


<b>Grant recipient:</b>	Rezan Organization for Development, Erbil, Iraq	
<b>Project title:</b>	<b>Weaving Communities Back Together IV: Building Resilient Minorities in the Nineveh Plains</b>	
<b>Project code:</b>	DIOC008	
<b>Grant period:</b>	6 months	
<b>Total funding:</b>	100,000 Euros	
<b>Reporting period:</b>	15/June/2023- 31/December/2023 (6 months)	
<b>Date of Report:</b>	31-Jan-2024	

**PROJECT FINAL REPORT**

**Summary of key achievements:**

This project was designed to support youth, women and men in highly vulnerable populations that have very limited or no access to livelihoods opportunities and as a result are unable to have a source of income for themselves and their family. The selected areas of this project (Mosul, Hamdaniya and Tel Kaif) have a variety of populations originating from minority religious and ethnic groups.

According to the context, the project team designed a Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment tool, the tool was published online on social media and 4100 individuals applied and send their ideas online. The team then shortlisted a group according to the project criteria and identified 31 entrepreneurs (14 male and 17 female) from Mosul and Erbil, who received a set of different trainings to equip them with the required knowledge and skills to run their own businesses. The trainings included: Business management, digital marketing, professional photography and a set of vocational training skills (including: sweets making, fixing electrical devices, plant nursery, sewing clothes, pickles making, food processing and baking etc..). After the completion of the trainings the 31 beneficiaries received cash grants to start their own businesses. Through understanding the context and needs of the businesses, the beneficiaries were divided into three different categories according to the needs and requirements of each business: First category receives 1000\$, second receives 500\$, third received 350\$, some home based businesses required less money than those which started a shop and paid rent, each business was individually evaluated and selected.

The project aimed at empowering vulnerable youth, men and women affected by the post conflict situation of the country with limited capacities to restore their livelihoods

**1. Implementation of the project measures, achievement of the indicators in the reporting period**

The project aimed to empower vulnerable men, women and youth through improvement of their livelihood's opportunities and support to them to earn their daily bread with dignity and respect. Through understanding the context and needs of the businesses which were identified by the beneficiaries, the project provided the required sets of skills training and grants to enable them to earn their livelihoods with dignity and respect.

The project targeted these vulnerable groups by offering:

- (i) Business management training and vocational trainings.
- (ii) Provision of cash grants for business startups.
- (iii) Regular mentoring and coaching to establish their businesses.

## Description of project activities and reporting against log frame:

**Project objective: Vulnerable men and women have improved access to livelihoods opportunities and skills development.**

**Activity: 1.1.1 Selection of beneficiaries prioritizing eco-friendly/ circular economic businesses.**

To improve livelihoods access for the vulnerable communities especially women, the project was announced on local social media and an online application form was published, additionally Rezan organization coordinated with various stakeholders such as local leader, religious leaders, Mukhtars and local and International NGOs for referrals. In total from the online application and referrals, Rezan organization received 4100 applications. These applications were then assessed according to the intervention criteria by the project team. After careful assessment, the project was able to identify 31 (14 Male and 17 Female) individuals from Erbil and Mosul cities for business startups training and cash grants to establish their businesses.

Some of the following vulnerability criteria were applied: Female headed household, large family, disability within the family etc. Other criteria which were applied:

- 1) Having an eco friendly business idea / or related ideas.
- 2) Being skilled and experienced person who had clients and now cannot provide them with products and services because of lost assets.
- 3) Having existing assets that were broken or lost because of the crisis, such as an empty shop that they need to restock, broken machine that they need to repair;
- 4) in other words having the expertise, skills and relations to re-establish the livelihoods that they lost during the displacement and return journey.

**Activity: 1.1.2 Identify viable businesses (Guiding and training the participants to write and submit business plans)**

Prioritization and selection were done through scoring to identify the most vulnerable and capacitated, interested people. Rezan team initially selected 100 business ideas and started visiting each business to evaluate the business idea and the vulnerability of the family, from there, the team requested the applicants to attend business plan training to help them write their business plans, the business plans were then evaluated based on the project criteria and capacity, after careful evaluation the team selected 31 individuals to be supported by the project.

**Activity 1.1.3 Provision of skill development and vocational training relevant to the business idea.**

After the beneficiaries were selected, the project conducted a series of comprehensive trainings tailored to their needs. These trainings covered various aspects such as writing a business plan, business management, digital marketing, and professional product photography. Additionally, vocational training was provided based on their specific business ideas, including carpentry, electrical device repair, plant nursery management, sewing, mobile device repair, and CNC machine operations. Grants were distributed accordingly following the completion of these trainings.

These trainings not only augmented their vocational skills but also equipped them with the knowledge to effectively utilize digital platforms, enabling them to broaden their reach and engage with a wider audience.

Furthermore, Rezan organization offered ongoing mentoring and coaching to each business, assisting them in establishing and sustaining their ventures. This personalized support played a crucial role in guiding the beneficiaries towards successful business operations.

#### **Activity 1.1.4 Distribute cash grants for business start-up.**

As part of the project, 31 selected individuals who had undergone comprehensive training sessions were required to sign a cash grant agreement. This agreement served to formalize the grant delivery process and ensure the beneficiaries' commitment to the project's terms and conditions. Additionally, it obligated them to procure items in accordance with their business plans.

Following the agreement signing, 21 beneficiaries received financial support totaling \$1000. Among them, \$500 was allocated to four businesses, while six businesses received \$350 each. The distribution of grants was based on the specific requirements outlined in the individual business plans, as evaluated by the Rezan team.

These grants, along with the acquired skills from the training sessions, empowered the beneficiaries to establish their small businesses successfully. The supported ventures encompassed a diverse range of activities, including fixing and selling mobile phones and accessories, carpentry, electrical device repair, plant nursery management, basic plastic recycling, grocery shops, CNC machining, baking, confectionery, and small restaurants.

#### **1.1.5 Support the business with ongoing mentoring and coaching sessions.**

Rezan Organization facilitated individual coaching and mentoring sessions, offering a personalized approach to address the unique needs and gaps within each business. These sessions served as a platform to identify specific areas requiring development and to engage in targeted discussions on topics such as marketing strategies, sales techniques, purchasing strategies, optimal business locations, and any additional support required by the beneficiaries.

## **Coordination**

The project adopted a coordinated approach for the implementation of activities. For the identification of beneficiaries, the project team sought assistance from different stakeholders including universities, community leaders, local NGOs and International NGOs. People in Need, IOM, Intersos, local government actors, security forces were the key stakeholders who were consulted for the referrals/ identification of beneficiaries and obtain NOC (No Objection Certificate) and approval to implement activities in the area.

## **Challenges**

1. **Political Instability and Market Volatility:** The ongoing political instability in Iraq contributes to fluctuating market prices, creating uncertainty for businesses. Rapid changes in government policies and regulations can disrupt market dynamics, leading to fears of business collapse among entrepreneurs.
2. **Currency Fluctuations and Rising Costs:** The fluctuations in the prices and exchange rate of the US dollar against the Iraqi dinar pose significant challenges for businesses. As the value of the

Iraqi dinar fluctuates, the cost of imported goods, often priced in USD, becomes unpredictable. This instability results in goods becoming more expensive for shop owners, impacting their profitability and financial planning.

3. **Delays in Project Funding:** The bureaucratic banking processes in Iraq often result in delays in receiving project funds. These delays hinder the timely execution of projects, leading to increased costs, missed deadlines, and frustrated stakeholders. Businesses and organizations relying on project funding face challenges in planning and executing their initiatives effectively due to these delays.

## Lessons learnt

- The provision of one-to-one coaching and mentoring sessions proved to be instrumental in addressing the specific needs and gaps within each business. These personalized sessions offered a valuable opportunity to identify critical areas requiring development and engage in tailored discussions on topics such as marketing strategies, sales techniques, purchasing strategies, optimal business locations, and any additional support needed by the beneficiaries.
- The cash grant was low for business start up due to the inflation in Iraqi market and increasing the amount of the grants would increase the chance of success and sustainability.
- The training types and contents were very welcomed and appreciated by the community and requested to conduct over a longer period of time.

## Sustainability

- Sustainability lies at the core of the businesses supported by Rezan Organization through our small business grants program. We go beyond mere financial assistance, focusing on empowering entrepreneurs for long-term success.
- Our approach started with personalized coaching and mentoring sessions tailored to the specific needs of each beneficiary. Through one-on-one guidance, entrepreneurs received invaluable insights and strategies for business growth and sustainability.
- Moreover, we equipped them with essential skills through comprehensive workshops on marketing, digital marketing, and professional photography. These workshops not only enhanced their marketing capabilities but also empowered them to leverage digital platforms effectively to reach a wider audience.
- Additionally, we emphasized the importance of eco-friendly practices in business operations. Through training and guidance, we encouraged beneficiaries to adopt sustainable approaches, such as ethical sourcing and waste reduction, thereby contributing to environmental conservation while enhancing their business reputation.
- Furthermore, we assisted entrepreneurs in establishing their presence on social media platforms, providing guidance on creating and managing their business pages. This enabled them to connect with customers, showcase their products or services, and drive engagement and sales.

By instilling these skills and values, we aim to create self-sustaining businesses that thrive in the long run.