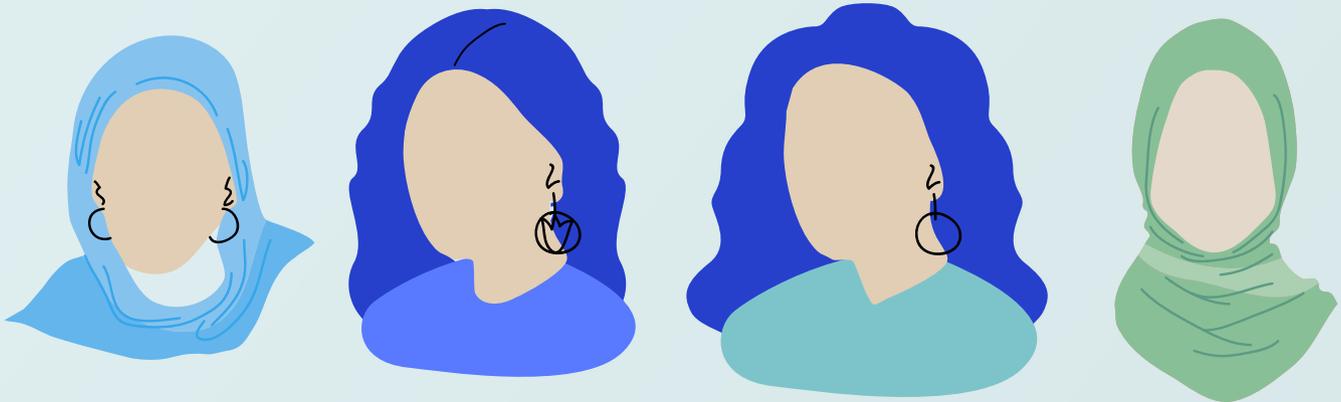




STIMULATING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS



The “**Stimulating Equal Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs**” programme is a collaboration between [UN Women](#) and [Procter & Gamble \(P&G\)](#) to equip women entrepreneurs with the skills and support they need to access opportunities as potential suppliers and distributors. Women receive training on business development, marketing, sales techniques, financial management and soft skills. Afterwards, selected women obtain funding to establish their own private business in the retail industry with many being integrated in the distribution channel of many large corporates including P&G, Juhayna, and Mars. The programme, implemented in Beni Suef and Minya, is funded through the generous support of P&G and ran from November 2017 – End of 2022.

WHAT OUR BENEFICIARIES HAVE TO SAY:

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“ I FOUND MYSELF AND VENTURED DISCOVERING THE WORLD ”

“ NOW, I ALWAYS HAVE MONEY IN MY HAND ”



“ I APPRECIATE THE OPPORTUNITY GOD BROUGHT MY WAY AT SUCH A HARD TIME ”



“ I HAVE BEEN ACTING LIKE A CHANGE-MAKER TO THOSE AROUND ME ”



“ IF YOU PUT IN THE HARD WORK, YOU WILL FIND THAT MANY DOORS OPEN UP FOR YOU ”

“ I ALSO LEARNED ABOUT HARMFUL TRADITIONS ... AND HAVE REJECTED THEM ”



“ THIS EXPERIENCE WAS LIFE-CHANGING FOR ME ”



“ I HAVE FINALLY MADE IT AND I AM DETERMINED TO SUCCEED ”



“ I SHOULD ALWAYS BE MOVING FORWARD AND DEVELOPING ”



“ EVEN MY HUSBAND HAS STARTED HELPING OUT AROUND THE HOUSE ”

FATIMA ISMAIL

AGE: 22 | MINYA

Throughout Minya's villages, few girls go to college or even finish high school as their families do not prioritize their education when facing financial difficulties. But Fatima had big dreams for her future and was determined to complete her education and provide for herself.

“Some of my family members would advise my father that as a girl, it's more than enough for me to complete my middle school education without enrolling in high school. But I was determined to not only earn my high school diploma, but my bachelor's degree as well.

I joined the programme, got trained on marketing and sales, then started selling different products from my home. Step by step, I built my own retail business and kept saving money until I was able to put myself through college. This is a major milestone that I am grateful to achieve. **Now the sky is my limit. I do not want to stop here. I want to continue until I can complete my post-graduate studies and become a life coach to others.**

I dream too of opening my own shop one day and to be renowned as a successful businesswoman throughout my village and the neighbouring villages.

Now, I always have money in my hand. I am able to buy myself new clothes and more than one pair of shoes at a time and I could afford the daily transportation to college.



Photo: UN Women/Nada Ismail

Besides the business skills I learned, I have developed so much on a personal front. I was extremely shy, and I could barely sustain a conversation with those outside my close circle. Now, I know the proper language to use in different situations, be it soft or tough. I also teach the skills I learned to my siblings so that they can benefit too, as I did.

In the beginning, I saw both sides of the coin. As many people supported and were very proud of me, others criticized what I was doing and even mocked and bullied me. **Now, after they've seen what I have accomplished, they have inquired about similar opportunities for them to join and grow as I did.**

I want to marry someone who will support me achieving my dreams. Someone who will get the best out of me. A true life-partner who is as ambitious as I am and who will not hold me back.”

MERVAT AZZMY

AGE: 46 | MINYA

Although Mervat was living a quiet life with her husband and three children in her rural village, something was pressing hard on her own mind and heart. Seeing her siblings – mostly men – better off, she always dreamed of working and establishing her own business, to support her husband and have a better life. She was looking for her own identity, apart from being a mother and a married woman. She looked for an active role beyond that of a homemaker. So, she eagerly joined the programme as soon as she heard about it.

“As a young girl, my dreams were to complete high school, go to college and have my own private business. Marriage was still among my dreams, yet it was at a later stage. However, my family insisted that I only complete intermediate education. I got married as soon as I finished, at around 18 years old.

Life got busy with raising three children, so owning and running a business became a far-reaching dream that seemed almost impossible. However, in time, I started a small business from my home as a hairdresser for close family members and neighbours. Yet, resources and time were limited, so I couldn't sustain it.

This is why I thought that the programme would be the perfect opportunity to finally start living out my dream – especially as I would not be alone in the business. Along with two other women trainees, we rented out a small shop where we started selling everything a woman may need.



Photo: UN Women/Nada Ismail

Along the way, I started building my new identity and began rediscovering the world. Before that, I was extremely reserved. I knew nothing except the things I did at home, to the extent that I was afraid of losing my way or getting lost if I went outside of my comfort zone or neighbourhood without a companion (in most cases, a male). Now, I travel to different villages and even go to the city to buy products and stock my shop. I am no longer afraid or hesitant to experience the outer world.

My personality has been transformed 100 per cent. I have gained a lot of confidence and communicate openly and fearlessly. **I see myself with a different eye, as a businesswoman with her own identity and not only as a homemaker.**

I dream to expand my retail business to attend to the needs of the women in my neighbourhood. A supplementary beauty salon is on the table too. **I want to set the tone for my daughters.** I am working hard, not only to prove myself, but to ensure that my success is translated into my daughters, who will complete their college education and find the jobs of their dreams.”

NORA NABIL

AGE: 36 | MINYA

As most mothers in her rural village Nora was extremely conservative and always abided by the traditions she grew up with. This, of course, affected the way she raised her two daughters, putting many more restrictions on them than her two sons. However, joining the programme, was an eye-opening experience that changed her mindset.

“Previously, I used to be extremely strict with my daughters – the same way my parents had raised me. Out of fear and care, our girls are not allowed the freedom to choose, nor travel alone even in neighbouring villages – to the extent that girls may miss out educational opportunities due to the associated risks they may face on the way to and from college. Girls are not allowed to mingle with people or men outside their family circles, which often ends in them marrying a close relative rather than an outsider at a very young age.

Now that I have experienced the world and become more aware and open-minded, I would rather build trust with my girls and help them have the same opportunities I avail to my two sons. I can still worry more about them but without letting that be a barrier to their dreams or accomplishments. I also learned about harmful traditions that impact myself and my daughters’ health and have rejected them.

My relationship with my children has changed completely and has become so much better. Through the programme, I learned how to send and receive messages quietly, and how to bargain to reach a middle ground rather than end up in a fight. In brief,



Photo: UN Women/Nada Ismail

to be soft on people and tough on the topic – which was for me a technique I had never been trained on.

I, myself, have become a whole new person. I used to know nothing about the world outside my home and I couldn’t even hold a conversation with strangers. Now that I have my own shop, I deal with different suppliers and vendors (mostly men) outside my close circle and I succeed in managing the business.

Being in a tough industry like the retail business isn’t easy. But struggling to survive really paid off. My shop has created a new stream of income and helped me gain my own money. Thankfully, I managed to buy a semi-automatic washing machine, a water cooler, as well as a stove with an oven. I can also now afford to take my children out for their birthdays and create happy memories they can cherish the rest of their lives.

I have learned that being knowledgeable and aware of the world around you is important and it shapes your life. Holding onto the traditional thoughts we were raised with is not always the right thing to do. We should always keep learning, developing and exploring because that is what will shape our future and secure a better life for our children, and mainly our daughters.”

SABRINE KHAIRY

AGE: 35 | MINYA



Photo: UN Women/Nada Ismail

Sabrine, who holds an intermediate level of education, used to live in poverty with her husband and four children, never imagining that one day she would own a business that would expand to all the villages of Minya. An active learner and entrepreneur by nature, Sabrine cloned the in-person sales training and logistics she learned through the programme, recruiting saleswomen to sell products in nearby villages by bus and ensuring safe transportation for them all.

“As a typical family living in rural Egypt, we were most frequently living in financial stress. We were constantly in debt to those around us just to be able to provide the basics. I remember that we would even go a month at a time without eating anything but eggs, cheese and bread.

With the skills and seed funding obtained through the programme, I began my own door-to-door business covering all the villages of Minya. **I first recruited 12 women, who received the same training as I did but were not bold enough to take the responsibility of becoming business-owners. But I had the guts to start the process and run my own business.**

Following the programme’s footprint, I contacted micro-bus drivers (all of whom are men) to give us a ride across villages and transport us back. By then, I distributed the daily allowance to the women (my employees) after paying the drivers.

I then managed to double my employees to 24 and trained them for field work. Seeing my growing business, my husband decided to join me and recruited additional 12 young men for me to train to start expanding the model in further areas that weren’t covered by my pool of women employees.

All of these women and men have their own stories and their own hardships. Most of them or their husbands are casual workers. So having a stable job has changed their life drastically. I remember this one woman who was able to send her young boy to elementary school after she began working with me.

My family’s life has also changed completely. I was able to pay off all our debts and provide for our family. I even managed to completely furnish our house and move into it. I got our water and electricity running, painted the house and even installed ceramic tiles. Also, I managed to enroll our son in high school so that he could continue his education.

To any woman who wants to start her own business, I tell her: “If you put in the hard work, you will find that many doors open up for you. If you are determined to succeed, you will.”

SAYEDA FATEHY

AGE: 37 | MINYA

With five children to feed, Sayeda and her husband have always worked hard to give their family the best life they could. However, as the children grew, the bills started piling up. Although both parents were employed as casual workers, their wages were humble and could not fully cover their household needs. This is when Sayeda joined the entrepreneurship programme and ventured to start her own business.

“Honestly speaking, we were destitute. Our small house had nothing but a rug and a few cooking utensils. Even worse, I had four children and another one on the way. Whatever my husband and I earned did not even come close to covering the cost of living.

So, when I was asked to join the programme, following in the footsteps of other peer villagers, I immediately agreed, upon seeing the profits they were making.

With the funds I earned, I decided to set up a makeshift stall in front of my house and I started selling different products including school supplies and home fabrics.

I quit my casual employment at that time. I don't regret this decision at all. I wasn't earning a decent wage and had no medical insurance to support me in delivering my baby safely, as one would have with formal jobs. I was informed during one of the visits to the village health-care centre that someone like me at my age wouldn't be able to have a natural birth but a C-section, for medical reasons. This operation would cost



Photo: UN Women/Nada Ismail

me around EGP 4,000, which was our family expenses for an entire month. However, I had the operation, as recommended, which wouldn't have been possible without my retail job.

Bit by bit, I began building a home out of our house. I brought a fridge and a blender in the kitchen, and I also got a bed for my children and a TV. I want them to feel like they have a nice home, like their friends, and that their life isn't missing anything. This wasn't an easy path nor was it without associated risks, but I am grateful that it all paid off in the end.

My work in the retail business through the programme, has completely transformed my mindset. **I turned from a casual worker waiting for my wage at the end of the day, to a business-owner who calculates profits on a monthly basis.** With the communication, sales and marketing skills I learned, I am now able to sell any product I can think of. In short, my horizons have expanded.

Most importantly, I learned that I should never stay still. I should always be moving forward and developing on different fronts. Being risk-averse isn't always the right choice. Life needs us to take some calculated risks. I took one and succeeded.”

AMAL IBRAHIM

AGE: 39 | MINYA

Amal, a mother of three in a remote village in Minya, had resorted to borrowing from neighbours after her husband lost his only source of income. That is when Amal decided to join the programme which she heard about from a neighbour.

“My husband is a truck driver – a job that provided enough money to sustain our household expenses. But this changed when his truck broke down and we couldn’t afford to fix it. He tried his best to get jobs here and there to provide for us, with no luck. Eventually, we had no choice but to borrow from family and neighbours just to get by.

I felt helpless doing nothing. I wanted to do something for my family’s well-being, to be a backbone for my husband and to reclaim our dignity. That is why I so appreciate the opportunity God brought my way at such a hard time. **Honestly, I would have never imagined myself working and running a business if the opportunity had come at another time.**

After completing the in-person sales training and receiving the seed funding, my business partners (other trainees) and I had a plan to grow and expand the type of business we were trained on. So, we rented a little shop and began stocking it with sanitary pads as well as other consumables including food and beverages products.

As well-trained saleswomen, we didn’t want to passively wait for customers to knock on our door. We decided to act proactively and reached out to a client base we formed during the training period and offered to bring the items they needed to their doorstep – similar to the ‘delivery services’ provided in big cities. We also replicated the model we learned through the programme. On a rotating basis, we would rent a car that would take us to



Photo: UN Women/Nada Ismail

nearby villages to deliver and sell our products. Thanks to this approach, we opened great sales channels and were exposed to a wider customer base. **Currently, we have become wholesale vendors for nearby supermarkets, which order with us by phone.**

Due to my life experiences, I learned that it’s always better to have various streams of income. With my acquired sales skills, in parallel to my business with the group, I’m running my own business at home selling makeup and ready-made clothes to neighbours.

Life at home has changed completely. We have paid off our debts and no longer need financial support from anyone. When my children need money, I can provide it and I am able to buy them the groceries they like most. I also didn’t forget about myself. I can afford now to buy myself new clothes, as I need to be presentable for my business. At home, I also bought a new stove and a new fridge that I always dreamed of but couldn’t dare ask my husband for, given the hardship we were facing.

In the last phase of the programme, I was designated the Sales’ Supervisor – a role I felt proud to take on. I was scared in the beginning, having some doubts in my abilities. However, I managed to handle and coordinate a group of 11 women. I helped them with their sales’ journeys and gave them tips for success to start their own businesses following my life experience.”

ASMAA BAKR

AGE: 32 | MINYA

Like many women in her village, Asmaa spent most of her time doing housework, then waiting for her two children and her husband to return home. And, like many women in impoverished rural areas, her family had few finances.

“I live in my husband’s family home, and it is the norm for all the women in the family to stay home all day. I could even stay for 12 hours all alone in my room until my husband and children returned. This really affected me emotionally.

My life turned upside down when my husband broke both his arms in an accident, leaving him at home without the ability to work. Of course, money was very tight at that time, and I found it hard to ask for help. That is when I heard about the programme. It was like the perfect solution at a time of dire need.

The programme opened a whole new world before me. Honestly, because of the way I was raised, I felt easily intimidated. Thankfully, through the training I received, my communication skills improved immensely. I was put in situations that would drive me mad – like trying to close a sales’ deal – but I learned how to control my temper. Getting out of the house and becoming comfortable in dealing with and being exposed to different types of people was a true turning point in my personal development and emotional well-being.

Surprisingly, at my age, I always felt insecure going around alone. Now I feel independent – something I hope my kids can learn early rather than the hard way.

My journey started right after the training and receiving the seed capital to run my business. It wasn’t easy in the beginning to rent my own shop. So, like other trainees, I and my five partners decided to turn our own houses into outlets where we could sell our share



Photo: UN Women/Nada Ismail

of products. Knowing the needs of our neighbourhood, we began selling sanitary pads, beauty products and accessories. We soon expanded and added dairy products and juices, chocolates, and even ready-made clothes and linens.

Now, we are well known around the area, and we have built bridges of trust with a wide base of customers. We have even succeeded in becoming wholesalers and sourcing local supermarkets.

The situation at home has improved drastically. Most importantly, I have been acting like a change-maker to those around me. I don’t ask for financial support – something that I always wished for and never believed was possible with my intermediate level of education. **People like me are mostly jobless, working on farms in vulnerable situations, or in the best-case scenario are married to a husband who is always able to provide. Now I can provide for my children and support my husband too.** From the profits I saved, I was even able to buy a new stove, fridge, water heater and semi-automatic washing machine – lot of stuff that made my life easier at home and which I never dreamed of having until I earned my own money and had a say over it.

I feel how much I have advanced in my knowledge, experience and exposure. **I am a businesswoman and a proud wife who has crafted her own identity.”**

FATEN WAZEER

AGE: 39 | MINYA

Faten is a tenacious businesswoman who has reinvented her own businesses in her rural village many times, never losing hope. She says joining the programme provided her with the right support at the right time.

“I love working and I could never stay home without earning my own money. When I first got married 20 years ago, I used a small makeshift shop in my in-law’s house. I stocked it with different products, and I was running it all by myself for two years. However, when I got pregnant, I had to close the shop to take care of my baby. But I never forgot about my dream. Once my daughter grew up, I ventured to try again. I rented a small shop and started selling groceries. I even expanded and bought a fridge and a freezer so I could sell more products. It went well for five years, until the rent increased, and I could no longer afford it.

So, I decided to turn one of the rooms in my house into an outlet. While I worked hard for the third time to get my shop up and running, I soon had another baby. However, my baby needed special care as he fell sick in his first few days. The medical bills piled up and I was forced to sell everything in my shop as I could not afford to keep it running. I did everything I could, yet in the end I lost my shop and, most painfully, I lost my baby as well. I was heartbroken and had no idea how I would stand on my own two feet again.

Two years passed, yet my dream of running my own business was still engraved in the back of my mind. Whenever neighbours passed by, they would ask when I would reopen my shop, but I didn’t have an answer.



Photo: UN Women/Nada Ismail

Then I learned about the programme. It came at just the right timing, now that my three children are enrolled in school, and I am in a better place. **For me, it was a true learning journey about the skills of running and sustaining a business, and the know-how on the do’s and don’ts. Equally important, I learned about personal branding, market segmentation, vendor diversification and effective communication** – things that I had never learned before as I only hold an intermediate level of education.

With the seed capital I received, I set out to rebuild my dream, for a fourth time. I was determined to get it right this time, and I knew I was well prepared. Seeing my shop doors reopen, people kept congratulating me.

I restocked my shop with different items. With the profit I am now making, I am able to help my husband provide for our family, especially with my daughter’s high school education fees – as I dream that she will complete a university degree. She should have a better education than I did to lead a better life.

Now, I control my money and can buy myself whatever I need without needing permission from anyone. Occasionally, I pamper myself too. I am proud that after this long journey, I have finally made it and I am determined to succeed this time.”

NAGLAA HASSAN

AGE: 39 | MINYA

When she first suggested she could work, there were many naysayers. Even her own family doubted her and thought she would fail and humiliate them. But after learning key skills through the programme, Naglaa dared to chase her dreams, and is inspiring others.

“Jobless as I was with an intermediate level of education, I used to sit at home and watch TV all day to let time pass until anyone returned home. On a TV series, I would watch women running their own businesses enthusiastically, and I wondered if one day, I could be like any of these featured women, getting up early and running my own business too.

When I expressed my desire to work one day, my husband and children didn’t take me seriously. They all questioned my ability to succeed without humiliating myself or my husband. Their rationale was that I had never had any formal or informal job before, nor was I used to being away from home for more than five hours a day. I told them I would learn fast because I am not a mindless person.

Despite all this demotivation, I joined the programme and started working as a salesperson. My first days at work were extremely tough. However, while struggling to adapt to my new state, my husband was my biggest supporter. He kept pushing me to continue and never quit. For him, my failure would harm his image.

My confidence and agility grew day-by-day. After the trainings, I rented a shop with one of the other trainees – a nearby neighbour. We began selling different products and getting integrated into different distribution channels including P&G, Juhayna, and Mars. Our sales began increasing. Mars even provided us with a small fridge as an incentive to be their sole distributors in our neighbourhood.



Photo: UN Women/Neta Ismail

I was one of the first few married women to start working in our entire village, where women’s work isn’t appreciated except inside their homes. It is seen as a disgrace to their spouse, as it means he is not able to provide for her or his family. In the beginning, many people gossiped about me and my husband, saying the cruelest things. Even my brothers insisted that I was humiliating myself and the family as a whole. But my husband surprisingly took it differently and advised me to disregard all this evil talk and focus on my goals and my business.

Now, after my success and the profit I’ve gained, all my siblings and neighbours speak highly of me. Even my brothers’ wives asked to be trained and joined the programme in subsequent phases. Ironically, I was the one supervising them.

This experience was life-changing for me. **I went from being a completely reserved woman who was incapable of handling the family’s expenses to someone who runs a business and manages its finances,** someone who takes risks and handles vendors and suppliers. My skills have developed tremendously, especially in business, marketing, bookkeeping, sales, communication and negotiation.

The most important success for me is that **I have become a role model for my children,** who run to the shop after school to help me out. And I am delighted when I hear my daughters proudly proclaim that they dream of ‘being like their mother.’

NAGLAA FATEHY

AGE: 37 | MINYA

Naglaa is a dedicated wife and mother of three living in a rural village. **As a young girl, she completed high school, but when she realized that the same opportunity might not be available to her daughter, she decided to take action.** Through a friend, Naglaa was introduced to the programme and determined to join.

“As my eldest daughter was completing middle school, our close family and friends started advising us to avoid sending her to high school due to the financial burden we would face with the current inflation rates and household expenses. However, I was determined that all my children must complete their education, to secure them a better life.

After completing the training, I started right away my own private business at home selling various products from different vendors. I have been working for two years now and thankfully, together with my husband, we were able to secure enough savings for our children’s education. This opportunity came to me at a perfect time. Honestly, we would not have been able to achieve this otherwise.

I can now buy different kinds of fruits – like mangos, pears and strawberries – all of which were once quite difficult to get, but thank God, not anymore.

I also finally bought myself new colourful clothes for the first time since I got married 18 years ago and replaced my worn-out clothes. I had always prioritized buying my children clothing and even then, I could only afford to buy one or two items. Now, the entire family can enjoy several new outfits.



Photo: UN Women/Muhammad Ismail

Besides the improvements on the financial front, my relationship with my spouse and children has improved tremendously. **I am no longer just a housewife to be consulted only on household matters and chores, but an open-eyed woman who has built a career in one of the toughest sectors in our neighbourhood and succeeded.**

Now, my time is divided among work and the normal family chores which was too much for me to handle alone in the beginning. So, I started distributing the roles among my family members – who took these on in a supportive manner – creating a household where everyone chips in without conflicting with children’s study time or homework.

I now preach that everyone should be responsible, accountable and independent. Even my husband has started helping out around the house. He sometimes even prepares me sandwiches to take while running errands – which isn’t normal in our village. The norm is that men are to be served and not the opposite.

I advise any woman out there to get [paid] work besides her household chores. Having a job makes you productive, provides positive energy, and puts your life and your family’s life in order.”

BENI SUEF

CLICK ON THE QUOTES TO READ THEIR FULL STORIES



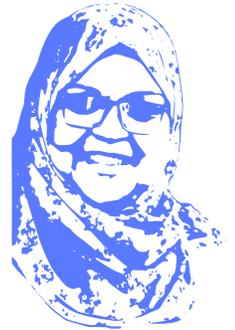
“ I GRASPED THE OPPORTUNITIES I HAD IN LIFE AND DID NOT MISS OUT ON HAPPINESS ”



“ IT FEELS GOOD TO EARN MY OWN MONEY AND I BELIEVE EVERY WOMAN SHOULD HAVE THAT. ”



“ I WAS DETERMINED TO STAND ON MY OWN TWO FEET. IF I CAN DO IT, ANY WOMAN CAN. ”



“ TOUGH SITUATIONS PUSH YOU TO GREAT THINGS ”

“ THE LADDER IS HARD TO CLIMB AT FIRST, BUT IT BECOMES EASIER AS YOU GO ALONG ”



“ I WANT EVERYONE TO SEE ME AND KNOW THAT I AM HERE ”



“ MY BUSINESS HAS HELPED PROVIDE MY FAMILY WITH FINANCIAL SECURITY ”



“ I SPOKE MY MIND WITH MY HUSBAND AND, GLADLY, HE AGREED TO ACCOMPANY ME ”

“ SUCCESS TASTES GOOD ”



“ THE DREAMS I HAD FOR MY LIFE AS A YOUNG GIRL ARE NOW BECOMING REALITY ”



AMINA MAHMOUD

AGE: 22 | BENI SUEF

As a young girl living in a rural village, Amina's life path had been laid out for her. But she had another vision of the life she wanted to lead. She decided to pursue her college education and even start her own business, which led her to the programme.

"I'm a very persistent girl and I care less about what people say as long as I'm on the right track.

My father wanted me to follow in the footsteps of most of my peers. That is, to only complete intermediate education and get married. But I insisted on going to high school. He would submit my admission file to the secondary vocational school in the village and I would retrieve and submit it to the high school instead. We went back and forth like this seven times until he gave up, yielding to my choice. To his surprise, I graduated high school with honours, went on to college and I just graduated this year.

But when I wanted to start working - while studying, it wasn't a piece of cake. Of course, my father did not agree immediately. For him, girls should stay home rather than go out to work. I could ask him for anything I needed, and he would provide it for me. Yet, **I dreamed of earning my own money and being able to buy whatever I need – most importantly to help out with my college expenses.** So, I kept trying to convince him until he gave in on that too.

With the cash I earned through the programme, I was able to rent a small shop next to our house and I started running it all by myself. People kept demotivating me, saying that it was too much for me to handle on my own and that I should not take

such a big risk. But I listened to no one. I had a dream and a goal in life, and I was determined to achieve it.

I started selling sanitary pads, soaps, detergents, and makeup and accessories. **Bit by bit, I started stocking more products and my shop was full. By then, those who doubted me in the beginning wanted to join me as partners.**

My life is so much easier now and a hundred times better. I can get whatever I want. I can buy myself as many clothes and shoes as I need. I can even help out at home, if my father allows it. I think back with pride to the days when I wouldn't have a penny in my pocket and couldn't even afford transportation to college.

I am grateful for the choices I made and the business I started, which enabled me not only to complete my university studies but to go on a college trip. And best of all, my father joined me in celebrating my graduation ceremony and this is a day I will never forget. I'm glad because I grasped the opportunities I had in life and did not miss out on happiness.

I proved to my father that I can succeed and accomplish anything that I want. Now, he is very proud of me and even consults me on his decisions and all family matters."



Photo: UN Women/Nada Ismail

AMAL MAHMOUD

AGE: 34 | BENI SUEF



Photo: UN Women/Nada Ismail

Amal was leading the traditional life. She would wake up in the morning and do her household chores, take care of her three children, and wait for her husband to come back from work. However, when she took the bold step of participating in the programme she did not realize that her life would change drastically.

“Before joining the programme, I didn’t have anything to look forward to in my day. My daily routine was just on repeat mode, over and over again. But now, I’m full of energy. I wake up early to finish my household chores before I go out to look after my business.

When I first heard about the programme, I was intrigued to join and try something new. I had a Bachelor’s degree but was not employed at the time, although I often did volunteer at the local community-based organization.

Working on building my entrepreneurship and business skills through the programme was an entirely different experience. Even being pregnant during the training period and while initiating my business was not a reason to deviate from my dream of running my own business.

I had some family members who were very supportive and understanding that this is a significant step for me to advance and progress financially and personally. I had others – mostly women – who were totally against me pursuing my business aspirations. For them, the right choice for any married woman is to look after her husband and kids. Yet, bit by bit, they saw how I was changing, so, they all became extremely supportive, and some even wanted to join me.

Through the programme, I started to learn about the world outside my house and mingle with people outside my close circle. I got out of my comfort zone and succeeded in building good relationships with so many people, starting from my business partners to customers and vendors. **Being an introvert myself, this is something that I was too shy to do before and never expected I would ever be able to do.**

Before adding any new product line, I felt scared. However, to my own and everyone’s surprise, every time I proved myself and succeeded. Actually, I am achieving such high sales in Juhayna that I dream of one day becoming its sole vendor in my village.

With my increased income, life has become so much easier. I am now able to buy myself whatever I want and whatever my children need without burdening my husband with extra expenses. It feels good to earn my own money and I believe every woman should have that.

I have changed since I joined the programme. My personality became much stronger, and I gained more self-confidence. I have learned how to be courageous and persistent to be able to achieve my goals.

Working is not just about making money; it’s about shaping your personality and proving yourself.”

NORA SALEM

AGE: 40 | BENI SUEF

Nora defied all stereotypes of women in her rural village. Besides being one of the few divorced women in her village, she decided she wanted to be the first woman to drive a motor tricycle in her village. She was able to do that thanks to the confidence and skills she gained through the programme.

“Devastated at being an abandoned woman divorced with two kids, I wanted to prove to myself, my fellow villagers, and above all my children that I could excel in life alone, no matter how hard it might be. With no alimony from my divorcee, I started working at a hospital to provide for my children. However, the working hours were too long for a single mother playing both roles (of father and mother). So, after a while, I quit and began living off my father’s pension.

When I first heard about the programme, I was a bit shy, but decided to give it a shot. During the first day of training, I kept thinking, ‘I want to build and run my own business, like other women. But I want to create a big bang. I want everyone to see me and know that I am here.’

I decided to buy a motor tricycle and be the first woman ever to own and drive one around our village. I used up my life savings of EGP 4,000 (US\$165) to buy it. In our village, women are not seen driving much. As I wanted to drive with confidence and control the first time I drove in town, I took it outside of town to learn how to drive. When the day came, everyone was surprised to see a woman driving a motor tricycle. When they saw how good a driver I was, they were very supportive.

I started going around my village and six neighbouring villages selling sanitary pads, diapers, soaps, detergents as well as dairy,



Photo: UN Women/ Hassan Abdallah

juice, and chocolates. I am now earning a net profit of around EGP 4,000 a month.

Although I did not see myself as such before, I now recognize how strong I am. I can defy the norms and succeed on my own. I felt accomplished when my daughter told me one day that she wants to start her own successful business, ‘just like you, Mom’. The programme not only helped me provide for my children and put them through college, but it helped me heal emotionally and psychologically. I stopped viewing myself as a victim and I learned how to stand up for myself and prove what I can do.

I also changed the perception of everyone around me. At first, my family and neighbours were against my divorce, despite the misery I was living. Everyone kept telling me to hold onto my husband, who would provide for us. Now, they say he’s the one who missed out on a good life with a me.

I dream big. My daily dream is for my business to grow until I can open my own detergent shop. Later, I want to build a detergent brand and become its sole vendor in Beni Suef. And eventually, I dream of opening my own detergent factory. I want to leave something for my children that they can be proud of.”

WALAA ALNADI

AGE: 34 | BENI SUEF



Photo: UN Women/Nada Ismail

Walaa had a secure life with her husband and three children. Her husband was a full-time employee who was well-paid in a private company. Unfortunately, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, his company had to downsize and he did not make the cut. Left without a stable source of income, Walaa jumped at the opportunity when she heard about the programme.

“This opportunity could not have come at a better time. My husband had just been laid off from his job without any compensation and we did not have any other source of income. I joined through word of mouth from peers in my village who had joined the programme since 2019, and it was perfect timing.

I told my husband, ‘You have been carrying the family load for 15 years; now it’s my turn to bear the load for a while’.

Throughout the trainings, I learned to seize any opportunity that crosses my path. Starting a business requires spirit and passion, but above all, a belief in oneself and the persistence to continue. The market is open to those who survive challenges and are not quitters.

That is why I am always looking to diversify my portfolio, to provide my customers with different products they might need depending on the season. At first, I started by selling sanitary pads, then, I began adding different products based on demand. I also noticed that there weren’t many stores around our neighbourhood that sell ready-made clothes or home fabrics. So, I immediately seized the opportunity and made use of the sewing machine I have at home but never used as a source of income. I now sew dresses, pants and bed sheets and sell to my neighbours.

Although I worked some short-term jobs before, having my own money from my own business feels completely different.

I calculate every penny because I know this is what will make my business grow. My goals are to rent a shop on the village’s main road and to become a wholesaler.

My business has helped provide my family with financial security during a tough situation, and it has opened many doors that we had never even considered before.”

NOHA ANWAR

AGE: 44 | BENI SUEF



Photo: UN Women/Nada Ismail

Noha, holds a bachelor's degree, living in rural area, loves to work, but in her remote village, job opportunities for women are infrequent and unfulfilling. However, after participating in the programme, things started changing.

"I love to work. Any opportunity that comes my way, I take right away. This is what compelled me to join the programme and see where it would lead.

Through the trainings, I learned that the key to succeed is to be extremely focused and detail oriented. That I need to keep track of everything that goes in and out, and write everything down, primarily to know my expenses and my income. I also learned the art of marketing and different convincing techniques. **It's not about selling products but more importantly about personal branding.**

During the training, when I started selling products through the door-to-door technique, I was extremely happy and excited when I was able to sell all the products I had. This exposed me to so many different types of people after I had only been confined to those within my village.

Afterwards, with the cash I earned through the programme, I started buying products and selling them out of my house. **Although I just started my own business a few months ago, my income is making a difference.** I am able to help my husband in providing for our three children. The programme came to me at a perfect time since one of my daughters is in college and the other just started high school, and their education had been

causing us much financial stress. Now, I am able to help with their education and buy them what they want.

I am also now able to buy myself small things that make a difference for me. For example, when I went to the bathroom in the middle of the night, it was always so dark, and I used to trip frequently. So, with my first profits from my business, I bought myself a small nightstand lamp that makes my nightly trips so much easier.

The most important thing for me out of this experience is that I have fulfilled myself. **I now feel I have a purpose to wake up for in the morning, and that my existence is adding value.** I have become more productive, and my entire day is currently full of significant tasks to accomplish. Looking back, I regret wasting time just sitting on my doorstep doing nothing but listening to the neighbourhood gossip.

To every woman who wants to work, I advise her to be confident and not to quit easily. To actively listen to people, but above all, her inner self and to focus primarily on her goal, because success tastes good."

HALA MOHAMED

AGE: 36 | BENI SUEF



Photo: UN Women/Nada Ismail

Hala is a divorced woman who has defied hardship and has broken all stereotypes for women in her rural village. Despite years in an unhappy marriage with no intimate dialogue with her spouse, Hala supported her husband when he fell ill, caring for him for two years while working and providing for their two sons, aged 9 and 11. However, when the tables turned and Hala took a bad fall that left her in recovery for more than a year and cost her an eye, her husband left, and she asked for a divorce. A few months before her accident, she had joined the programme and once she was healed, she set up her own shop.

“The programme provided me with a big family that supported me through my recovery period, giving me something to look forward to. The trainings I received helped me during my recovery period as well. **I learned how to depend on myself and to never give up no matter how hard the circumstances are.**

I wasn't broken after my accident or divorce. I was working on my business independently, hence, I felt strong and calm from inside.

Before the programme, I didn't have a clear plan when it came to what I wanted to do for a living. I was going around doing random jobs here and there. But now, I've learned by experience how to organize my priorities, look into different options and

assess risks and benefits properly as much as I can. I learned how to listen and communicate more effectively, which helped me to deal not only with customers and vendors, but also with my two kids. I am grateful that now my relationship with both of my sons is so much better and life at home has become much calmer.

I remember when I got my first income from the shop, I took my boys out to dinner. We were all so happy that day.

The sky is my limit when it comes to my dreams. As a bachelor's degree holder, I dream of establishing an e-marketing application one day that can provide women, and housewives **in particular, with anything they might need. I dream also of employing women who are in tough situations like me. Most of the women in my neighbourhood need to become financially independent to take proper life decisions.**

A woman can do anything she wants, as long as she is determined. I was all alone with two kids at a tough age and with no financial support. However, I was determined to stand on my own two feet. If I can do it, any woman can.”

MONA SALAH

AGE: 35 | BENI SUEF

Mona lives in a remote rural village with her husband and three daughters. As a child, she was pampered as the youngest in her family. But that changed when she was married off at the age of 18 to a man 12 years older, whom she barely knew. A year after her marriage, her husband suffered a brutal attack that left him bedridden and unable to work. Once he had recovered, she started working odd jobs, but it wasn't until she joined the programme that she truly found her calling.

“I found myself as a young 19-year-old girl, having to take care of my husband while also being a new mother to a 2-month-old baby. We were living off the support of our families and friends and that was extremely hard for me to accept and put my pride aside.

Tough situations push you to great things. If you are living very difficult circumstances, you can always make something good out of it.

I have taken so many jobs. But I never found the support I needed, mostly in terms of coaching, until I joined the programme. I received trainings, constant guidance and funding to start my own business. The programme taught me everything about sales and marketing, which I fell in love with from the very beginning – as if I had discovered my calling in life and hidden talent. In the trainings, I learned how to study the market and explore the gaps that need filling. This is how a good salesperson offers something unique to customers.



Photo: UN Women/Nada Ismail

I soon ventured further and started my own online business selling handmade wood products and jewelry. With my hard work, my business has been growing, along with my profits.

I changed my life around completely. I went from living off of people's help to being the one people go to for help. I went from working for a salary at the end of the month, to being a business-owner that wants to grow and take it to the next level.

I want my daughters to be proud of me when they look back at my life. I teach them that their ultimate goal should not just be wearing a wedding dress. Having only had the chance to obtain intermediate-level education, I aim to give my daughters a high-level education and help them build their own businesses – if they have the passion to do that. I am instilling in them values of independence.

I dream of one day establishing a big retail company and employing other women – mainly those in tough situations who need a hand– to help them out.

I urge every woman to search deep within herself, to realize her strengths and passions, to set goals and to work on achieving them.”

MONA TAHA

AGE: 36 | BENI SUEF



Photo: UN Women/Nada Ismail

Mona is a shy woman who kept to herself inside her house with her three sons and husband, with little interaction with those around her. Although she would occasionally volunteer at the local community development association, she had never had a paid job before. When she first heard about the programme and ventured to join, all those around her objected.

“I kept convincing my husband that I should at least give this experience a shot, until he gradually accepted. With time, he came to appreciate that we now have two sources of income, realizing how much financial pressure I was taking off his shoulders. Only then did he become extremely supportive.

Now my husband even gives me a hand with my business. He joins me on my trips to wholesalers to buy merchandise at a low price as well as by lifting and storing the products at our house, where I then sell them to retailers and villagers nearby. I started out by selling sanitary pads but quickly moved on to add other products and accessories. Besides serving my neighbourhood customers, I am now also a wholesale distributor to nearby shops and pharmacies.

As my business continued to grow, my husband offered me money to increase the capital and expand my business even more. Our relationship is much better since the financial stress

that has caused us so many problems has been lessened. **We are currently not only a couple but rather partners helping each other out.**

The most important thing I took from this experience is that I was introduced to my strong personality. The ‘new me’. I learned to speak up, to be vocal, and to pursue my ambitions. Even my family, who once objected to me working, now admires me for my strength and my persistence.

Everyone keeps asking me, ‘What happened? You’ve always been such a quiet person?’ And I answer: ‘That was my past life before I began working and running my business’. Even my husband appreciates me turning into a new person.

I am now advising my sons that when they marry, they should pick a suitable woman who is a true partner, so they can build their lives together.

I tell any woman out there who wants to start working to take the leap and not to listen to any negative or discouraging words from those around her. The ladder is hard to climb at first, but it becomes easier as you go along.”

NADIA HUSSEIN

AGE: 31 | BENI SUEF



Photo: UN Women/Nadia Ismail

As Nadia and her husband sit side-by-side on the front steps of their family home, he whispers in her ear, and she giggles and leans on his shoulder. Married when she was 22 years old, they have supported each other through many challenges over the past nine years. A year ago, Nadia enrolled in the programme through which she was supported to open a little shop along with five other women from her rural village.

“My husband is my biggest supporter. He never leaves my side and is helping me so that I can grow my business into something big. I know the financial burden that my husband is carrying in supporting our big family of eight people to look after, so I have never asked him for any money for myself. Actually, I have never asked anyone else for money.

I am now running a private business with my partners, and this has provided me with a stable source of income that I can depend on. I am very happy because now I am able to take some of the pressure off my husband’s shoulders and provide for our big family as well.

After running my shop for a while, I thought that it would be best to expand the business and get more merchandise from wholesale vendors in Cairo. I spoke my mind with my husband and, gladly, he agreed to accompany me. So,

we decided to go together to Cairo and buy what my shop needed at a lower price.

We traveled to Cairo and began collecting contact information for different wholesale vendors from whom we would later make purchase orders on a regular basis for delivery to their village. With this new avenue, I began ordering a wider variety of products and stocking the shop, where I and my husband would take work shifts, particularly my husband would the night shifts.

With the growing business, I and my business partners have started to become wholesale distributors to neighbouring shops and are also delivering products to our relatives in neighbouring villages who sell on our behalf.

I am now planning on opening my own independent shop that will be much bigger than the one I share with my partners, and I want to grow my business with my husband until we can open the first supermarket in our neighbourhood.”

SAWSAN RAMADAN

AGE: 43 | BENI SUEF

Sawsan saw many projects for women's empowerment on TV, but never believed that they were real or that she could take part. That is, until she joined the programme in 2020. With the training and support she received, Sawsan was able to start her own home-based business and building the life she had always dreamed of.

“The dreams I had for my life as a young girl are now becoming reality. I dreamed that I would have my own business and my own house where I would live with my husband and four children. Since I started running my business, I was able to renovate my house, which used to only have brick walls. Now it's all painted. I even installed ceramic tiles in the kitchen and bathrooms. I am so happy that we are finally starting to live in a beautiful home.

At my age, I never made use of any opportunity that crosses my path. Now, I learned that I should. Besides my trained job as a saleswoman, I started to make use of my passion for cooking Upper Egypt's popular foods. So, I bought an oven with the profits I earned from my retail business and began to also sell homemade feteer (a popular pastry in Egypt). **I have become known as the one to go to when anyone wants to place a purchase order in my neighbourhood.**

My new stream of income, which is almost three times what I used to make in my previous job, had a positive impact on my household expenses. In addition, my emotional and psychological well-being has improved immensely. My previous jobs demanded long working hours that kept me away from home and children,

with very little pay in return and extreme stressful situations. **But now, I am running my own business at my own pace, which doesn't conflict with my family responsibilities.** I have to admit, running your own business has controllable stress and pressure in comparison to working for others under situations you have little control over. This also led to a calmer relationship with my husband and more quality time with my kids.

As a typical villager, I had to drop out of education early and get married, despite loving to study so much. Now, being exposed to the world of business and coming out of my shell as a housewife, I am planning to continue my education to help me grow my business even more. This wasn't even a thought before I joined this programme.

I am glad and proud to say that when my daughter started middle school, I decided to enroll with her and earn my certificate too. I graduated with very good grades. I'm currently studying for my second year and when I finish, I want to apply for college. **I have bird's wings now: It's never too late to learn. I love to study, and I am sure this will help me both manage my business and better raise my children.”**



Photo: UN Women/Nada Ismail

MANY MORE BENEFICIARIES HAD A LOT TO SAY

MINYA



“FROM A LIMITED, AMBITIOUS AND FREQUENTLY DEPRESSED PERSON TO SOMEONE FULL OF ENERGY.”

Amaal Tawfik



“WORKING HELPED BUILD MY SELF-CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM.”

Nourhan Farouk



“IT’S THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE THAT I LEARN TO EARN GOOD MONEY.”

Nadia Kamel



“NOW, I AM INDEPENDENT, WITHOUT DEPENDING ON OTHERS FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT.”

Sabah Aly



“I LEARNED TO CHALLENGE MY SHYNESS AND DO SOUND BUSINESS.”

Diana Shenouda



“RELATIONSHIPS IMPROVE AT ALL LEVELS THROUGH EQUAL RIGHTS AND DUTIES.”

Shayma Saber



“IT’S NOT A SHAME TO WORK. IT BUILDS A WOMAN’S PERSONALITY.”

Hanem Kamel



“LIFE NEEDS PARTNERS RATHER THAN A SOLE PROVIDER.”

Asmaa Saber



“LIFE IS NOT ANYMORE, A GAME OF DEPENDENCY.”

Safaa Mohamed



“WORK FOR YOURSELF FIRST. IT’S NEVER, TOO LATE TO START.”

Yasmine Mohamed

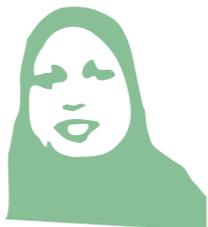
MANY MORE BENEFICIARIES HAD A LOT TO SAY

BENI SUEF



“THIS WORK EXPERIENCE ADDED A TRUE VALUE TO MY USED TO BE A “STILL” LIFE.”

Aya Mubarak



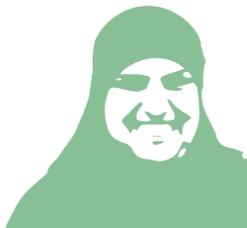
“I DREAM BIG NOW. RAISING KIDS REQUIRES THE MEANS TO DO IT PROPERLY.”

Afaf Mabrouk



“I HAVE NOW A PURPOSE IN LIFE OTHER THAN BEING A MOTHER.”

Asmaa Taha



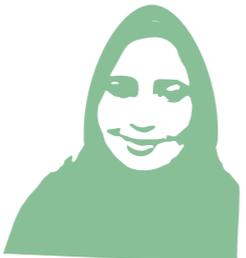
“DREAMS ARE ATTAINABLE FOR FIGHTERS.”

Hanaa Ewees



“I BELIEVE NOW THAT WOMEN CAN DO MIRACLES.”

Asmaa Hassan



“PREVIOUSLY, I THOUGHT THAT WOMEN FIT ONLY IN GOVERNMENTAL JOBS. NOW, THIS HAS COMPLETELY CHANGED BY TRUE EXPERIENCE.”

Reda Mohamed



“I UNDERESTIMATED MY ABILITIES BEFORE WHICH HELD ME BACK FOR SO LONG.”

Asmaa Saeed



“BREAKING THE “SCARY BARRIERS” AND “SOCIAL NORMS” FOR WOMEN’S WORK, WASN’T AN EASY TASK, BUT IT PAID OFF EVENTUALLY.”

Ibtisam Eid

RESULTS ACHIEVED

MORE THAN

300



Women villagers trained to carry out market development activities

REACHING OVER

700,000

potential buyers in over 340 villages



15



women owned and led retail companies established for around 50 women

INCREASE IN INCOME RANGING BETWEEN

30-50%



TRAININGS INCLUDE

MARKETING AND SALES



SOFT SKILLS



BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

CASH MANAGEMENT



LEGAL AWARENESS



For more info, click [here](#) or watch the programme's
“[Not Only a Mom](#)” documentary.



