide similar services and interventions in the entrepreneurial ecosystem once the programme was completed.

Gender transformative programmes tackled gender issues by ensuring equal opportunities for males and females. This process took into consideration cultural issues and women specific needs, the

specific challenges women faced, and women's priorities in benefiting from the programme interventions.

Given the increased levels of challenges and the need to enhance youth employment and strengthen the private sector, the evaluation concluded that the programme can be scaled up, to target a greater number of Gaza youth and enterprises based on adequate assessments.

Lessons Learned (to be prerequisites for future programmes)

- Hosting businesses to be fully committed to endorsing job placement duration of TVET beneficiaries.
- Assess the capacity of the hosting businesses to ensure that they have the necessary equipment, tools, and infrastructure for placement of women or PwDs.
- Obtain and validate updated lists of beneficiaries to avoid duplication of services and to ensure that selected young beneficiaries are fully available to benefit from the programme service, whether TVET or entrepreneurship opportunities.
- Factor in all possible risks that may affect the timeline with the IPs for smoother and quality implementation, to avoid multiple amendment of the contracts and agreements.
- The vocational training may be provided before or during the apprenticeship (i.e., 3 days in the company and 2-3 days vocational training) based on capacity assessment and agreement with the host business, so that beneficiaries have better opportunities to be retained after completion of the apprenticeship period.
- Ensure that the programme includes provision of awareness sessions for relevant IPs' staff and stakeholders on gender issues and integration of PwDs in the private sector.
- Programme design factors in challenges implementing partners face such as financial challenges resulting from insufficient funding. This is handled by funding additional operational costs and activities and provision of specific tools and equipment beneficiaries may need, especially female beneficiaries and adaptive medical equipment for PwDs.

The evaluation analysis of findings, lessons learned, and information highlight the following summary of the recommendations (the details are provided in section 7 of this report) to be considered for future programmes:

- Foster sustainable growth driven by the private sector through MSMEs capacity building and enhance business enabling environment to promote economic recovery, through provision of technical and financial support and removing regulatory and practical obstacles to doing business or scaling up within the local market and beyond.
- Integration of active labour market strategies to support sustainability of the entrepreneurs and startups to enhance success rate of the new established business.
- Conduct comprehensive needs assessment that focuses on exploring a new horizon of potential local, regional, and international demands, hence identifying priority specializations and training programmes to meet the needs. This assessment will contribute to improving the matching process, creating new job opportunities, and supporting private sector recovery. It will also provide a more holistic understanding of the interrelationships between needs, allowing for more targeted responses.

- Enhance coordination and partnerships among vocational training providers, incubators, academic institutions, and the private sector through research and development, knowledge and experience transfer, and resource sharing.
- Provision of support improve the quality of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) graduates can be achieved by establishing a mechanism to upgrade the capacity of local TVET providers.
- Conducting assessment for the implementing partners to provide clear evidence of the drivers of success among the selected partners. The assessment findings can guide the distribution of roles and responsibilities and improve their ability to work together to achieve program results. It is important to design and implement a strategic mechanism that supports implementing partners to lead future interventions addressing youth employment and private sector recovery.
- Systematically mainstream gender responsiveness across all interventions and enhance gender sensitive approach in future interventions through designing and implementing gender training for partner organizations and relevant stakeholders.
- Capture the medium- and long-term impacts of the programme through developing impact indicators to reflect the concrete impact that the various interventions have on the direct beneficiaries and the local community. This could be developed through impact assessment studies for the various programme outputs, which would also consider increasing budget allocations for such activities.
- Improve programme ToC to enhance integration between the three programme outputs, through provision of greater opportunities for TVET beneficiaries (output 2) who have entrepreneurial ideas to benefit from the incubation services (output 3) or microgrants opportunities (output 4), to become self-employed or new startups.

1. INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this thematic evaluation was to assess the results achieved by the UNDP concerning programme outputs 2, 3 and 4, which were funded by SDC, Japan, Norway, and Denmark. The evaluation focuses on assessing the extent to which the activities under these outputs contributed to 1) Youth skills' enhancement, 2) Increasing the employability of youth and 3) Ensuring increased sustainability and growth of existing businesses.

A theory-based approach was applied for this thematic evaluation, using qualitative and quantitative methodology during the evaluation process. The evaluation gathered information about the key indicators of the programme outputs, to determine the extent to which the changes the programme planned for have been achieved and to assess. The approach assessed the ability of the programme approach to link short-term and longer-term outputs, and how the selected programme strategies achieved the planned outcomes, including objectives and assumptions.

Analysis of findings and recommendations will be used for further improvement of UNDP's approaches and activities under the programme and the development of other similar interventions in the sector.

1.1 Socioeconomic context

Palestine context is characterised by a high degree of volatility due to political, socio-economic, geographic, and demographic factors. According to the World Bank, more actions are needed to get the Palestinian economy out of its deteriorating trajectory in order to achieve economic development and job creation. Labour market and unemployment remain a major challenge and chronic issue facing the Palestinian community¹. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), the unemployment rate in Palestine reached 26% in 2021, with a large disparity in the unemployment rate between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as this rate reached 47% in Gaza Strip compared to 16% in the West Bank. These rates reached 66% among female youth and 36% among male youth in 2021 and were the highest in the Gaza Strip compared to the West Bank among youth graduates (74% and 36% respectively). The highest rates of unemployment among the youth aged 18-29 years were recorded among graduates, including those holding an intermediate diploma or higher (54%) with a clear difference between youth males and females (39% and 69% respectively).

From a labour market perspective, Palestinians rely heavily on employment in the public sector (21% of the population work in the public sector), while about 66% of the population are employed by the private sector, and the remaining 13% are employed in Israel (PCBS, 2020). The Palestinian private sector operates in a challenging context of an unstable economy, travel bans, and quarantine measures due to the outbreak of COVID 19, which made it difficult for enterprises, including Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), to sustain business operations. Many workers could not go to their places of work or carry out their jobs, resulting in reduced incomes and increased poverty rates. This is coupled with the economic impact of the Israeli occupation, which has been characterized by the imposition of restrictions on movement of people and goods and the control of natural resources, resulting in low productive capacity of the Palestinian economy.

¹ Economic Monitoring Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, World Bank, 2021.

The situation in the Gaza Strip remains a protracted protection crisis and remains cut off from the rest of the Palestinian territory, with three large scale offensives in Gaza Strip in six years, exacerbated by the May 2021 escalation. Almost 60 percent of the Gazan population live below the poverty line. Therefore, the residents of Gaza Strip have become dependent on government and external donor assistance, and capacity for the public service delivery has been overstretched.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 in Gaza Strip not only strained the already deteriorated healthcare system but has also contributed to a further worsening of the economic conditions for the residents of Gaza. More and more families have been pushed into poverty and made reliant on food rations where vulnerabilities are expected to deepen next years.

1.2 Description of the programme

Path to Economic Recovery: Facilitating Decent Jobs in Gaza Strip Programme was designed in line with the Palestinian National Policy Agenda 2017 – 2022, and with UNDP’s overall approach of Transformative Resilience and adopting the SDGs ‘leave no one behind’ principle. The overall goal of the programme is to address the issue of unemployment in Gaza Strip, by empowering youth to exercise their career choices and the potential to lead a better life using economic empowerment tools for creating short, medium, and long-term job opportunities. The proposed approach for implementation provided opportunities for skilling and employment of youth, particularly woman, and persons with disabilities (PwDs) in Gaza Strip by using entrepreneurship, business incubators, vocational training, and onsite intensive skilling in addition to supporting MSMEs and strengthening their capacities to sustain in the market.

The primary objective of this programme is to tackle the issue of unemployment in Gaza Strip by empowering youth to exercise their career choices and achieve a better quality of life using economic empowerment tools. for creating short, medium, and long-term job opportunities. The programme targets youth and women in the age category 18-35 who are unemployed or who are entering the labour market for the first time after completion of education, in addition to other marginalized groups in Gaza Strip by providing them with greater access to decent productive jobs in the private and public sectors and contributing to sustainable and inclusive economic development. The targeted beneficiaries possess different competency levels, and they expected to improve access to more sustainable job opportunities and strengthen social cohesion.

This multi-donor programme was implemented throughout June 2019 to December 2022 with funding from the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), Qatar, Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), Norway, Japan, German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), Denmark, and German Development Bank (KfW). The total budget of the programme was US\$ 25 million. The programme had four outputs, including:

Output 1: Gazans are provided with greater access to short-term decent work opportunities in private and public sectors. This output was evaluated at the end of 2021 under a separate thematic programme evaluation.

Output 2: Gazan youth capacities in technical and vocational education and training are improved.

Output 3: Young entrepreneurs are provided with greater access to medium and long-term job opportunities.

Output 4: SMEs capacities in sustaining and growing their businesses in the market are strengthened.

The programme implementation approach focused on providing opportunities for skill development of youth, particularly women, and people with disabilities (PwDs) in Gaza Strip through supporting entrepreneurship, business incubators, vocational training, and onsite intensive skills development. In order to deliver the programme activities, UNDP has engaged in partnership with different national partners who were involved in direct implementation of the different programme interventions. The national implementing partners (IPs) and their role on the programme are provided in table 1:

- Job Creation Programme (JCP)
- Centre for Rehabilitation and Vocational Training of People with Disability (Irada)
- Business and Technology Incubator (BTI)
- UCAS Technology Incubator (UCASTI)
- Palestinian Federation of Industries (PFI)
- The Palestine Trade Centre (PalTrade)
- Palestinian Agriculture Relief Committee (PARC)

Table 1: The implementing partners and their role in the programme.

OUTPUT	Target Beneficiaries	Implementing partner	Donors
Output 2: Gazan youth capacities in technical and vocational education and training are improved.	PWDs	IRADA Atfaluna	SDC III
	TVET	JCP	Japan
Output 3: Young entrepreneurs are provided with greater access to medium and long-term job opportunities.	Entrepreneurs and Start-ups	BTI UCASTI	SDC III
		PFI, BTI GGateway	Japan Norway
Output 4: SMEs capacities in sustaining and growing their businesses in the market are strengthened.	MSMEs	PAL Trade PFI	SDC III
		PARC, PITA	Japan Denmark

2. EVALUATION SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Evaluation scope.

According to the Terms of Reference (TOR), this thematic evaluation focuses on Outputs 2, 3 and 4 of the programme's interventions - implemented in partnership with national partners in Gaza Strip. The evaluation was conducted throughout October to December 2022.

The Evaluation covers all aspects of the programme implementation in the Gaza Strip. These aspects are included in the period subject to evaluation such as beneficiaries, implementing partners, geographical scope, budget and funding sources, implementation arrangements and context and other dimensions of evaluation. More specifically, the evaluation encompasses the programme

implementation approach to provide skill development opportunities to the youth, especially women and PwDs in Gaza Strip through supporting entrepreneurship, business incubators, TVET, MSMEs, and onsite intensive skills development.

Given that this is a programme thematic evaluation, Output 1 is not included. It was the focus of another evaluation conducted in October 2021.

2.2 Evaluation objectives

The main purpose of this thematic evaluation is to assess the results the UNDP achieved with respect to output 2, 3 and 4 of the programme. These outputs were mainly funded by SDC, Japan, Norway, Denmark, and UNDP. The evaluation is of the approaches and methods applied and their ability to enhance both the supply and demand sides of the labour market and hereby address unemployment and economic underperformance.

The focus of the evaluation is the extent to which the activities under outputs 2, 3 and 4 contributed to 1) Youth skills enhancement, 2) Increasing the employability of youth and 3) Ensure increased sustainability and growth of existing businesses. The evaluation also assessed the programme's inclusion of cross cutting issues such as gender equality, and empowerment of women and PwDs.

The findings of the evaluation will be utilized for further improvement of UNDP's approaches and activities under the programme. They will also be used to enhance other similar interventions, especially that this evaluation coincides with the ongoing development of UNDP's new strategic Transformative Resilience framework and strategy for the inclusive economic development portfolio. The evaluation identifies key lessons learned, summarizes the experiences gained, and recommends best approaches and methodologies to bridge gaps within the programme. The evaluation also investigates how the interventions were adapted to respond to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

2.3 Evaluation criteria and key questions

The evaluation was conducted according to the six evaluation criteria defined by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)- Development Assistance Committee (DAC) which included: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, the likely impact, and likely sustainability. Together, these criteria provided a comprehensive picture of the programme interventions, the implementation process, and the results achieved by the programme.

The evaluation criteria served as a basis for primary and secondary data analysis and are reflected in the questions presented in the Evaluation Matrix (Annex 1). The evaluation matrix includes details of the indicators and measures used to evaluate the programme relative to the evaluation questions, from which the specific guiding questions of the FGDs, surveys, and interview protocols were elaborated for each respondent in view of their roles and profiles.

This section summarizes the evaluation criteria and key questions used to assess performance and rationale. Findings, lesson learned, and recommendation will provide UNDP, donors and partners with the information they seek in order to make decisions, take action, add to knowledge for designing similar future interventions. The evaluation criteria and main evaluation questions addressed by the evaluation are summarized in table 2.

Table 2: The evaluation criteria and main evaluation question

<p>Relevance: The extent to which the objectives of the programme are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country needs, global priorities and partners' and donors' policies.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent is the programme in line with the national development priorities, UNDP's Country Programme's outputs and outcomes, UNDP Strategic Plan, and the SDGs? 2. To what extent has the programme outputs been relevant to the youth and women economic empowerment, and can respond to the most pressing challenges faced by youth entrepreneurs and TVET graduates? 3. To what extent have the programme's activities and approaches been relevant in addressing the gap between students' skills and the labour market's demands to enhance employability of the targeted youth? 4. To what extent has UNDP's output focusing on support to MSMEs been able to respond to the most urgent needs for the MSMEs to sustain during the global pandemic and increase their production capacity? 5. To what extent has the project been effective in addressing urgent and priority interventions in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic? 6. To what extent has integration of relevant human rights and gender sensitive approaches been applied to address the needs of specific target groups?
<p>Coherence: The extent to which this intervention is coherent with UNDP and other actors' intervention in the socio- economic recovery.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. To what extent is the programme coherent with UNDP and other actors' interventions within the socio-economic recovery sector, and improved sustainability of results, while avoiding duplication of effort? 8. To what extent has the programme supported coherency between the programme's different outputs and strategies?
<p>Effectiveness: The extent to which the outputs of the objectives of the programme are achieved or are expected to be achieved.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. In which areas does the programme have the greatest achievements? What are the supporting factors? How can the UNDP build on or expand these achievements? 10. In which areas does the programme have the fewest achievements? Why and what have been the constraining factors? How could or can they be overcome? 11. To what extent have the programme's activities been able to build the capacity of key stakeholders, such as business incubators, TVET centre and the private sector? 12. To what extent is the programme's strategy effective through the use of innovative approaches to address the needs and challenges faced by youth in Gaza? 13. To what extent has the integration of gender sensitivity and human rights considerations contributed positively to the achievements of results?
<p>Efficiency: Measure how the programme's economic resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted to results.</p>

<p>14. To what extent has there been an economic use of financial and human resources? Have resources been allocated strategically to achieve the desired results taking into account the need to prioritize certain groups (marginalized and/or discriminated against (e.g., male vs. female youth, women-led vs. man-led MSMEs)?</p> <p>15. To what extent has the programme been able to leverage co-investment from other donors to support the achievement of the programme’s objectives?</p> <p>16. To what extent have the M&E system and approaches utilized by UNDP been contributing to efficient programme management?</p>
<p>Likely impact: Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by the Programme, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.</p>
<p>17. To what extent has the programme’s been able to empower Palestinian youth economically and socially?</p> <p>18. To what extent has the programme been able to build the capacity of the IPs and relevant stakeholders within the entrepreneur ecosystem to provide the same support services after the end of the programme? What are the main factors influencing this, whether negatively or positively?</p> <p>19. What are the likely impacts of the intervention on the target groups’ lives? Are there early signs that the intervention will have a positive impact on the beneficiaries’ future (both for them and their families) in terms of job opportunities, economic independence, and livelihood situation taking into account gender empowerment and/ or gender equality)?</p>
<p>Sustainability: Continuation of benefits from the programme’s interventions after major development assistance has been completed. The probability of continued long-term benefits. The resilience to risk of the net benefit flows over time.</p>
<p>20. How likely are the achievements of the programme be sustained after the end of the programme? What are the main factors influencing this, whether negatively or positively)?</p> <p>21. To what extent has the programme been able to establish a sustainable enabling environment for entrepreneurs and start-ups? What are the influencing factors (positive and negative)?</p> <p>22. To what extent is it likely that the programme’s support under output 4 will ensure sustainability of MSMEs?</p>

3. EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODS

3.1 Evaluation approach

A theory-based approach is used for this thematic evaluation. It applies a qualitative and quantitative methodology during the evaluation process. The evaluation team gathered information about the key indicators of the programme outputs, in order to determine the extent to which the changes (or the outcomes) the programme planned for have been achieved and to assess the ability of the approach to link short-term outputs and longer-term outputs of the objectives and their achievement.

The approach analyses how the selected strategy of the programme achieves the planned outcomes, including objectives and assumptions. The approach also assesses the dynamics and realism of the Gazan context. This process also includes the programme design and activities that are investigated along with the changes that occur during the programme implementation phases.

3.2 Evaluation phases

The evaluation comprised three main phases:

3.2.1 Inception Phase

The inception phase covered the initial data collection and investigation of the context and reviewing available documents in consultations with the UNDP programme team. During this phase, a preliminary implementing partners and stakeholder map was developed; the quality and availability of the data evaluated for the construction of the interview forms and questionnaires; information gaps, limitations and risks and additional documentation requirements were identified; the methodological approach and the evaluation tools were developed.

The Inception Report, which was based on the feedback on the methodology and the proposed work plan, was approved by the UNDP team at the end of the inception phase.

3.2.2 Data Collection and Analysis Phase

The Evaluation Team continued data collection and analytical desk work during this phase. Information collected during the inception phase was complemented with additional secondary data and findings from the surveys, focus group discussions, and key interviews. Data obtained during this phase was analysed and triangulated according to the evaluation criteria and used to answer the evaluation questions and validate the programme Theory of Change (ToC). This phase involved additional communication with the programme team to adjust the preliminary findings and make necessary corrections in the draft report. The findings, conclusions, recommendations, and lessons learned were presented in the first draft of the evaluation report and reviewed by UNDP programme and RBM team.

3.2.3 Reporting Phase

The reporting phase consolidate the findings, lessons learned and recommendations with the feedback received from the programme team. This phase was completed according to the approved workplan of the inception phase.

3.3 Data collection procedures and instruments

The evaluation team implemented a mixed method using qualitative and quantitative research methods for collecting, analysing, and using information to answer the evaluation questions and for triangulation of data sources.

3.3.1 Systematic documents review

The evaluation team conducted a comprehensive document review of programme documents, results framework, evaluation reports, M&E reports, and programme agreements. This allowed the evaluation team to apply various analytical approaches and methods to ensure quality of analysis across data sources and documents. The document review started during the inception phase. It included preliminary meetings with the programme team, and documents review, to help prepare the inception report. Document review was finalized during the implementation of this evaluation, the complete list of information sources reviewed is provided in Annex 2.

3.3.2 Key Informant Interviews (KII)

The evaluation team used interviews with key respondents as a useful technique for gathering perceptions and experiences about the primary stakeholders (primary stakeholders are those who are closely and directly involved in the programme), allowing to examine different perspectives on the same topic among different groups.

The evaluation applied open semi-structured interviews, which served as the primary source of qualitative information. A total of twelve interviews were carried out with the key respondents representing the implementing partners, donors, civil society, and the programme team. The initial list developed during the inception was based on the recommendations of the programme team, stakeholders, and document review. The list of was adjusted and finalized in consultation with UNDP programme team during the early stages of data collection. The specific data collection methods were defined for each key respondent. The preliminary interview guide, included in Annex 3, was adapted to the profile of each respondent before interviews were conducted. It included more specific questions as relevant. The questions focused on specific areas of design and implementation, relevance, and coherence with other similar interventions in the same sector. The average duration of each interview was about one to two hours. All interviews were conducted in person in Gaza Strip.

The evaluation team conducted the following interviews:

Institution	Role	No of
UNDP team	Programme Manager Project Managers	4 (M:3, F:1)
UNDP RBM team	RBM Manager RBM Coordinator	2 (M:1, F:1)
SDC	Programme Officer	1 (M:1, F:0)
JCP	JCP Director Project Coordinator	2 (M:2, F:0)
Irada	Irada Director Project Coordinator	2 (M:1, F:1)
Atfaluna	Project Coordinator M&E Officer	2 (M:1, F:1)
BTI	BTI Manger Project Coordinator	2 (M:1, F:1)
UCASTI	Project Coordinator	1 (M:1, F:0)
GGateway	GGateway Manager Project Coordinator	2 (M:0, F:2)
PICTI	PICTI Office Manger Project Coordinator	2 (M:0, F:2)
PEF	PEF Gaza Manger Project Coordinator	2 (M:1, F:1)
PALTrade	Paltrade Manager/ Project Coordinator	1 (M:1, F:0)
PFI	PFI Manager/ Project Coordinator	1 (M:1, F:0)
PARC	PARC Programme Manager/ Project Coordinator	2 (M:1, F:1)

3.3.3 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The FGDs were used to complement the findings of the interviews and documents review. The aim was to provide in-depth assessment of certain issues that had resulted from other tools.

The evaluation team closely coordinated with the UNDP programme team and the implementing partners to communicate with the targeted beneficiaries. About 10-12 participants attended each focus group, and attention was given to ensure participation of women and PwDs.

It was originally planned to conduct nine FGDs during the inception phase. Following the interviews with the implementing partners, a total of 8 FGDs were conducted. As the evaluation team decided to merge two FGDs into one that represented the same target group of the beneficiaries. The FGDs questions guideline is provided in Annex 4.

3.3.4 Surveys and Sampling Frame

The surveys were developed by the evaluation team in consultation with the UNDP team and for final approval before the start of the data collection.

The evaluation team developed comprehensive structured questions and selected a representative sample of the targeted population of the programme. The sample size was statistically calculated taking into consideration different variables including programme geographical locations, marginalized and vulnerable communities in each location, gender, age, vulnerable groups including women and PwDs. The evaluation team guaranteed the selection of a representative sample size of the different target groups to ensure findings generalizability. The total sample size was determined based on 95% confidence and 5% margin of error.

The following surveys were developed and used during the evaluation:

Survey 1: Beneficiaries of the Entrepreneurship and TVET including PWDs

The survey targeted a stratified random sample of beneficiaries who were targeted by the programme activities under output 2 and 3, including TVET beneficiaries, Start-ups and entrepreneurs (Annex 5).

Table 3: Sample selection and sampling frame.

Sample/Beneficiaries	No of targeted population	Sample size	Sample size			
			M		F	
			%	#	%	#
Targeted Palestinian youth and women in Gaza	397	230	31	62	69	140
Proposed Total Sample Size			230			
	Incubation	TVET	Grand Total			
Female	90	70	160			
Male	40	30	70			
Grand Total	130	100	230			
Response rate						
	Incubation	TVET	Grand Total			

Female	70	70	140
Male	32	30	62
Grand Total	102	100	202
Sample description			
Variables	Category	Percentage %	
Gender	Male	31%	
	Female	69%	
Age	18-19	0.5%	
	20-29	64.9%	
	30-39	29.7%	
	40-49	5.0%	
Governorate	North Gaza	12.4%	
	Gaza	52.5%	
	Middle area	12.4%	
	Khan Younis	11.4%	
	Rafah	11.4%	
Marital status	Married	49.0%	
	Single	49.0%	
	Engaged	1.5%	
	Divorced	0.5%	
Persons with Disabilities PwDs	PwDs	14 %	

Survey 2: Supported MSMEs

This survey targeted all supported MSMEs during the programme (a total of 191 were reached out of 197 MSMEs). The survey guide used for the MSMEs is provided in Annex 6 of this report. The final list of the targeted population in the surveys was developed in coordination with the programme team based on the available data of the beneficiaries.

The evaluation team translated the surveys questions into Arabic during the inception phase. Both surveys were also pilot tested to ensure that the questions were well articulated and comprehensive from the respondents' point of view. Data collected from the surveys was analysed using SPSS and Excel Software.

All data collection activities including the surveys, interviews and meetings have been reported and documented using the designed data collection and analysis tools. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software for data mining and data analysis.

3.4 Triangulation

Given the quantitative and qualitative nature of this evaluation, rigorous triangulation was applied to validate the findings and achieve an acceptable level of generalization. The evaluation applied multiple cross examination in order to validate the information obtained through the surveys, interviews and the document, including:

- Compare the qualitative data obtained from the FGDs with the quantitative data obtained through the surveys.
- Cross-referencing of the primary data from the interviews with secondary data from the document review.
- Cross-referencing the findings by type of Key Respondent (programme team, stakeholders, donors, implementing partners, and the beneficiaries).

3.5 Stakeholder participation

The evaluation team encouraged equal involvement of all partners, stakeholders, and beneficiaries, both women and men, in the evaluation process to ensure outcome evaluation validity, programme improvement, and designing of future interventions. This was done through the following measures:

- Mixed-methods evaluation approach was used. It combined detailed insights and holistic understanding obtained from qualitative data from the interviews and FGDs. This allowed for more comprehensive analysis of the quantitative data produced by the surveys and supported circulation to the wider population. Two different surveys were used in the evaluation: the TVET beneficiaries survey and the entrepreneurs and start-ups survey.
- A multi-level analysis was conducted. It compared the findings from data collected at the level of the beneficiaries and implementing partners across the different programme outputs.
- Using the stratified random sampling to select respondents, so that all target groups are fully represented in the surveys and focus group discussions. Gender balance, geographic locations, and interventions were considered.
- Develop a full list of implementing partners and stakeholders, which allows them to participate in the in the semi structured interviews, reflect on their experience, give feedback, and provide recommendations during the implementation of the programme.

3.6 Evaluation performance standards

The evaluation followed the criteria of performance standards used that were provided to the evaluation team as part of the TOR. The evaluation criteria are based on the OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability adopted by UNDP. While the evaluation criteria were derived from the OECD's standards, it is worth noting that impact assessment was not included as part of the performance standards for this evaluation. This is because measuring the program's impact or transformative change can be challenging, particularly when the evaluation is conducted immediately after the completion of program activities. Typically, the true impact of a program can only be accurately measured a few years after its conclusion. However, our evaluation team sought

to identify results that could be directly attributed to the program's interventions, potentially signalling future impacts that can be measured in subsequent evaluations."

3.7 Ethical considerations

The Evaluation was conducted in accordance with the principles of independence, intentionality, transparency, and ethical integrity, as well as the confidentiality of the respondents. This was in line with the UNEG Standards for Evaluation in the UN System and UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation.

The evaluation was designed and carried out in a way that respected and protected the rights and well-being of the beneficiaries and communities benefiting from the programme, in accordance with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other Human Rights conventions. The evaluation applied the Gender and Human Rights Based Approach and was guided by the UNEG Gender and Human Rights Norms and Standards.

The evaluation respected the dignity and diversity of the participants during all phases including planning, implementation and producing the evaluation findings. The evaluation used tools that were appropriate to the cultural environment of the groups and the individuals. Hence, all key actors, stakeholders and implementing partners were informed in advance, by the UNDP, about the objectives, scope, and criteria of the evaluation. Before each interview, the evaluators informed respondents of the scope and objectives of the evaluation and reiterated the independent, impartial, and confidential nature of the evaluation.

The evaluation treated respondents autonomously and confidentially, giving them time and information to decide whether to respond or not. The interviews and focus groups were conducted without the presence of the representatives of the implementing partners or the UNDP team to ensure confidentiality. Interview questionnaires were shared, upon request, with respondents before conducting interviews. An external agent attended an FDG only on one occasion to provide sign language for hearing-impaired respondents.

3.8 The Evaluation Team

Team Composition and responsibilities: the evaluation team comprised of a Team Leader, Youth Economic Empowerment Expert, Data Collection Team, and SPSS Expert for Data Entry and Statistical Analysis. The team covered the geographical locations across Gaza Strip governorates where the programme was implemented.

The Team Leader: has more than 18 years of experience in evaluating international development programmes, particularly in the field of local economic development and local governance. He has proven experience in designing and leading participatory and gender-sensitive evaluations of relevant programmes as well as evaluation of MSMEs support. The Team Leader had overall responsibility for carrying out the evaluation and the preparation of the evaluation report, supporting the development of methodological tools, data collection and analysis, report writing and providing team support.

The Youth Economic Empowerment Expert: has experience in project implementation, monitoring and evaluation (M&E); qualitative and quantitative data collection, analysing data and results framework development. The expert had demonstrated expertise and knowledge of youth empowerment and skills enhancement initiatives and working with entrepreneurs.

The evaluation team conducted the work under the overall guidance and supervision of the UNDP Office and the Programme Team. The UNDP designated a programme officer to be the focal point of evaluation. The programme officer assisted in facilitating the evaluation process, provided relevant documentation, arranged introductory meetings within the UNDP to establish initial contacts with the implementing partners and programme staff, and arranged interviews with key respondents. This was in accordance with the ToR.

3.9 Data analysis

Data obtained during the data collection phase was tabulated and analysed separately. Triangulation was also conducted to reach the main conclusions and analysis drafted in the body of the final report. The desk review provided the basis for the questions of the KIIs and the FGDs. SPSS and Excel software were used for data analysis obtained through the surveys. Moreover, notes and transcripts from the KIIs and FGDs were synthesized and triangulated with the findings of the desk review and secondary data sources.

The final draft was developed in accordance with the proposed outline and was structured to answer all the evaluation questions.

3.10 Major limitations of the methodology

There were no serious limitations to the evaluation that would affect the quality of the findings. However, the evaluation team identified the following limitations during the implementation of this evaluation:

- There were some challenges to reach the selected sample of beneficiaries for focus group discussion. The evaluation team, in coordination with the implementing partners, conducted follow-up correspondence with the respondents to ensure their commitment to participate in the evaluation process.
- The proposed sampling method and type of sample and scope of evaluation allowed the findings of the evaluation of Survey 1 (Youth and Women) to be circulated. However, it was a challenge to circulate the findings of Survey 2 (Supported MSMEs), particularly in relation to increase turnover and productivity due to the economic conditions in Gaza Strip. The triangulation methods were applied in order to improve the quality of analysis and increase the validity of the data.

3.11 Programme intervention logic and Theory of Change

Strategic Plan (2022 – 2025) describes the future direction of the UNDP², continuing from the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021³, through six signature solutions on poverty and inequality, governance, resilience, environment, and gender equality. Therefore, the plan sets out the direction to end extreme poverty, reduce inequality, and achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda. The plan guides UNDP vision to improve the economic and social conditions of the Palestinian people by identifying their social and economic needs and by establishing concrete interventions to fulfil their aspiration for sustainable human development based on self-determination, equality, and freedom.

² UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025

³ UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021

The plan does not contain the explicit Theory of Change (ToC) with causal analysis, assumptions, and solution pathways. Thus, the response to the development challenges developed by this programme was based on tailored solutions that adequately addressed the specific shortcomings and obstacles in Palestine, which was set out in the programme framework.

UNDP's resilience approach in this programme was based on linking short-term decent work to long-term sustainable employment. The approach was implemented through a combination of short, medium, and long-term job creation initiatives, management support to existing enterprises, and incubation of new start-ups, all designed to stimulate the Gazan economy and lead to further creation of jobs.

The evaluation identified the following risks and assumptions that guided the programme logic and the design of the programme in relation to each of the three outputs:

- Assumption: No further deterioration in the economic, social and security environment.
- Risk: Social and family pressure prevents youth and women from pursuing certain careers.

The UNDP implemented a triple track approach that linked short-term decent work to long-term sustainable employment, including:

- Track A: Emergency employment to help people rebuild their lives and stabilize livelihoods.
- Track B: Medium-term employment. This track focuses on building the capacity of local human resources (i.e., skills training, incubation, and entrepreneurship), access to finance (e.g., savings and micro-loans), and market based economic activities.
- Track C: Long-term employment: This track focuses on sustainable employment creation through the promotion of an enabling environment, labour market mechanisms and institutions and private sector recovery.

The programme ToC ensured that Palestinian beneficiaries, including the private sector, had greater access to decent productive and sustainable work. The ToC was built on understanding the interconnections and different operational environments and development settings of the Palestinian society, particularly in Gaza Strip, to promote structural resilience, reverse current trends of occupation and fragmentation, and to address unemployment, and lack of access to basic services and rights.

Reviewing the programme documents and discussions with UNDP staff and implementing partners and stakeholders helped reconstruct the ToC (Figure 1). ToC's reconstruction included the following:

- Improved Output 1 (Track A) of the programme to include wage subsidy and internship opportunities rather than only cash payments to the youth.
- Enhanced integration between the three programme outputs, so that potential TVET beneficiaries (output 2) with entrepreneurial ideas had the chance to benefit from the incubation services (output 3) or microgrants opportunities (outputs) to become self-employed or have new start-ups.
- Engage private businesses to actively participate in the delivery of beneficiaries' capacity building component during the job placement period.

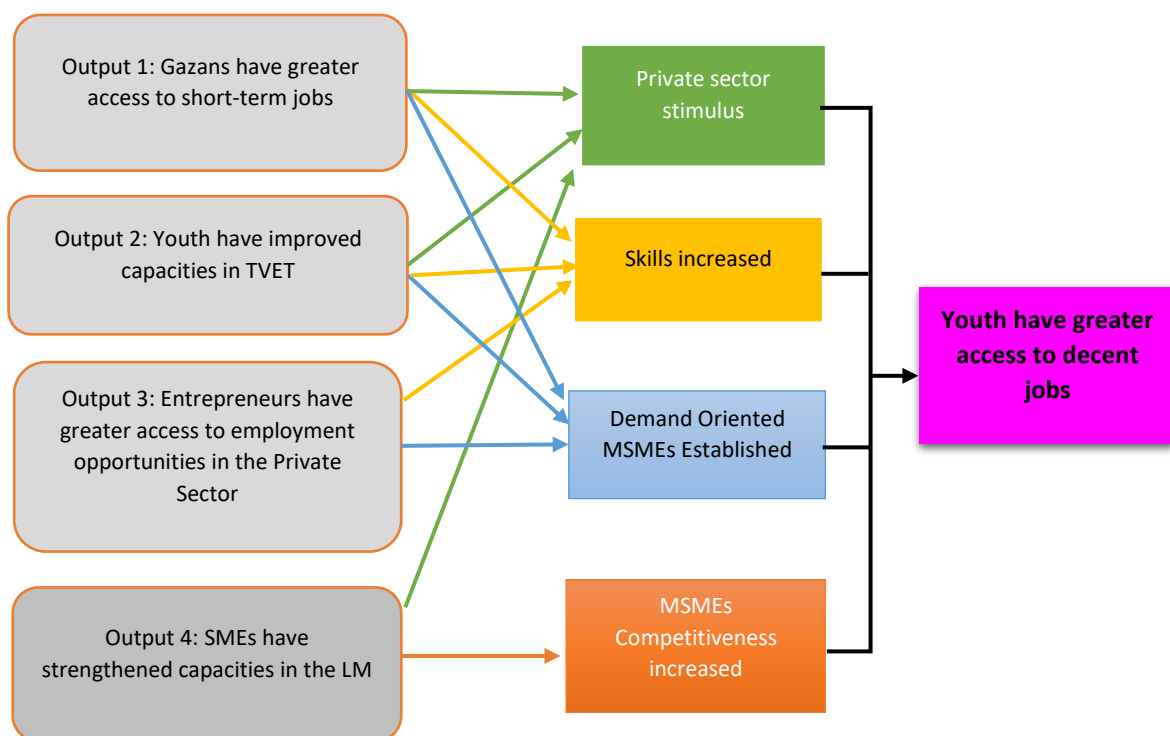


Figure 1: Path to Economic Recovery ToC (Business Perspective).

4. EVALUATION FINDINGS

4.1 Relevance

The extent to which the objectives of the programme are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country needs, global priorities and partners' and donors' policies.

Finding 1: The programme was implemented in line with the State of Palestine's National Policy Agenda (NPA) Putting Citizens First (2017-2022), namely the third pillar of the Agenda "sustainable development." Moreover, the programme was aligned with two of the ten national priorities, including 'Economic independence' and 'Resilient Communities' and contributed to achieving SDGs' "No one Behind" principle, through immediate job creation and enhancing long term competitiveness of the private sector to build independent economy.

The programme framework and documents confirm that the design of the programme is well aligned with the UNDAF (2018-2022) strategic priority 3 "Supporting sustainable and inclusive economic development"⁴, as well as UNDP's Strategic Plan of eradicating poverty, achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and support national plans, needs and priorities⁵.

⁴ UNDAF for the State of Palestine (2018-2022).

⁵ UNDP Strategic Plan (2018-2021).

Furthermore, the programme started the implementation of key strategies from the new UNDP Strategic Plan (2022 – 2025)⁶. It was responsive and flexible to consider global challenges such as COVID-19. The programme strengthened collaboration with local partners through reviewing and updating its approach to respond to new challenges. It applied integrated approaches aimed at making transformative change to rebound from COVID-19 and build a better future.

The programme made significant contribution to the achievement of multiple SDGs in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), including SDG 1 ‘No poverty’, SDG 5 ‘Gender equality’, SDG 8 ‘Decent work’, and SDG 10 ‘Reducing inequalities.’

The programme’s strategic development complemented humanitarian aid with clear vision to advance Gaza’s economic future. This approach and measures enhanced investment in short-term human capital and linked it with a longer-term plan.

UNDP has extensive experience in labour market and employment strategies including building skills, business development, inclusion, and enhancing social cohesion. These strategies have been widely implemented by other UNDP country offices in the region and proven to be valuable for job creation for young Gazan men and women. Initial signs were positive and, based on UNDP/PAPP experience, could be replicated in the economic empowerment sector.

Finding 2: Programme is relevant to the needs and priorities of young men and women economic empowerment, and able to respond to the most pressing challenges faced by them and improving their living conditions and livelihood opportunities.

The situations in the Gaza Strip continue to be shaped by the ongoing severe political, economic, and social constraints of what now amounts to over 17 years of siege and blockade, recurrent hostilities, internal divide, and falling aid inflows. The unemployment rates among diploma certificate and higher graduates aged 19 to 29 in Gaza Strip hit 75 percent. Unemployment in Gaza is still much higher among women (at 65 percent) than men.

There are skills that are in short supply in some professions despite the high unemployment rates among women and men in Gaza. These skills have high demand in the labour market. The programme successfully addressed skills shortages through targeted vocational training courses that lasted for three months (260 training hours). University graduates, with high unemployment rates, participated in the training. Trainers were selected by the implementing partners (JCP, PEF) from the Ministry of Labour vocational training centres and private TVET centres. The participants received monthly allowances to cover expenditure incurred during the training course.

After completing the training period, participants were assigned to train for three months at a private sector business. They were given the opportunity to acquire practical experience during training and increase their chances of potential recruitment at the business – having completed the three-month on the job training. The evaluation found good level of coordination with MoL during the implementation of the programme interventions, however, the majority of selected TVET centres to provide training service were non-governmental or private providers.

⁶ UNDAF Strategic Plan (2022 – 2025).

The delivered training was guided by pre-identification of skills deficit in Gaza. In the absence of systematic labour market needs analysis and given the lack of employment centres, the programme used information and sector studies from other sources and recent reports prepared at national level, in addition to discussions with the private sector representatives in Gaza.

The evaluation found that the programme was relevant to the needs and priorities of the youth and to strengthening the MSMEs in the Gaza Strip. This was confirmed by the following:

- Adopting integrated approach to enhance youth employment through skills development and TVET opportunities followed by workplace training in the private sector to provide the trainees with the opportunity to gain practical experience according to the labour market demands.
- Focus on sustainable employment creation for Gaza youth through the promotion of an enabling environment, labour market mechanisms, and supporting private sector recovery.
- Creating enabling environment for the entrepreneurs and start-ups in partnership and support by the local implementing partners.
- The majority of the TVET beneficiaries (72 percent), and the entrepreneurs (75 percent) reported that they received enough support during the implementation of the programme from both the implementing partners and the training providers. They also added that the programme was useful and supported them to learn new knowledge and skills.

Finding 3: The programme's activities and approaches have been relevant in addressing certain gaps between students' skills and the labour market's demands to enhance employability of the targeted youth. During implementation phase, the programme faced certain challenges related to matching the needs of the employers, in addition to the limited capacity of the private sector due to the current economic difficulties in Gaza.

About 95 percent of the targeted youth reported that the training and support they received during the programme matched their skills and capacities. They also confirmed that 70 percent of the support they received through the programme was relevant to the needs in the labour market and would increase their employment potential.

About 71 percent of the surveyed MSMEs reported that the technical support they received was relevant to upgrade their operations and production capacity. While 52 percent of the supported MSMEs indicated that they expected more support to cover other needs and challenges facing their business, such as market linkage support, and provision of equipment and tools to improve production capacity.

Most private sector companies (80%) reported, during the FGDs, that the programme approach was consistent with their needs through provision of workplace learning opportunities for targeted youth in their companies after completing the TVET course. The owners of these companies further indicated that it was important to improve the matching mechanism between the competencies of the beneficiaries and the needs in the private sector, which would enhance the potential for future employment for the targeted youth.

According to the programme team and the IPs, the programme interventions were designed in accordance with an extensive needs' assessment process for all activities. The assessment was conducted by the partners and was approved by UNDP. The implementing partners were mainly

responsible for identifying the economic sectors to be addressed by the programme. They were also responsible for conducting needs assessment for the beneficiaries using studies and through experts' workshops followed by approval of the technical steering committees in coordination with UNDP team. According to the evaluation, the IPs succeeded in adequately identifying these priorities and addressing them to select the training programmes and designing the entrepreneurship and incubation services for the beneficiaries. A sectorial and coordinated needs assessment at national level would further allow for a more holistic understanding of the inter-relationships between needs, their root causes and underlying vulnerabilities and allow for more targeted responses.

The overall perception of UNDP was positive as UNDP's strengths and comparative advantages were positively recognized by the stakeholders and the implementing partners as a reliable actor with ample capacity to lead the implementation of this programme. Based on interviews with implementing partners (IPs) and stakeholders, it was noted that UNDP had a strong reputation in the economic empowerment and youth employment sector in Palestine. The IPs expressed appreciation for UNDP's team's ability to effectively engage with partners and stakeholders, as well as their high level of communication and involvement throughout the implementation process. Furthermore, implementing partners confirmed that UNDP's team had a solid understanding and extensive knowledge of the local needs and the intricate dynamics of the labour market pertaining to youth employment and business development. The IPs also commended UNDP's team for their comprehensive follow-up and on-the-ground involvement during both the assessment and implementation phases of the program activities.

Finding 4: MSMEs support met the most urgent needs of MSMEs to sustain their business during the COVID-19 pandemic and to increase their production capacity. The support covered specific affected production line. However, the interventions need to be scaled up to ensure full recovery of the targeted MSME.

Programme framework, under Output 4, aimed at strengthening the capacities of MSMEs to sustain and grow their businesses in the market. This helped them to recover from the economic crisis in Gaza. The planned interventions mainly involved onsite technical expertise to selected enterprises, tailored to the needs of the concerned enterprise.

Approximately 68 percent of respondent of the supported MSMEs confirmed in the survey that the support through the programme enabled them to resume operation after being affected by COVID-19 pandemic. The programme also enabled them to recover following May 2021 hostilities towards Gaza by maintaining their machines, equipment, and production lines that were partially damaged. The respondents indicated that the amount of support needed to be increased based on comprehensive needs assessment and upgrading plan for the enterprise. Female beneficiaries of the supported MSMEs agreed that the support through the programme helped them build their capacity to increase income, hence, improving livelihoods and living conditions.

According to the interviews between PFI and the FGD and the private sector representatives, the programme was flexible to direct its interventions to enhance recovery of MSMEs in the key economic

sectors affected by COVID-19 and the last military escalation in May 2021. Additionally, the services provided by the programme also contributed to enhancing the resilience of these businesses, allowing them to adapt to future economic shocks with the provision of management, technical, and market access support and assistance.

Finding 5: The integration of human rights and gender sensitive approaches were applied through the programme interventions and addressed to high extent the needs of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and women. Women and PwDs faced certain challenges to fully integrate in the workplace due to the immitted capacity and economic difficulties facing the companies in the private sector.

The programme adopted several measures in line with UNDP Strategic Plan (2018-2021), Outcome 1.1.2, to ensure that women and PwDs were empowered to gain universal access to basic services and financial and non-financial resources. The purpose of this was to build productive capacities and benefit from sustainable livelihoods and jobs. The programme activities addressed certain issues related to vulnerable women and PwDs, thus contributing to empowering and enhancing the living conditions of targeted women and PwDs. This is discussed in more details throughout this report.

The participation rate in the labour force among males was 72 percent in 2022, whereas the participation rate among females was 19 percent⁷. Palestinian women with advanced educational degrees are less likely to be employed in the workforce than anywhere else in the MENA region, with about 53 percent of skilled Palestinian female workers face unemployment. About 62 percent of young Palestine women find difficulties to access work for a range of reasons such as not knowing how or where to seek work or no jobs being available in their area⁸.

Gender sensitive and vulnerability assessment were considered in the programme framework and reports, particularly the employment strategies and beneficiaries' selection criteria. However, the evaluation found certain obstacles and challenges women faced during the implementation of the programme interventions, according to the interviews and FGDs, certain measures need to be considered to address gender inequality, and provided more opportunities for young women, which may include:

- Facilitate access to information sources to be available for women at any time. Moreover, increase dissemination of information about participation in the programme in all Gaza governorates and enhance sharing market information using communication channels available for women.
- Support having positive environment that reduces the cultural barriers to women's participation in the private sector, when possible.
- Work with local actors and women organizations to raise awareness to promote women's access to leadership in business, female entrepreneurship, and advocate for equitable access to and control over resources.
- Design and implement marketing campaigns targeting women to positively influence both men and women's attitudes on women's empowerment and employment in the community. The purpose of this is to create common support by men and the wider community to accept economic opportunities for women and women as business leaders.

⁷ PCBS report (Q3, 2022).

⁸ World Bank Report: Toward More and Better Jobs for Women in Energy, (2022).

- Women beneficiaries in the FGD reported some challenges they met at the hosting companies related to the working conditions and lack of basic infrastructure to meet women specific needs. *Therefore, it is recommended to provide the requirements and needs that encourage active women's participation.*

With regards to inclusion of PwDs, unemployment rate is significantly higher for people with disabilities, where unemployment stands at over 90 percent. Lack of accessible infrastructure, access to services, transport, and assistive devices and services in Gaza's workplaces present additional obstacles for the inclusion of PwDs. The programme contributed to achieve *Output 1.1.2* in the UNDP Strategic Plan (2018-2022) that the poor, women, and people with disabilities are empowered to gain universal access to basic services and financial and non-financial assets to build productive capacities and benefit from sustainable livelihoods and job opportunities.

The programme directly responded to the issue of high unemployment amongst the PwDs, through a tailor-made training programme, followed by job placement period in the private sector, this component was implemented by Irada and Atfaluna. People with disabilities have acute labour market disadvantage and hence the addition of job placement services was an essential activity to enhance their employment rate and getting them into work.

The programme responded to the economic, social, and psychosocial needs of the PwDs. The interventions supported the PwDs to overcome social isolation they face because of immobility through specific interventions directed for PwDs, to provide them up to date quality training in cooperation with Irada and Atfaluna. This also included provision of microgrants to become startup or self-employed, in addition to supporting MSMEs run by PwDs to help them have their own source of income, hence, become able to overcome the economic difficulties that had severely impacted their livelihoods.

4.2 Coherence

The extent to which this intervention is coherent with UNDP and other actors' interventions in the socio- economic recovery.

Finding 6: The programme is coherent with UNDP interventions in the same sector, taking advantage of the on-going activities related to building entrepreneurship skills, job creation and establishing micro-businesses interventions implemented by UNDP in the recent years.

The programme was designed through a participatory approach in 2018, were several consultation discussions and meetings were conducted with the main actors and players in Gaza Strip, In depth discussions were held with the donors (Japan, Norway, SDC and UNDP). The design of the programme was presented, validated, and approved following these activities.

The programme successfully integrated the private sector component in the design and implementation phases. According to the findings of UNDP report, “a strong private sector is critical for providing the employment that young Gaza population desperately want and deserve”⁹.

Programme actions under Output 4 complemented current support by the World Bank in economic recovery and improving the business environment in Palestine. Similar conclusions are recognized by the World Bank analysis “A sustainable growth path for the Palestinian economy depends on a domestic private sector that can compete in regional and global markets and increase its export of goods and services.” The recommendations of the World Bank report highlight the need for strategic investments in human capital to improve the competitiveness of the labour force and efforts to create linkages with regional value chains to reverse the recent collapse in the livelihoods of Gazans.

Finding 7: The programme was built based on other actors’ interventions within in the socio-economic recovery sector to ensure sustainability of results, particularly the World Bank interventions. While the coordination between UNDP and local actors was high during the implementation of the programme, a limited coordination was found with the key international actors, particularly to develop a unified strategy for the recovery and reform of the private sector.

The key actors and development partners successfully generated thousands of jobs in the Gaza Strip, mainly short-term jobs, for vulnerable people and youth through various projects. These initiatives were important to provide cash inflows that were needed to bring relief from the difficult living conditions faced by Gaza residents. UNDP adopted, in this programme, a comprehensive approach that integrates different labour market instruments and tools to have lasting impact, through linking *short-term decent work to long-term sustainable employment under output 1 of the programme*. The focus of the other three outputs of the programme was on: improving the skills of youth through provision of TVET opportunities (Output 2), create culture of support for entrepreneurship and startups (output 3), and enhance the competitiveness of the MSMEs (Output 4).

The programme design in Gaza was built on UNDP engagement and collaboration with the key stakeholders. Lessons were learned from implementation of economic empowerment interventions taking advantage of the on-going activities related to building entrepreneurship skills, and relevant micro-businesses interventions implemented by UNDP in the recent years in Gaza Strip. The evaluation found limited evidence about coordination between the programme and the other interventions implemented in Gaza Strip in the same sector, such as the interventions conducted by GIZ, and Enable.

Finding 8: The programme outputs were integrated and complemented each other to achieve decent work and economic recovery in Gaza. UNDP also established strong partnerships with national actors, especially in entrepreneurship and youth employment which helped enhance its good standing in these areas. Coordination between IPs could be improved to support achieving planned results.

During the preparation phase of the programme, UNDP adopted a comprehensive mechanism based on capacity assessment to select the main partners to work with UNDP on the implementation of the programme interventions. The partners were selected based on their potential role and

⁹ UNDP Report: Three Years After the 2014 Gaza Hostilities Beyond Survival Challenges to Economic Recovery and Long-Term Development, May 2017).

responsibilities in the programme in each output. The programme framework and reports (progress and final reports) indicated integration of outputs in support of objectives.

While the evaluation found high level of coordination and support between UNDP team and each implementing partner, a limited level of coordination among the IPs was noticed. The interviewed IPs reported that they had limited information about each other interventions in the sector, this coordination is necessary to achieve the planned results through integration of outputs.

4.3 Effectiveness

This section assesses the extent to which the outputs of the programmes' objectives were achieved.

4.3.1 Achieving results

Finding 9: All planned targets of the programme (planned number of beneficiaries and SMEs) were achieved, and key results were observed for the various beneficiary groups (TVET beneficiaries, entrepreneurs, and the start-ups) despite the challenges faced during the implementation of the programme interventions due to COVID-19 and 2021 hostilities towards Gaza.

The revision of the programme documents and the IPs' reports showed that the targeted number of beneficiaries was achieved over the programme duration from 2019 to 2022, as shown below (Table 4). The planned number of beneficiaries under output 2 was exceeded since there was a possibility to increase the number of trainees in some TVET courses. The UNDP team, in cooperation with the IPs, reported that the programme had continued to deliver the planned activities despite the restrictions and security measure during COVID-19 and the 2021 hostilities towards Gaza. The planned targets of the programme were achieved by the last quarter of 2022.

The programme achieved its planned outcomes of enhancing youth employment and strengthening the private sector in Gaza. This included improved living conditions, creating enabling environment, skills development, as well as new and improved livelihoods opportunities. The findings of the interviews with the IPs and the focus groups with the beneficiaries from the different programme's interventions showed that the intended results were achieved despite the challenges that the programme faced during implementation process.

The entrepreneurs and start-ups during the FGD indicated that integration of other strategies would enhance success of the start-ups and business development such as follow up and support to the start-ups, develop value chain approach, and provision of more funding to scale up successful businesses and MSMEs.

On the other hand, the programme supported economic recovery of targeted MSMEs through provision of turnaround management support. The Interviewed representative from the private sector added that the support by the programme needs to be coupled with larger scale support to enhance the private sector long term development.

Table 4: Expected outputs, indicators and achieved targets as per the programme's report

Output	Planned target	Actual target
<i>Output 2: Youth have improved capacities in technical and vocational education and training.</i>	485 of youth (M, W and PwDs) benefitted from the short term TVET course.	495 youth (men, women, and PwDs)
<i>Output 3: Young entrepreneurs have greater access to medium- and long-term job opportunities.</i>	1040 Young entrepreneurs benefitted (M/W) from incubation activities	1323 entrepreneurs and start-ups benefitted (M/W) from incubation and acceleration activities
<i>Output 4: SMEs have strengthened capacities in sustaining and growing their businesses in the market.</i>	65 of SMEs receive turnaround management support	65 MSMEs received turnaround support through the programme.

4.3.2 Effectiveness of the programme's strategy and approach

Finding 10: The programme strategy was effective in adopting innovative approaches to address the needs and challenges faced by youth in Gaza through quality vocational training and provision of apprenticeship opportunities in the private sector, supporting youth entrepreneurs and start-ups, and strengthening the MSMEs in Gaza. The programme faced certain challenges during the implementation phase related mainly to the current economic crisis in Gaza.

Output 2: Youth have improved capacities in technical and vocational education and training.

The goal of the interventions under Output 2 was empowering and creating job opportunities for unemployed youth in Gaza Strip including PwDs by providing them with short term technical and vocational training. This is followed by apprenticeship opportunities in the private sector to help them to integrate into the labour market. The aim of this was to transform youth from recipients of humanitarian aid into proactive, competent economic members who can define their own long-term development goals. Beneficiaries were selected according to several predefined selection criteria for each target group. The implementing partners for this component were JCP, PEF, Irada, and Atfaluna.

Table 5: Summary of achievements under output 2.

Donor	IP	Target Group	Planned No of BNFs	Targeted No of BNFs	Males	Females	Startups
SDC III	Atfaluna	PwDs	385*	395	279	216	23
SDCIII	Irada	PwDs					
SDCIII	JCP	Youth					
Japan	PEF	Women	100*	100	0	100	31

* Microgrants were provided for selected ideas to become start-ups.

Component (1): TVET for Gaza youth implemented by JCP

The programme targeted unemployed Gaza youth (selection criteria: age 18-35 years, employment status, commitment to train and work, from Gaza Strip, including at least 40 percent females). The following activities were achieved by this component:

- A needs assessment study was carried out during the inception phase of the programme, to determine the needs of the local market and private sector in Gaza Strip in coordination with the PFI. The TVET training programme was developed according to the findings and recommendations of the study.
- TVET opportunities were provided for 309 youth (128 females, 181 males), distributed over 15 training courses. The beneficiaries also received training on life skills, first aid and management of small business (Table 6).
- Job creation for 233 youth (M: 131, F: 102) for up to 3 months period, of which 43 percent were females.
- Provision of seed funding the beneficiaries to start 13 micro-projects. The beneficiaries were provided with equipment, raw materials, in addition to managerial & financial consulting. The total number of beneficiaries was 51 (M: 26, F: 25).

Table 6: TVET training courses and total number of beneficiaries.

#	course	Total No. of trainees	No. of Trainees	
			Males	Females
1	Digital marketing	44	23	21
2	Sewing and fashion design	21	12	9
3	Leather and shoes design	17	16	1
4	Modern aluminium technologies	17	17	0
5	Hydraulic and industrial control system	16	16	0
6	Elevator technology and alternative energy system	16	16	0
7	The art of beauty skin care	18	0	18
8	Fashion design via computer program	33	11	22
9	Cosmetic and skin care	19	1	18
10	ISO 22000:2018 Food safety management system	23	11	12
11	Diagnostics and maintenance of modern cars	19	19	0
12	PHP development	15	5	10
13	Flutter mobile application development	13	5	8
14	Smartphones maintenance	20	12	8
15	Computer Numerical Control CNC	18	17	1
Total		309	181	128

Enterprises were invited to apply for support following the announcement, specifying the areas in which expertise was required. They had to be committed to making staff available to work with the external specialist during the coaching sessions, in addition to provision of feedback after the completion of the job placement period.

Employment Generation for Young Gazan Women, funded by JCP

The goal of this intervention was to increase the access of unemployed females who sought to enhance their skills through Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) courses to the labor market. This was achieved through a series of well-planned training courses that began with an introductory skills course, followed by technical training implemented by TVET providers and employers together, using Work-Based Learning (WBL) methodology. The program also included business skills courses to enhance participants' abilities to start their own businesses. As a result, the project contributed to enhancing the skills of 96 females, improving their chances of obtaining sustainable jobs in various industrial and economic sectors. This was based on a mapping study conducted to investigate the reality of TVET and the actual needs of the labor market and female job seekers in Gaza Strip.

The programme enhanced integration of women in the production sector by addressing the issue of the large number of women graduates and others who are unable to find a source of income for their families and the goal is to eliminate unemployment in a different and unorthodox manner, through qualification and training them in theory and practice on the various production lines in the factories at the hands of Local experts and advanced training centers, which allowed them to obtain ideas that are in line with the needs of the industrial sector in addition to their suitability with the values of the basic society, which led to the establishment of 31 small business (production) projects that are capable of development and sustainability.

This project contributed to enhancing 96 females' skills and improve their chances of getting a sustainable job. It targeted 100 females TVET graduates and drop-outs who are job seekers from the culinary arts & food processing sector, cosmetics and beauty care, manufacturing of cleaning materials, tailoring and fashion design, Arts, and handcrafts.

The finding of the survey (Figure 2) showed that the percentage of the TVET beneficiaries who strongly agreed that the programme supported them to learn new knowledge and skills was 26 percent compared to 55 percent who agreed that the programme supported them to learn new knowledge and skills. Moreover, 24 percent of the TVET beneficiaries strongly agreed and 56 percent of them agreed that the duration of the training course was sufficient to improve the capacity of the targeted youth. This was also confirmed by their feedback during the FGDs.

Additionally, 27 percent of the TVET beneficiaries strongly agreed and 68 percent of them agreed that the programme was effective. They felt it would help them find job opportunities in the future. When asked about capacity and skills development, 22 percent of the beneficiaries strongly agreed and 48 percent of them agreed that they felt better prepared for the labour market and were able to find job or start business after participating in the programme.

Thirty percent of the beneficiaries strongly agreed, and 66 percent agreed that the job placement in the host businesses matched their skills and abilities, which supported them to integrate and become more productive in the hosting companies and increased the potential to obtain job offers in the future.

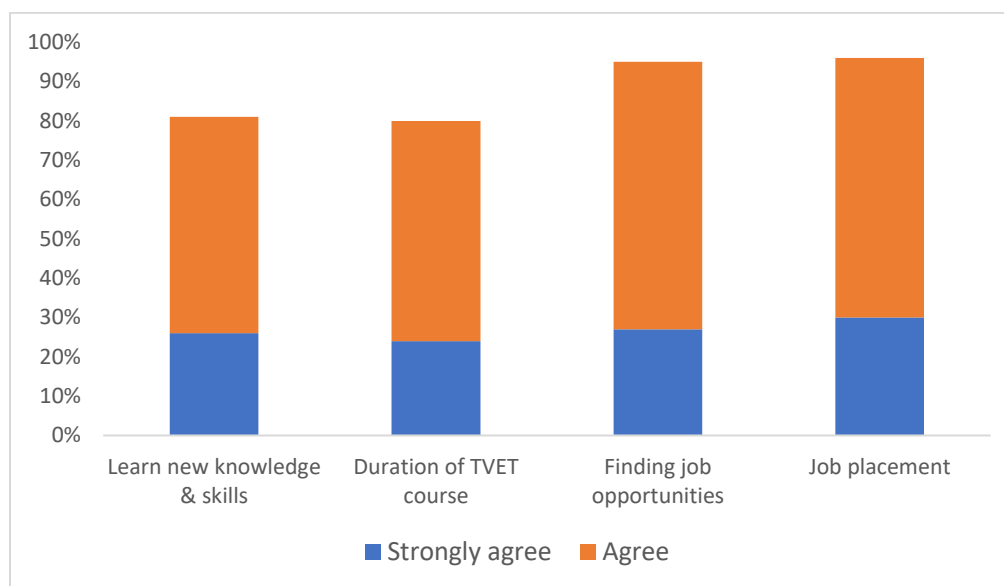


Figure 2: Satisfaction of beneficiaries regarding effectiveness of the TVET programme

Skilled graduates confirmed during the FGDs that the programme made them better qualified for the labour market. The findings of the survey also confirmed that. They also stated that the programme gave them the opportunity to refresh and update their knowledge through direct exposure to the world of work after graduation and increased linkage with the labour market demands.

Private sector representatives in the FGDs provided mixed perceptions regarding the long-term employment in the private sector. They indicated that the private sector was considered the main employer and has major role in the economic recovery process. However, the sector had faced many challenges to continue its operations and maintain sustainability of business due to the current economic crisis in Gaza. This, according to the private sector representatives, required comprehensive interventions for private sector capacity building at national level. They also added that the demands in the private sector were to employ skilled workers or skilled graduates with high competencies, while the recent studies should focus on the new skills and specializations with high priorities for the private sector. This would contribute to creating new job opportunities and supporting private sector recovery.

Component (2): TVET for PwDs

This component, which was under output 2 of the programme, aimed to provide quality vocational training for the unemployed PwDs and to respond to the issue of high unemployment amongst people with disabilities. The programme approach to include job placement was highly effective since PwDs faced acute labour market disadvantage. This was essential for getting them into work. The component was implemented by two main partners Irada and Atfaluna. Irada targeted people with physical disabilities and Atfaluna targeted visually and hearing-impaired people.

Irada TVET project: A total of 58 beneficiaries including women and youth with disability were trained (40 percent of them were females and 60 percent were males). Trainees were selected based on the selection criteria and following personal interviews, with participation of a representative from the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Social Development. The trainees were selected from all governorates in Gaza Strip and were aged between 18 to 35 years. The support provided was divided into three phases:

1. Five training courses were conducted: graphic design, sewing, mobile phone maintenance, maintenance of washing machines and electrical appliances, and maintenance of refrigerators and air conditioners. The duration of the training course was 6 months and covered 288 training hours.
2. Provision of apprenticeship opportunities where the beneficiaries including 58 women and young men with disability were employed for 3 months with a salary of \$250 per month.
3. Incubation phase: the beneficiaries received 30 training hours in entrepreneurship and developing business plans. They submitted their business plans which were evaluated by a committee. 14 of them were awarded with microgrants to start business. They also received coaching services including technical support and management of marketing and business management.

Atfaluna TVET project: This intervention aimed to improve access of 35 hearing-impaired young men and women to inclusive and accessible TVET and job opportunities. UNDP team, in cooperation with Atfaluna, selected the occupations that had high potential for integration of the persons with hearing impairment in the labour market. The selected occupations were fashion design, wood-work products, and digital marketing. The selection of IT related occupations aimed at increasing the potential for PwDs to obtain online or outsourcing work opportunities.

The programme was effective for building the capacity of the target group to facilitate access to skills development and decent work opportunities through the social enterprise approach, supported by a work chain to ensure long term employment of the PwDs. Moreover, the social enterprise approach was implemented for creating employment opportunities through which persons with hearing impairment would be mainstreamed in the local and international market, to benefit from internships and outsourcing channels. This was also supported through products making in the field of fashion design and wood-work decorations products. This was followed by marketing of those products in the local and international markets.

The rights-based approach was integrated in the programme interventions with support from Atfaluna, to encourage and reinforce changes in society’s attitudes towards persons with disabilities by raising awareness of the civil society, particularly, the public and private sectors, micro-business organizations, employment agencies, and vocational training centres about the rights of PwDs to schooling, vocational trainings, and employment.

The following topics were prioritized by the beneficiaries to improve future TVET programmes to match the needs of Gaza youth (Figure 3).

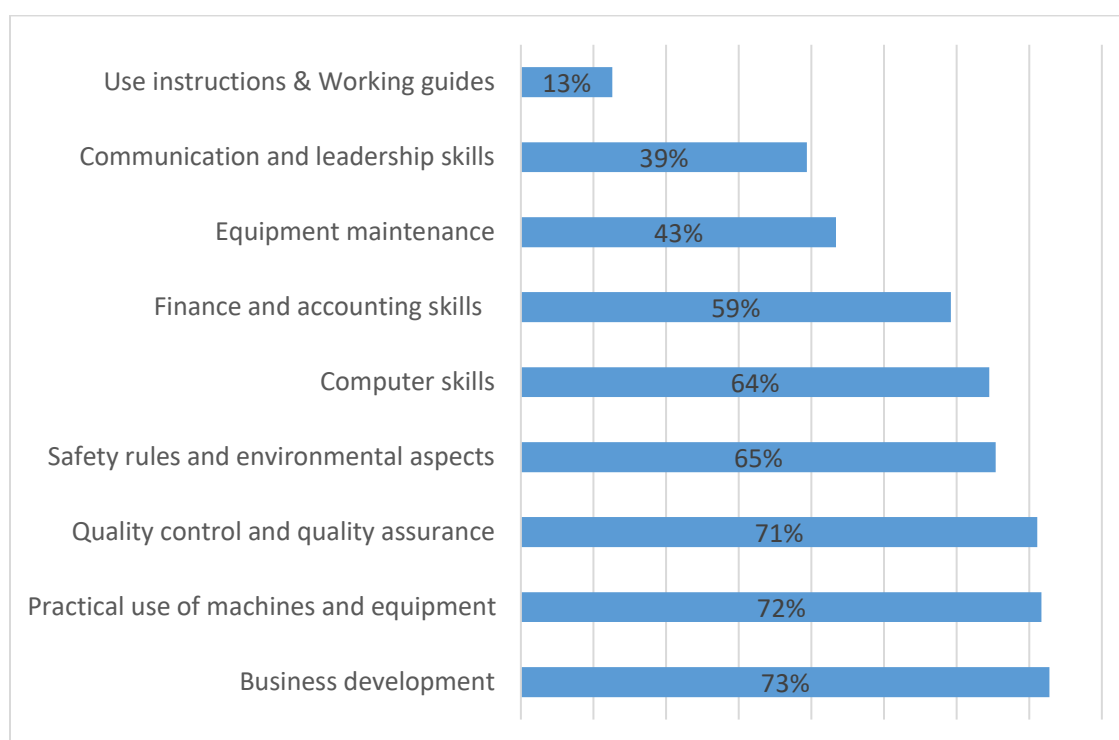


Figure 3: Improvement of the TVET course according to the beneficiaries’ assessment.

Output 3: Young entrepreneurs have greater access to medium- and long-term job opportunities.

The focus of the activities under output 3 was mainly on entrepreneurship and incubation in cooperation with the existing incubators in Gaza. In the recent years several incubators were established in Gaza. They offer individual programmes and have developed tried-and-tested methods and approaches for incubation and acceleration, as well as group hackathons ‘bootcamp’ approaches for generating and refining the business ideas. The programme approach was effective to build on the available resource and infrastructure to provide greater access to medium- and long-term job opportunities based on creating enabling environment for innovation and entrepreneurship. UNDP selected UCASTI and BTI as the implementing partners for this component, while GGateway and PFI were selected as implementing partners for the intervention (Table 7). The implementation was built

on the expertise, knowledge, and the updated model gained from START project (Incubation project funded by SDC) under the Youth and Women employment Project.

Table 7: Summary of achievements under output 3.

Donor	IP	Target Group	Planned No of BNFs	Actual No of BNFs	Males	Females	Start-ups
SDC III	BTI	incubation	820	1097	658	439	123
SDC III	UCAST	incubation					
SDC III	PITA	incubation					
Norway	GGateway	Freelancing	120	126	-	-	-
Japan	PFI	Entrepreneurs	100	100	0	100	24

Support under this component was provided through mentoring, coaching, and training courses. Incubation was provided across all sectors including e-work. The selection of enterprises for incubation was made based on the strongest proposals regardless of sector. Coaching sessions were provided including both technical and business skills. Seed funding was provided after completion of incubation for selected promising start-ups. Access to finance remains difficult in Gaza, particularly to new firms without collateral, therefore, provision of seed funding through the programme for the start-ups in the form of grants is justified.

The programme approach to link the incubation and acceleration phases was effective to increase the success rate of the selected start-ups. This support was delivered during the life cycle of the projects by several sources with direct supervision of the implementing partners: i) the local/international market sectors, ii) utilization of well-established networking with relevant partners both at individual or institutional levels, and iii) provision of R&D and innovations services through the integration of academic research with entrepreneurship.

According to the interviews with the IPs and the FGD with the entrepreneurs, the evaluation found that the programme effectively integrated the components in the incubation/acceleration process despite the complex business environment in Gaza. The implemented activities for each component involved market assessment including business acumen, external and internal networking, and R&D for exchanging ideas and best practices with external specialized centres. These interventions positively affected several sectors and targeted groups in Gaza including the entrepreneurs, university students, graduates with innovative projects, R&D projects, existing start-ups, and the private sector.

The interventions under output 3 are:

10X Project- Implemented by BTI: The overall aim of this intervention was to boost role of Palestinian ecosystems through integrating the concept of technology transfer in developing promising market driven innovative ideas. The project includes two main components: the first is Market Driven Innovation, and the second component focuses on provision of Incubation and Acceleration services.

The programme supported BTI to create and build strong understanding of the local market ecosystem to focus on solving real needs and problems, in addition to developing the process of ideation through R&D and innovation. This also included utilizing and building new networks and relationships with local and international ecosystems to support the incubator's activities. The programme provided fund and incubation services to *32 entrepreneurial ideas* who benefited from the incubation and acceleration activities. Intensive three training course were organized during the project: Blockchain, E-Commerce, and Artificial Intelligence, in addition to several webinars and bootcamps.

START Project- Implemented by UCASTI: This intervention aimed at integrating innovation and technology transfer concepts to provide market-driven solutions through Incubation program started in January 2020. The approach through this intervention is based on building innovative business models and developing innovative business and technologies that focus on solving community challenges and problems. The target groups of the project are:

- Private sector which will be collaborated with to provide solutions to different problems in the local market.
- Academics, students, research centres and universities which will be collaborated with to recommend different strategies to transfer technologies advancements and trends to the local market.
- Entrepreneurs from different fields who hold an idea that can be transformed into business and have the ability and desire to build their own start-up.

The approach was effective to attract innovative and technologically challenging services and viable products achieved through the constructive interaction with the start-up ecosystems mapped in the project and exploitation of these products and services. The project also contributed to strengthening capacities to develop innovative and technologically services and viable products.

Several incubation and acceleration activities were managed with START and 10X, which have a high impact on the ecosystem and provided higher value to benefited start-ups. Different events of hackathons/ bootcamp also contributed to generate the mainstream of participation of the start-ups. These interventions laid the ground to exploit new initiatives and programmes through public and special targets of entrepreneurs and start-ups in Gaza. According to UNDP, IPs and respondent during the FGDs, the networking activities with internal and external partners on entrepreneurship which were created had significant contribution to expand the scope of work for entrepreneurs and companies beyond borders, providing them with the required expertise and knowledge, and increased their access to the global programs and events.

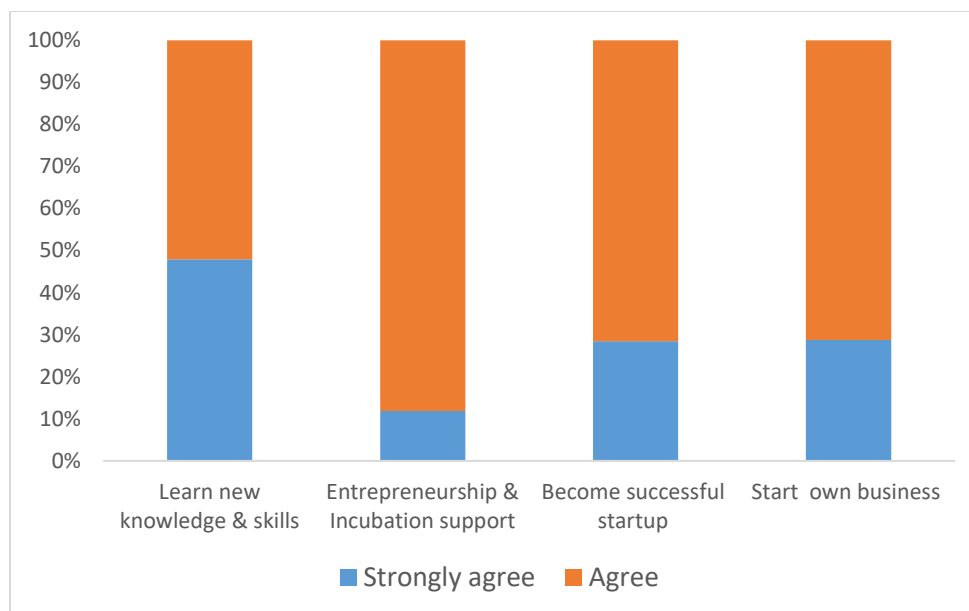


Figure 4: Satisfaction of beneficiaries on effectiveness of the entrepreneurship & incubation services

The survey findings showed high satisfaction of the beneficiaries with the entrepreneurship and incubation services (Figure 3). 46 percent of the entrepreneurs and start-up strongly agreed and 50 percent of them agreed that the programme was effective and useful to improve their skills to become start-ups. Also, 10 percent of the entrepreneurs and start-up strongly agreed, and 74 percent agreed that they received enough support by the hosting incubator during the implementation of the programme. Moreover, 25 percent of the entrepreneurs and start-up strongly agreed, and 62 percent of them agreed that they were better prepared to start and manage own business because of the programme support.

The entrepreneurs in the survey and FGDs also mentioned certain services and recommendations to improve future programmes, including:

- Monitor established start-ups and provide support, when needed.
- Support scaling up of funded start-ups in future cycles or opportunities.
- Provide financial support based on the specific needs. Some start-ups need financial support that exceeds the maximum limit.
- Provision of marketing support.
- Provide technical support and knowledge transfer in cooperation with the international counterparts.

Education for E-Employment Project (G-Talents) implemented by GGateway:

GGateway was responsible for the implementation of G-Talents Project “Education for E-Employment”, which aimed to support and empower 126 young talents to work online as freelancers, contractors, or sustainable remote employees for international clients. This intervention was conducted in the period from January 2022 to November 2022, which included the implementation of several activities over 5 months, under two rounds of training and hosting phases. This intervention is considered as an example of how to put strategies into action in fragile

settings to increase the access to, and quality of jobs particularly for young people and women through E-Work.

A total of 126 young graduates (50 percent women) were distributed over 9 groups. They were trained for 2 months on various programming and non-programming fields. The training phase included 3 major components: intensive technical skills training, freelancing and employability skills training and English for freelancing skills training. A total of 1125 training hours were completed by all groups. The best 80 trainees were provided with the opportunity to join the second round of the hosting phase for a 3-month period. The hosted trainees benefited from the on-job support through several technical and freelancing mentorship sessions, including equipped co-working spaces, online subscriptions, learning resources and stipend amount to cover transportations costs. 78 trainees successfully completed the hosting phase including coaching sessions that consisted of (individual, group, and hotline coaching sessions). Delivered coaching sessions supported them in securing more jobs, increasing their income, and receiving a professional support from expert mentors.

About 97 percent of the trainees secured at least one online job either through freelance platforms, social media platforms or contracted with local/International companies, in addition to about 700 online jobs created by the freelancers.

Output 4: SMEs have strengthened capacities in sustaining and growing their businesses in the market.

The interventions under this output aimed at strengthening the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Gaza and helping them to recover from the current economic crisis. Support to selected enterprises involved technical and management support.

SDC III: Private Sector Stimulus Program (PSSP)

The PSSP project aimed to support the speedy recovery of MSMEs in the key economic sectors affected by COVID-19 and the last military escalation. Additionally, the project sought to enhance the resilience of these businesses, allowing them to recover and sustain related jobs, and adapt to future economic shocks with the provision of development, technical, and market access support and assistance. The programme approach to support the selected enterprise was tailored to the needs of the concerned enterprise. The implementing partners for this intervention were PFI in cooperation with Pal Trade. The programme assisted 25 MSMEs in Gaza Strip enabling them to overcome operational and marketing challenges and sustain their business activities and supply chain.

The results were successfully achieved by enhancing the technology of these MSMEs, promoting their national and regionally collaboration related to the value chains, upgrading their creative and technical capacities, implementing the maintenance of machinery, and equipment, and upgrading production lines to increase product quantity and quality, additionally to providing service and/or technical assistance if it was deemed necessary.

PARC Project: Supporting an Inclusive and Multi-Sectoral Response to COVID-19

The intervention was an emergency response that examined the possibility to provide recovery support to women-led businesses in Gaza Strip. Consequently, the businesses would be able to resume operations and overcome the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. PARC project aimed at enhancing the economic resilience of 31 women-led businesses in Gaza Strip affected by COVID-19 pandemic. This would be achieved through enhancing women-led businesses' capacity to improve skills and competencies to manage business during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project provided grants based on a systematic and comprehensive needs assessment. Hence, the project provided the businesses with needed equipment, tools, raw materials...etc to ensure refunctioning and operation in the market with solid and resilient roots. Furthermore, the services focused on building strong relationships with the private sector, and microfinance institutions to support enabling the environment to become more responsive to the needs of women-led business.

The programme support was effective. It enhanced direct recovery of MSMEs in key economic sectors affected by COVID-19 and the last military escalation in May 2021. 21 percent of supported enterprise strongly agreed, and 57 percent agreed that the support enabled them to resume operation after being significantly affected by the hostilities and COVID-19, which positively enhanced resilience and stabilization of businesses of these enterprises. Approximately 79 percent of the enterprises were able to increase profitability as a result of the programme support.

The programme also allowed the enterprises to recover and sustain jobs. 33 percent of targeted enterprises reported that they were able to return at least one of their workers and adapt to future economic shocks with the provision of development, technical, and market access support and assistance. This was done by enhancing the technology of these enterprises through provision of needed machinery and tools so that selected enterprises were able to resume operation and production.

During the interviews with the implementing partners and the FGD with the private sector representatives, they indicated that the private sector in Gaza faced several common challenges such as:

- Restrictions of movement of goods to and from Gaza and diminished purchasing power of the market.
- Lack of national and regional cooperation due to the blockade and restrictions of mobility of materials and products.
- Limited access to finance to upgrade and improve production lines.
- Limited technical capacity and expertise to meet the production standards and specifications.
- The need to upgrade the production lines and installation of modern and sophisticated machinery to increase product quantity and quality.
- Integration of quality control and quality assurance in the production lines to increase the potential for exportation and open new markets.
- Focus on the management, financial, and marketing aspect which remain issue, particularly for micro and small enterprises.

- Lack of policy support to guide the development and sustainability of MSMEs as a key component in the economic recovery process.

4.3.3 Programme's greatest and fewest achievements

This section provides a summary of the findings for the programme's greatest and fewest achievements based on the results of the survey, FGDs, and meetings with the UNDP team, IPs, and the beneficiaries.

Programme's greatest achievements:

Finding 11: The programme contributed to improving the capacities of the IPs, the incubators, and the TVET centres to design and implement labour market interventions and increase skill development of youth, particularly young women, and people with disabilities (PwDs) based on the needs the private sector.

- The programme contributed to improve the capacities of the IPs, stakeholders, incubators, TVET centers, and private sectors. All interviewed Ips, including the incubators, TVET centres, and private sectors reported improved capacity of their institution as a result of the programme support.
- The IPs indicated certain areas for improving capacities to design and lead similar programmes in the future. These areas included: staff capacity building, establishing wide network with the local and international partners in the same sector, and expand the funding network with new donors.
- The selection of the IPs was based on their proven capacity and experience in the sector of interventions to provide the necessary support for the beneficiaries under each of the programme's output. The IPs indicated that the programme supported them to build the capacity of their staff in the field of youth employment, incubation, and entrepreneurship.
- The programme contributed to creating sustainable job opportunities for the beneficiaries through the different interventions: TVET, incubation and entrepreneurship, and supporting MSMEs.
- The timely response of the programme to the MSMEs following COVID-19 and May 2021 hostilities to support them to recover and resume operation, which were at the risk of layoffs or closures due to the financial crisis.
- The programme effective approach, which was based on matching between the skills of youth and the demands in the labour market, created supportive environment for youth to apply their skills. This increased the potential of young people to receive employment opportunity at the host company or finding other job opportunities.
- The programme encouraged women's participation in all interventions, to obtain TVET opportunities, or become start-ups, so that they can earn income and build self-confidence both at individual and community levels.
- The apprenticeship model to create job opportunities in the private sector, supported the recovery of the private companies through the provision of qualified human resources, particularly, for the companies facing serious economic challenges following the recent crisis.

The programme fewest achievements:

Finding 12: The apprenticeship was planned to be conducted in strong and productive private sector companies with operational and financial stability. The programme faced challenges during the job placement period in the private sector due to the limited capacity and lack of infrastructure and resources at some hosting businesses particularly for women and PwDs.

- The implementation of the job placement component of the programme faced certain challenges due to the limited capacity and lack of infrastructure structure at some hosting companies. This was confirmed during the FGDs with some beneficiaries. Moreover, women reported similar challenges related to the workplace as the private sector is traditionally male oriented in Gaza.
- The selection of priority occupations and economic sector was done based on assessments and studies conducted by local and International NGOs in Gaza, which resulted in certain challenges for the IPs to fully match between the skills of youth to fill certain gaps at the hosting companies.
- According to interviews with IPs and FGDs with the entrepreneurs, despite the programme support to provide microgrants for the entrepreneurs, more efforts were required to find out whether entrepreneurs were still in operation, or they required further support to sustain operations, particularly during the first year of the start-up lifetime.
- Regarding the programme participatory approach to include the partners and stakeholders in identifying the needs and key interventions, all interviewed IPs reported that they were fully engaged during the implementation phase of the programme interventions. However, they expected greater involvement in the design of future interventions in the sector.

4.3.4 Integration of gender sensitivity and consideration of human rights

Finding 13: Integration of gender sensitivity and human rights considerations contributed positively to the achievements of programme's results, and have benefits favoured both males and females through provision of equal opportunities taking into consideration the cultural issues and specific needs of women. Even though there was substantial advancement regarding gender equality and women's empowerment, the limited capacity and cultural barriers hindered women's full benefit from the programme services.

The programme followed an action plan in line with gender transformative programmes. The physical component of the programme focused on gender responsiveness through prioritizing females to participate in the TVET and provision of equal opportunities for female entrepreneurs and start-ups. This was implemented taking into consideration issues of protection to make women feel safer. Socio-economic activities, such as vocational training, job placement support, and microgrants were elaborated in terms of gender responsiveness due to their nature and defied gender stereotypes. Balanced distribution was achieved in provision of equal opportunities for women to participate and benefit from the intervention across all programme outputs (Figure 5). This was confirmed by the findings of the surveys and FGDs since 21 percent of female entrepreneurs in the programme strongly agreed, and 58 percent agreed that they had the confidence to start and grow a business. On the other hand, women indicated mixed perception during the FGDs about the support of the local culture and regulations for women as entrepreneurs. Women also added that the training and entrepreneurship support they received during the programme was relevant to their specific background and abilities.

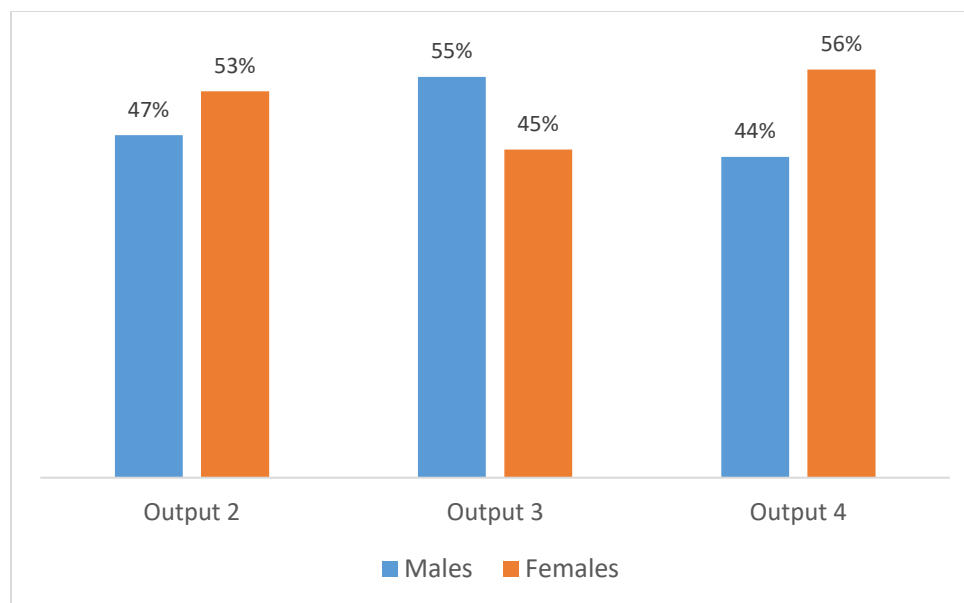


Figure 5: Distribution of males and females on programme outputs.

Women reported facing certain cultural barriers during the programme. The disproportionate impact of these contextual factors on women and girls was underpinned by sociocultural norms that sustain a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in the community, which continue to heavily impact women's efforts to find and keep decent work. The survey and FGDs findings show that women still have low perception than men about the local culture endorsement for women entrepreneurs and start-ups, and usually the preference is given to employment in the public sector as a safe employment location for women.

Thirty-one percent of female beneficiaries were concerned about the working conditions in the private sector. This was directly related to the structure of private sector in Gaza, which dominated was by family businesses, in addition to lack of infrastructure for women workforce.

The results of the survey and FGDs showed mixed community perception regarding women entrepreneurs and start-ups. This required more focus to disseminate the programme approach for female graduates and students through conducting awareness raising activities at community level.

The soft component of the programme included socioeconomic, and awareness related activities highlights the gender responsiveness activities, such as socioeconomic empowerment through provision of equal opportunities for women and involving women during the needs' assessment process.

The programme framework included indicators that measured the percentage of women participation under each output and intervention. However, the framework lacked measurable indicators to track and measure gender related activities and the ability to track the progress in achieving objectives on gender transformative programming not only measuring the participation rate.

4.3.5 Programme management

The program team faced several challenges over the past two years, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the hostilities towards Gaza in May 2021. Despite these challenges, the UNDP team was able to respond effectively, learn lessons, and develop strategies to come up with creative alternative plans that were appropriate for the emergencies, based on detailed context analysis in Gaza. Another challenge for the program was related to changes in some procedures and updated work plans, as well as contract amendments with the implementing partners, which were particularly challenging given the already difficult context, including the impact of COVID-19.

The majority of interviewed IPs indicated that the timeframe to implement the programme activities was limited, particularly during the preparation phase which put more pressure on the IPs to complete the activities within the proposed timeframe. In future interventions, UNDP team need to factor in delays, and allow for enough time and resources for creative solutions and ideas that can face the challenges brought by potential crisis.

UNDP team had years of experience in youth empowerment and economic development activities in Palestine, particularly in the Gaza Strip. This provided the UNDP with considerable advantages to plan and work in Gaza's complex context through internal discussions and agreements on certain action points that facilitated the work within such a challenging context. This was confirmed by all IPs and stakeholders.

4.4 Efficiency

Efficiency measures how the programme's economic resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) were converted into results.

Finding 14: The programme efficiently used the available financial resources to implement the various interventions in cooperation with the local implementing partners. The number of actual beneficiaries exceeded the planned number in the results framework which indicate proper allocation of resources to achieve planned outputs.

4.4.1 Allocation of resources

Allocation of financial and human resources was used efficiently to achieve the programme results, which was confirmed through the following:

- UNDP appointed a highly qualified team to lead the implementation of the program. The management team was highly appreciated by the implementing partners and stakeholders for providing the necessary management and technical support during the design and implementation of the program activities.
- The integration of capacity building and job placement in the private sector largely contributed to both improved skills of Gaza youth and increased the youth's potential to find employment at the hosting businesses or become self-employed.

- Budget reallocation and deviation were small considering the programme scope and size. This indicated comprehensive and efficient budgeting process with adequate budget estimation for the various activities of the programme.
- Although it was challenging to measure cost efficiency by comparing relative costs of achieving the same output using different activities, the programme was cost efficient according to the budget allocated, number of implemented activities, and number of beneficiaries. Table 8 summarizes the budget expenditures of the programme throughout 2019 to 2022 by type of output. Cost efficiency for Output 3 was evident since almost half of the budget (47 percent) was dedicated for this output, which included the highest number of beneficiaries under the incubation and entrepreneurship services. It reached 1323 beneficiaries, i.e., an average of USD 1,221 per beneficiary. Output 2, dedicated to improving youth capacities in TVET, used around 32 percent of the total budget and reached around 595 beneficiaries, an average of USD 1,871 per beneficiary.

The remaining budget of about 21 percent from the total budget was allocated for output 4 to improving business environment through support business start-up and SMEs, amounted to an average of USD 11,144 per MSME. This is considered reasonable amount as the budget was used to install equipment and tools destroyed during May 2021 hostilities towards Gaza.

Table 8: Budget spending by output for 2019 to 2022

Output	Donor/s	Implementing partner	Beneficiaries	No of Beneficiaries	Budget (\$)
Output 2	SDC III	Atfaluna	TVET/PwDs	595	1,113,000
	SDCIII	IRADA	TVET/PwDs		
	SDCIII	JCP	TVET/youth		
	Japan	PEF	TVET/Women		
Output 3	SDC III	BTI	Incubation	1323	1,616,200
	SDC III	UCASTI	Incubation		
	SDC III	PITA	Incubation		
	Norway	G-Gateway	Freelancing		
	Japan	PFI	Entrepreneurship		
Output 4	SDC III	PFI & Paltrade	support MSMEs	66	735,495
	Japan	PARC	support MSMEs		
	Danish	PARC	support MSMEs		

Redistribution of budget and resources: The findings of the assessment conducted by UNDP following May 2021 hostilities revealed that: 2,254 facilities were affected, of which 52% belonged to the trade sector, 34% to the services sector and 14% to the manufacturing sector, in addition to 164 affected private ICT facilities. The size of destruction to infrastructure, equipment, and furniture amounted to

USD 19,179,132, or 59.3% of the total size of impact¹⁰. Considering these findings, it is important for any intervention aimed at enabling rapid private sector and economic recovery *to prioritize and allocate more budgets for provision and/or repairing of needed machinery and equipment, as well as rehabilitation and reconstruction of damaged buildings and other infrastructure.*

There is an urgent need for a more sustainable growth path driven by the private sector in order to create sustainable jobs in Gaza Strip, in addition to providing logistic support to businesses, including raw materials, equipment, and new technology.

Interviewed partners clearly stated that the UNDP team worked efficiently and adequately while taking into consideration the local context. They described the programme team as flexible, efficient, knowledgeable, and professional. They viewed their relationship with the UNDP team as a true partnership to achieve the common objectives. Most partners also mentioned that any delays in payment was due to required financial procedures.

Although the programme did not have gender equality in the main objectives, the value of the UNDP gender marker for the programme was 2, which showed that the programme interventions had significant contribution to gender equality. The evaluation found this value to be fair for the programme through allocating more efforts into gender mainstreaming activities during all phases of the programme.

4.4.2 Selection of implementing partners

Finding 15: The selection of partners and partnership strategies have been effective to build an enabling environment for Gaza youth and strengthened the private sector ecosystem. However, the evaluation found certain level of overlapping of the roles and responsibilities and lack of coordination between the IPs over the various programme outputs.

All interviewed IPs valued UNDP's ability to mobilize funds in the field of economic empowerment and to facilitate decent jobs for Gaza youth. Moreover, they valued UNDP's ability to provide guidance, consult with actors and stakeholders, and adapt the work to the specific needs of the beneficiaries. During the interviews, the evaluation found that the IPs allocated the needed resource to implement the various programme interventions. The designated staff mostly had adequate skills and needed experience in intervention sector.

Contributing to cost efficiency, reviewing the programme documents and IPs reports showed that the IPs followed procurement processes that were clear and strict whereby service providers were subject to a bidding process. The highest quality providers at the lowest compliant price were selected for all programme interventions. The IPs were able to sustain UNDP standards and guidelines in selecting the most cost-efficient providers to implement the planned activities.

UNDP approach was effective through the programme to build the capacity of the local partners in relation to enhancing youth employment and economic recovery interventions. The selection of IPs

¹⁰ Gaza Economic Impact Assessment Summary Report following May 2021 Hostilities.

was made based on capacity assessment process conducted by UNDP before starting the implementation of the programme. UNDP adopted clear and systematic approach to select the qualified IPs, however, the evaluation found that some of the selected IPs had similar capacity and experience in the sectors of intervention. Therefore, this approach could be reviewed to take into consideration the specific roles and responsibilities of each partner, to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure high level of coordination and integration between the programme interventions during the implementation phase. Evidence for this conclusion was developed based on the analysis of the roles and responsibilities of each IP in the programme (Tables 7 and 8). The following findings were reached:

- PEF and JCP have very similar mandates regarding TVET and enhancing youth employment.
- PFI was selected to implement certain intervention under output 3, while PFI mandate and expertise would better fit to provide support to SMEs and private sector development under output 4.
- Under output 4: While PalTrade was selected as partner with PFI to provide marketing services and development of exports, it was not selected as partner with PARC.
- BTI and UCASTI had almost same mandates and were responsible to implement similar interventions related to incubation and entrepreneurship. This also applied to the role of PITA through provision of incubation services.
- Freelancing services were provided both by UCASTI and GGateway during the programme implementation.

4.4.3 Efficiency of M&E system to achieve results

The focus of the UNDP strategy is to reinforce its internal monitoring capacities, systematizing quality assurance reviews over programmes and interventions. It was evident during the implementation of the programme that the UNDP, through the Result Based Management RBM team, continued to fortify systems for quality control, documentation of lessons learned, and capacities to support programme adjustments as needed. This was conducted in accordance with UNDP's programming policies and procedures. The programme was monitored through clear monitoring and evaluation plan which was developed and adopted during the implementation phase.

Results indicators were part of the M&E system used by the UNDP team to follow up on work progress and achievement of objectives. The indicators were all related to the number of beneficiaries of the various outputs and activities. Increasing the number of beneficiaries to exceed the planned target for certain outputs was evidence of cost-efficient use of resources to maximise benefits and reaching the highest possible number of beneficiaries.

The budget allocation could be reviewed in future programmes, to allocate more funding to bring about significant change to the companies from the private sector. This can be done through developing comprehensive upgrading plans for the targeted companies, covering both the technical and management components of the targeted companies.

In addition to the results indicators, some impact indicators can be developed to reflect the concrete impact that the various interventions have on the direct beneficiaries and the local community, such as quantitative indicators that are related to the improved living conditions of targeted youth, and the

impact on the private sector at large, These indicators will help to capture the medium- and long-term impacts of the programme. This could be developed through conducting impact evaluation studies for the various programme outputs taking into consideration increasing the share of budget dedicated to such activities.

4.5 Likely impact

Positive and negative, primary, and secondary long-term effects produced by the Programme, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.

Finding 16: The programme had high impact on Gaza youth and the targeted MSMEs, more specifically contributed to empower Gaza youth socially and economically. Furthermore, the programme was able to build the capacity of the IPs and relevant stakeholders within the entrepreneur ecosystem to provide similar services and interventions after the end of the programme.

In light of the main focus of the programme to improve livelihood for Gaza youth through enhancing employment, the adopted approaches were expected to have likely impact on the targeted beneficiaries both at the short and the long term. A positive impact was observed across the various interventions under each of the programme outputs, with varying degrees depending on type of activity. The support provided for the MSMEs recovery after May 2021 hostilities had an immediate direct impact. The TVET and entrepreneurship support under outputs 2 and 3 had medium impact and was expected to have long term impact of the targeted beneficiaries. The long-term impact will also contribute to enhance economic recovery and creating decent work for Gaza youth.

The evaluation investigated all activities and interventions that specifically concerned youth, and the achieved results impacted Gaza economic recovery in terms of skilling Gaza youth with high quality vocational training relevant to the labour needs. In addition to enhancing linkage between trained youth and the private sector by provision of job placement opportunities taking into consideration matching the skills and competencies of youth and the specific requirements of the hosting company. This model proved to be functioning and contributed to create long term job opportunities for several youth under output 2 of the programme (Table 9).

Table 9: Percentage of long-term job opportunities created under output 2, as a result of programme support.

Implementing Partner	Target Group	No. of Beneficiaries	Long-term jobs created	Percent jobs
JCP	Youth	305 (M:178, F: 127)	233 (M; 131, F: 102)	76%
Atfaluna	PwDs	35 (M:18, F:15)	35 (M:18, F:15)	100%
IRADA	PwDs	58 (M:34, F:24)	14 start-ups	24%
PEF	TVET/Women	100 (M:0, F:100)	31 start-ups	31%

The surveys showed that the programme had a positive impact on the youth overall well-being. This was also confirmed by the FGDs' findings. This positive impact meant improved sustainable livelihood opportunities and support to face economic challenges and low standards of living resulting from unemployment.

In addition to the impact at individual level, the programme also had impact at community level. It increased degrees of social integration between youth and their surroundings, enhanced opportunities for income generation, and overall higher confidence to become independent and able to contribute to the community development process.

Translation of skills into job opportunities cannot be fully assessed at this stage because some trainings were recently completed. There are still opportunities for the trainees to benefit from the skills and competencies they acquired during the programme to find new job opportunities. There is also insufficient information on beneficiaries among graduates regarding their current employment status.

The beneficiaries reported in the FGD that the programme supported was essential for them to open a window of hope for better future under the current complex and difficult economic conditions in Gaza. They added that they felt confident in being able to become independent and generate income. They also confirmed increased knowledge and skills which allowed them to perform a variety of freelance jobs with support from the implementing partners.

The project supported 49 PwDs to generate income to become independent and potentially help their families through start-ups and self-employment support. According to the interviews with UNDP team, Irada, and Atfaluna, the value chain model adopted by Irada and Atfaluna was useful to build linkages to the markets locally and outside Gaza. This proved to be a successful model and has the potential to be expanded and further developed and lead to higher levels of income generation. This finding was also confirmed by the beneficiaries during the survey and FGDs.

The impact of the programme on the beneficiaries' lives -based on the results of the surveys and FGDs:

- Improved self-confidence to find job opportunities or become self-employed.
- The ability to establish connections and new networks to contribute to upgrade business and improve income.
- Become financially independent.
- Improve knowledge and experience about the labour market demands.
- Improved knowledge of business environment for business to grow.
- Ability to have stable and sustainable source of income.

Impact on MSMEs: The economic crisis and COVID-19 lockdowns had an immense impact on the businesses and economic activities, in addition to the destruction resulting from May 2021 hostilities towards Gaza. MSMEs faced significant challenges to their inability to purchase products for their businesses, consequently, they faced the risk of business closure. The programme supported them in various ways, including provision of equipment and tools, and technical and financial support. The provided support was essential in terms of medium-term sustainability. The survey results show that the support provided by the programme enabled the MSMEs to resume operation (21 percent strongly agree, 57 percent agree) after being affected by the hostilities and COVID-19 pandemic. Also,

MSMEs owners (79 percent strongly agree, 16 percent agree) indicated increased profitability as a result of the programme support.

The representatives of the private sector in the FGDs said that despite the important support by the programme to strengthening the enterprises, the amount of funding was still small to achieve considerable change and upgrade operations and productions of the enterprises.

The majority of female-led enterprises (92 percent) reported that the support was important and would help them change their life for the better, hence, become empowered to overcome the cultural barriers for women employment and female start-ups. On the other hand, approximately 54 percent of women indicated they experienced certain type of risk or problems during the business development phase.

4.6 Likely sustainability

This section assesses the continuation of benefits from the programme's interventions and the probability of continued long-term benefits after the major support was completed.

Finding 17: Sustainability issues have been considered and planned through active involvement of local partners in the design and implementation phases of the programme. However, growing economic challenges require rethinking partnership model to expand partners' networks with other donors and main actors including the public sector.

The UNDP recognizes that emergency employment does not provide long-term sustainability. It also understands that Gaza needs to be viewed from a strategic development perspective that complements humanitarian aid. The purpose of this is to integrate sustainability and resilience into the interventions. To integrate sustainability and resilience into the interventions, the programme involves strategic development that complements humanitarian aid with clear vision to advance Gaza's economic future through investment in human capital. The programme adopted a comprehensive approach that integrated different types of job creation strategies in order to have a lasting impact. The approach links short-term decent work to long-term sustainable employment.

During interviews, IPs pinpointed certain positive change, which was evident and manifested in various ways as a result of the programme support to expand collaboration and networking with the local actors in the same sector. UCASTI and BTI also reported significant progress and development to widen collaboration at global level among organizations and companies that provided incubation and entrepreneurship services. Supporting evidence for the above can be taken from UCASTI which was able to benefit from the programme to establish strong network with Swiss counterparts to share knowledge and experience, in addition to provide training and job opportunities for selected entrepreneurs.

Atfaluna was also able to establish good model of the value chain, thus, increasing the production rate of items produced by the PwDs through the selling point for the local clients or to the outside markets.

Investments in research and development is important factor for future sustainability. According to the interviews and FGDs findings, the programme positively contributed to improve academic R&D to be oriented to solve community challenges. This model was pilot tested by UCASTI and BTI. The

evaluation found that this model was promising and had high potential to be expanded to other academic institutions in Gaza, particularly final research projects of bachelor's and master's degree students who participated in the R&D activities and tool active role in the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

To enhance sustainability, the programme approach extensively relied on including local actors and service providers during the implementation of the programme interventions. While the programme under output 1 showed high level of coordination with the public sector through the MoL, *the evaluation found limited evidence to include and coordinate with the public sector and government agencies in the other outputs (Output 2, Output 3, and Output 4).*

Finding 18: The programme contributed to increase matching between the competencies and skill of the TVET beneficiaries with the needs in the private sector. To enhance future sustainability, the programme can be upgraded to create better enabling environment and greater opportunities for youth entrepreneurship, in addition to increasing support to upgrade the production capacities of the MSMEs.

The programme strongly contributed to match the competencies and skill of the TVET beneficiaries with the needs in the private sector. The comprehensive analysis from the findings, however, shows that there are some conditions that need to be present to ensure sustainability and successful integration of youth at the hosting companies, which could include:

- Conduct labour market assessment study to identify the priority sectors and occupations, taking into consideration the global market trends.
- Develop “win-win” model to enable host businesses to be fully committed and supportive of the youth during the job placement period. This can be achieved through creating functioning mechanism in the apprenticeship programme and developing plans for the private sector companies (technical and financial support), with the youth playing an active role in these plans.
- Provision of support to enhance value chain model for the start-ups and MSMEs, which involve sequence of activities that they achieve, to link production with the end users.
- Accelerate shared technology and create new opportunities for sharing knowledge with the youth, which will lead to improved connectivity and business training skills to enable the youth to increase their knowledge through business training that meets the needs of the labour market.

The programme contributed to increase the capacity of Irada and Atfaluna, to lead and implement economic empowerment activities to support the PwDs who are facing many challenges to find decent work. PwDs received important opportunities through the programme to enhance their interaction within the society, which had significant impact to increase their potential to fulfil their own basic needs and improving quality of their lives. This was evident through sustainable interventions for socio-economic empowerment of persons with hearing disability implemented through vocational training, and internship opportunities and outsourcing opportunities with support from the implementing partners.

The analysis of the results of the interviews with IPs and the FGDs revealed that the programme approach and interventions provided good sustainable model to improve and address the needs of Gaza youth. The IPs can participate and support future intervention for youth empowerment, and further contribute to support entrepreneurship and start-ups in the future.

Due to the high relevance of the programme and the positive impact on both Gaza youth and the recovery of the private sector, the evaluation concludes that the outcomes of the programmes can be replicated to target a greater number of beneficiaries and MSMEs based on the adequate assessments. Given the increased levels of challenges and the need to strengthen the private sector, labour market development activities in future interventions may take up a high share of the budget.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This section consolidates the conclusions of the evaluation and summarizes the opinions of the evaluation based on the triangulation of findings described in the evaluation findings.

Overall, the programme was successful in achieving the outputs of its objectives throughout 2019 to 2022. The programme dealt with the various challenges that the Gaza context faced over the past three years including the COVID-19 pandemic and May 2021 hostilities.

In terms of relevance, the programme proved to be highly relevant to the needs and priorities of youth and women's economic empowerment. The programme was able to respond to the most pressing challenges faced by youth and improved their living conditions and livelihood opportunities. The programme's activities and approaches were relevant in addressing certain gaps to enhance youth employability in the labour market. However, there were certain challenges that the programme related to limited capacity of the private sector due to the current economic difficulties in Gaza.

In terms of coherence, UNDP had positive perception and comparative advantages recognized by the stakeholders and the implementing partners as reliable actor with sufficient capacity and experience to lead the implementation of the programme. The outputs of the programme were integrated and complemented each other to achieve decent work and economic recovery in Gaza. UNDP had also established strong partnerships with national actors, especially in the area of entrepreneurship and youth employment which helped enhance UNDP's good standing in these areas.

In terms of effectiveness, the planned targets of the programme were achieved, and key results were observed for the various beneficiary groups, through adopting innovative approaches to address the needs and challenges faced by youth and strengthening SMEs capacities in sustaining and growing their businesses in the market.

Gender issues were tackled through gender transformative programmes that focused on women specific challenges and gave priority to women to benefit from the programme interventions through provision of equal opportunities. The project took into consideration the cultural issues and specific needs of women.

The programme had efficiently used the available financial resources to implement the various interventions in cooperation with the local partners, which indicated proper allocation of resources to achieve planned outputs. Further coordination between the partners will contribute to enhancing efficient use of resources.

The programme has high impact on Gaza youth and strengthening the capacities of the MSMEs and was able to build the capacity of the IPs within the entrepreneur ecosystem to provide similar services and interventions after the end of the programme.

Sustainability was planned in the programme through investment in the human resources and built the capacity of Gaza youth. This was further ensured through active involvement of local partners in the design and implementation phases of the programme. However, growing economic challenges require rethinking partnership model to expand partners' networks with other donors and main actors including the public sector.

Given the increased levels of challenges and the need to enhance youth employment and strengthen the private sector, the evaluation concludes that the outcomes of the programmes can be replicated to target a greater number of Gaza youth and enterprises based on adequate assessments.

6. LESSONS LEARNED

- There are certain issues to be learned as prerequisites to enhance success of the job placement opportunities for the youth:
 - Obtain commitment for full endorsement of the hosting companies during the job placement period to provide needed support for the TVET beneficiaries.
 - Conduct capacity assessment for the hosting companies to ensure that these companies have the equipment and infrastructure needed to host women or persons with disabilities.
 - Obtain updated lists of beneficiaries and validation of the lists to avoid duplication of services and ensure that selected youth are fully available to benefit from the programme service, either TVET or entrepreneurship opportunities.
 - Design and put into operation follow up mechanism to track and evaluate the performance of the youth (evaluation forms, attendance sheet, reports, etc.) during the job placement period.
- Some contracts with the IPs were amended to complete the planned activities. One lesson learned regarding planning and timelines is important to factor in all possible risks that may affect the timeline with the IPs for smoother and quality implementation.
- The vocational training may be provided before the apprenticeship or during the period of the apprenticeship (i.e., three days in the company and 2-3 days vocational training). This is to be based on capacity assessment and agreement with the hosting companies. The purpose of this is to ensure that beneficiaries have high potential to be retained after completion of the apprenticeship period.
- The programme did not include provision of awareness sessions for the IPs staff and relevant stakeholders regarding the gender issues and integration of PwDs in the private sector.
- The implementing partners face financial challenges and limited funding. Therefore, the programme should design needs to factor these challenges by supporting additional costs and activities such as provision of specific tools and equipment for youth, particularly females, or assistive devices for the PwDs.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents a set of recommendations based on the analysis of findings. They are suggested as ways or roadmap to take the programme forward in future interventions:

Recommendation 1: Fostering sustainable growth path and enhancing business enabling environment driven by the private sector to create sustainable jobs in the Gaza Strip through:

- Coordinate with donors and key stakeholders to remove regulatory and practical obstacles that hinder doing or scaling up business within the local market and beyond.
- Develop and implement upgrading plans (including technical and financial support) for private sector companies, with active participation from youth in these activities.
- Create a win-win model with the private sector by providing support to existing businesses, including raw materials, equipment, and technology transfer, so that the hosting private sector businesses can fully commit to supporting youth during training programs and job placement periods.

Recommendation 2: Integration of active labour market strategies to support sustainability of the entrepreneurs and startups to enhance success rate through:

- Allocate funding for co-financing partnerships between the private sector, funding organizations that provide microcredit and loans, and potential donors to support all phases of small businesses and startups. This will insure and maximize their success during the inception phase of the businesses.
- Create a model that aims at provision of business development services to support the local startups and small business to access external markets, thereby increasing their exports and enabling them to take part in the economic development process.
- Provide mentoring and coaching services for supported start-ups to enhance the viability of their new businesses.
- Develop a value chain approach to improve business processes, enhance startup efficiency, and establish a competitive advantage.
- Provide funding to scale up successful startups, enabling them to expand and grow their businesses

Recommendation 3: Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment focusing on exploring new potential demands at local, regional, and international levels, identifying priority specializations and training programs to meet those needs. This assessment will contribute to improving the matching process, creating new job opportunities, and supporting private sector recovery, allowing for a more holistic understanding of the interrelationships between needs and more targeted responses.

Recommendation 4: Enhance coordination and partnership between the vocational training providers, academic institutions, and the private sector through:

- Expand cooperation with the public vocational centres to provide training services to the youth, this will increase local ownership and ensure local endorsement of future interventions.

- Provide support to facilitate collaboration between educational institutions, vocational training centres and the private sector through R&D, knowledge and experience transfer, and sharing of resources.
- Develop a comprehensive and practical mechanism to implement the job placement programme in cooperation between the vocational training centers and the private sectors.

Recommendation 5: Improve quality of TVTE graduates through establishing a mechanism to upgrade the capacity of TVET providers, which may include:

- Engage external experts to support the design and implementation of the training programmes to provide an opportunity to share knowledge and experience with the local trainers particularly in new topics and occupations. This will ensure that skilled youth are well-equipped to compete in both local and global markets."
- Improve the integration of entrepreneurship and business development skills in TVET programs to increase the potential for sustainable employment opportunities for young people."

Recommendation 6: Design and implement a strategic mechanism that support the implementing partners in leading future interventions that focus on youth employment and private sector recovery through:

- Developing area-based strategy for the IPs, shifting from project to programme-based approaches, and consistently integrating gender responsiveness into all interventions.
- After analysing the roles and responsibilities of each IP in the program, it became clear that there is certain level of overlapping and lack of coordination among the various program outputs, to avoid duplication of efforts, improve coordination, and increase the efficiency of implemented interventions, it is recommended that the list of implementing partners be reviewed based on their areas of expertise.

Recommendation 7: Enhance gender-sensitive approaches including good practices for the application of these approaches and tools through:

- Enhance the vocational training and job placement system to meet the specific needs of vulnerable groups, particularly women and PwDs, who face significant disadvantages in the labor market. This will facilitate their successful integration into the workplace and improve their employability."
- Provide gender training for partner organizations and other relevant stakeholders to ensure they understand and apply gender-sensitive practices in their work.
- awareness sessions for vocational training providers and private sector employers to promote understanding of gender issues and encourage the adoption of inclusive and equitable practices.

Recommendation 8: Capture the medium- and long-term impacts of the programme through developing impact indicators to reflect the concrete impact that the various interventions have on the direct beneficiaries and the local community. This could be developed through impact assessment studies for the various programme outputs, which would also consider increasing budget allocations for such activities.

Recommendation 9: Improve programme ToC to enhance integration between the three programme outputs, through provision of greater opportunities for TVET beneficiaries (output 2) who have entrepreneurial ideas to benefit from the incubation services (output 3) or microgrants opportunities (output 4), to become self-employed or new startups.

8. ANNEXES

Annex 1: Evaluation Matrix

Annex 2: list of information sources and documents reviewed

Annex 3: Key Respondent Interview Guidelines

Annex 4: Focus Group Discussion Questions Guidelines

Annex 5: Survey (1) for TVET, Entrepreneurs and PwDs

Annex 6: Survey (2) for MSMEs

Annex 7: Programme framework