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STRENGTHENING PRODUCERS’ ASSOCIATIONS ACROSS THE NENA REGION TOWARDS HEALTHIER DIETS: A FOCUS ON OMAN AND UMA COUNTRIES

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SDGs:



Countries: Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman and Tunisia

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Implementing Partners

Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR), Oman; Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Algeria; Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Marine, Libya; Ministry of Rural Development, Mauritania; Ministry of Agriculture, Maritime Fisheries, Rural development and Water and Forests, Morocco; Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries, Tunisia.

Beneficiaries

Small Scale Family Farmers (SSFFs) and farmer associations; Aflaj managers and members of the Omani Agriculture Association (OAA); agricultural extension workers; communities and farmers in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region; Oasis agriculture organizations; Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Country Programming Framework (CPF) Outputs

Algeria: CPF 2018–2021, Priority 1

Libya: CPF 2017–2020, Priority 2

Mauritania: CPF 2017–2021, Priority 1

Morocco: CPF 2017–2020, Priority Area 2

Oman: CPF 2018–2022, Outcome 1, 3, 5 and 6

Tunisia: CPF 2016–2020, Priority 1

UMA-FAO Programming framework, Output 1.2.



BACKGROUND

Small-scale family farming is the dominant form of agriculture worldwide, with over 500 million family farms, ranging from smallholders to medium-scale farmers. These farms are integral to maintaining diversified agricultural systems, preserving traditional food products, contributing to better nutrition for populations, and protecting the environment. In the NENA region, SSFFs contribute more than 80 percent of agricultural production, playing a crucial role in transforming food systems.

Sustainable food systems aim to provide healthy, affordable and safe food, yet globally, current food management practices do not adequately provide pathways to improve nutrition of populations.

A holistic approach is required, linking food supply to increased demand for healthy foods and creating win-win solutions for stakeholders across food systems. The SSFFs and their organisations are essential drivers in this transformation by producing nutritious food, accessing markets and reducing post-harvest losses, thereby enhancing the availability of healthy diets for consumers. However, SSFFs face numerous challenges that limit their productivity, profitability and livelihoods. Collective action through producers' organizations, cooperatives, or other forms of collaboration enables SSFFs to overcome these barriers, enhancing their contribution to agricultural development. Strong, inclusive producers' organizations are vital for a thriving agricultural sector and rural economy.

In Oman, agriculture is based on an unequal model, where 89 percent of farmers own only 25 percent of the land, while 0.2 percent own 21 percent. Most farms focus on low-tech, non-market, family-oriented production. The "Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy towards 2040" highlighted the need to promote producers' organizations to professionalize the sector and improve incomes and livelihoods. Upon the request of the Government of Oman, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) provided technical assistance under the TCP/RAB/3606 project to strengthen producers' organizations in the NENA region. This project's results emphasized the need for further support in governance, management and administration to enhance POs' effectiveness.

In the Maghreb region, agriculture is a key economic pillar, contributing over 15 percent to the gross domestic product (GDP) and providing work for 35 percent of the population. The SSFFs in the region face challenges related to access to resources, markets, finance and knowledge. Collective action, involving producers' organizations and the communities managing traditional irrigation systems, plays an important role in addressing these challenges. FAO has worked with professional organisations in the Maghreb to support the adaptive management of the region's oasis systems.

Both Oman and the Maghreb region are endowed with traditional oasis systems that have sustained communities for hundreds of years. In Oman, the *falaj* irrigation system channels water for household use, crop cultivation and livestock breeding. Similarly, in the Maghreb, local farmers have developed resilient systems for managing scarce water resources, integrating crop and livestock production with agroforestry techniques.

These oasis ecosystems have been maintained through strong farmer-based organisations, whose sustainability depends on their capacities to create income opportunities through specialized, high-value commodities and environmental services. Strengthening SSFFs organisational capacities around these systems will be essential for ensuring food security and the future viability of oasis-based agriculture.

IMPACT

The project contributed to creating more productive, inclusive and sustainable food systems across the NENA region by enhancing the organizational capacities of the SSFFs and empowering farmer associations and *aflaj* managers. Through the development of a comprehensive andragogical guide, targeted training initiatives and the dissemination of best practices, the project equipped stakeholders with essential skills in governance, service delivery and collective marketing. The successful study tours to Mauritania and Tunisia provided practical insights into effective irrigation techniques and water management systems, allowing participants to adapt and implement proven strategies in their own contexts. Furthermore, fostering continuous dialogue between producers' organizations and government entities has strengthened their collaboration, providing stakeholders with the opportunity to overcome challenges and jointly develop innovative solutions. Collectively, these efforts not only improved agricultural productivity and efficiency but also promoted inclusivity by empowering marginalized communities and enhancing their access to resources and decision-making processes. As a result, the project laid the groundwork for resilient and sustainable food systems that support food security and the socio-economic development of the NENA region.

ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS

The project successfully enhanced the skills and efficiency of farmer associations and *aflaj* managers toward sustainable food systems through a comprehensive and strategic approach that involved several interconnected outputs.

Under Output 1.1, which focused on strengthening collaboration with the Omani Agriculture Association (OAA), a three-week mission to Oman was conducted, during which key objectives were established, such as understanding the realities faced by Omani farmers and engaging in discussions on essential topics like membership and collective marketing. The mission included visits to five governorates and culminated in a national workshop that presented findings and explored strategies for financing and professionalizing the OAA.

Key conclusions underscored the democratic values within the association and highlighted the community's commitment to agricultural development, laying the groundwork for further capacity-building efforts.

Output 1.2 underwent a significant revision to align more closely with the evolving needs of the OAA, following changes in governance. The FAO assessed the association's dynamics during a mission to the five governorates, revealing challenges in managing the commercialization of produce. This led to the decision to focus on organizing a regional forum that would facilitate knowledge exchange between Omani farmers and those from the Maghreb region. This forum aimed to strengthen producer associations, promote healthier diets, and support broader agricultural development efforts across the NENA region.

Output 1.4 was crucial in developing the organizational capacities of SSFFs in the NENA region. A key deliverable was the creation of an andragogical guide, which served as a comprehensive learning tool documenting both virtual and face-to-face training sessions. This guide incorporated innovative participatory approaches tailored specifically for SSFF, focusing on improving service delivery, governance and collective marketing strategies. By emphasizing flexibility, the guide allowed producer organizations to adapt the methodologies to their local contexts rather than rigidly following prescribed frameworks.

In conjunction with the andragogical guide, a study of oasis agricultural production systems was conducted by a FAO expert, resulting in a compilation of good practices. These practices targeted crucial areas such as water resource conservation, biodiversity protection and improved agricultural yield, with an emphasis on their replicability across oases in the NENA region. This collection empowered associations and irrigation systems managers by providing them with evidence-based strategies to enhance their agricultural practices.

The project also facilitated study tours for an Omani delegation to Mauritania and Tunisia, where participants gained hands-on experience in effective irrigation techniques and water management systems. These visits allowed them to observe successful methodologies in practice, allowing them to adapt and apply these approaches within their own contexts. The practical insights gained from these tours were integral to reinforcing the training provided through the andragogical guide.

Continuous dialogue between producers' organizations and government entities, fostered through these various outputs, created a collaborative environment conducive to addressing challenges and exploring innovative solutions.

Furthermore, the documentation of these methodologies ensured that the skills and efficiencies gained were institutionalized, providing a sustainable resource for future training efforts.

In summary, the coordinated efforts across these outputs resulted in significant improvements in the organizational capacities and efficiencies of producers' organizations and *afraj* managers, ultimately promoting sustainable food systems in the region. The comprehensive approach, encompassing training, practical experiences and stakeholder collaboration, ensured the effective dissemination and application of best practices, setting a foundation for ongoing agricultural development in Oman and beyond.

IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK PLAN AND BUDGET

The implementation of the work plan and budget for the project was generally successful, aligning closely with the established goals of enhancing the organizational capacities of the SSFF in the NENA region. Key activities, including the development of the andragogical guide, targeted training sessions and study tours, were executed on schedule, with budgets effectively allocated to support these initiatives.

However, several impediments and constraints were encountered during the project. Changes in governance within the OAA necessitated adjustments to activities, particularly in addressing the evolving needs of the association and its members. The inability of the OAA to manage the commercialization of produce, such as vegetable baskets for schools, underscored the necessity for additional capacity building before implementing certain planned activities. Furthermore, logistical challenges, including coordinating study tours and ensuring participation from diverse stakeholders, occasionally hindered timely execution. This necessitated a rephrasing of the project and a no-cost extension, changing the end date from 31 March to 31 December 2023. The timeline extension, along with the implementation of adaptive strategies such as stakeholder consultations and a revised focus on activities, allowed the project to remain on track in achieving productive, inclusive and sustainable food systems across the region.



FOLLOW-UP FOR GOVERNMENT ATTENTION

The project underscored the significance of continuous dialogue between POs, such as the OAA, and government entities, fostering a collaborative environment to address challenges and innovate solutions. A national workshop held in Muscat brought together representatives from all branches of the OAA and government officials to present key findings from various missions, analyze financing methods for the association, and strategize future initiatives. This engagement highlighted the necessity for ongoing governmental support in agricultural policy and resource management, particularly in implementing a unified approach to collective marketing. Moreover, the documentation of methodologies and best practices ensures that the progress made is not only recognized but also sustainable over time, calling for sustained governmental oversight and collaboration. This proactive engagement is essential for maintaining the momentum of agricultural development efforts and achieving long-term food security and sustainability across the region.

SUSTAINABILITY

1. Capacity development

The project developed a robust framework that enhances the skills and knowledge of farmer associations and *Aflaj* managers, ensuring long-term benefits for the agricultural community. Central to this effort was the creation of the andragogical guide, which provides a comprehensive learning tool designed to be adaptable to various local contexts within the NENA region. This guide not only documented effective training methodologies but also focused on critical areas such as governance, collective marketing, and risk management. Furthermore, the collaboration between FAO, the OAA and the non-governmental organization (NGO) UPA Développement international (UPADI) facilitated the exchange of knowledge through study tours and workshops, allowing participants to observe and implement best practices in irrigation and resource management. By institutionalizing these methodologies and fostering a culture of continuous learning, the project laid the groundwork for ongoing improvements in agricultural productivity and inclusivity, ensuring that communities are better equipped to address future challenges in sustainable food systems. This strategic approach to capacity development reinforces the importance of building resilient agricultural practices that can adapt to changing environmental and socio-economic conditions.

2. Gender equality

The project's emphasis on improving the organizational capacities of farmer associations inherently supports the inclusion of women in leadership roles and decision-making processes. By enhancing the skills and efficiency of these associations, the project indirectly encourages a more equitable distribution of resources and responsibilities, allowing women to participate fully in agricultural activities. This focus on capacity development fosters an environment where gender equality can contribute to the overall sustainability and resilience of food systems in the region.

3. Environmental sustainability

The project contributed to advancing environmental sustainability by focusing on the conservation of water resources, protection of biodiversity and enhancement of agricultural practices within fragile ecosystems. Through the development of good practices in oasis agricultural production systems, a comprehensive report documented strategies aimed at optimizing water use and preserving natural habitats. The study tours undertaken by the Omani delegation to Mauritania and Tunisia highlighted effective irrigation techniques and water management systems, demonstrating the importance of integrating traditional knowledge with modern practices. By equipping farmer associations and *Aflaj* managers with the tools and knowledge needed to implement these sustainable practices, the project promotes a balanced approach to agricultural development that minimizes environmental impact while enhancing productivity. This emphasis on sustainable methods not only supports the resilience of local ecosystems but also contributes to long-term food security in the NENA region.

4. Technological sustainability

The project promoted technological sustainability by integrating innovative agricultural practices and digital tools into capacity development efforts. The andragogical guide served as a foundational learning resource, documenting both virtual and face-to-face training sessions that introduced farmer associations and *Aflaj* managers to modern methodologies for governance, service delivery and collective marketing. The incorporation of online training modules ensured that participants could access valuable information regardless of their geographic location, facilitating ongoing education in agricultural practices. Additionally, the study tours to Mauritania and Tunisia showcased advanced irrigation technologies and water management systems, emphasizing the importance of adopting proven solutions tailored to local contexts.

By equipping stakeholders with the necessary skills and knowledge to leverage technology effectively, the project fostered an environment where sustainable practices can thrive, ultimately enhancing productivity and resilience in the agricultural sector across the NENA region.

5. Economic sustainability

The project contributed to economic sustainability by enhancing the financial viability and market competitiveness of SSFF across the NENA region. Through targeted training on governance, service delivery and collective marketing outlined in the andragogical guide, farmer associations and *Aflaj* managers acquired essential skills for effective management and resource allocation. The collection of good practices generated from the study of oasis agricultural production systems emphasized strategies for improving agricultural yield and product quality, which directly impacts farmers' income. Additionally, the project facilitated knowledge sharing through study tours, allowing participants to observe successful irrigation techniques and water management systems that reduce costs and increase efficiency. By fostering collaboration between POs and government entities, the project also created a supportive environment for accessing financial resources and investment opportunities. These efforts collectively strengthened the economic resilience of agricultural communities, paving the way for sustainable livelihoods and food security in the region.



DOCUMENTS AND OUTREACH PRODUCTS

- ❑ **Dhaouadi L.** Publication forthcoming. *Report on the Oasis agrosystem and the promotion of good practices.* <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-MedKUHmzQUeICbOeugpotSSdGCqHkhB/view>
- ❑ **FAO.** Publication forthcoming. *Final guide prepared by UPA.*

ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS - LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Expected Impact	More productive, inclusive and sustainable food systems across the NENA region	
Outcome	Skills and efficiency of farmer association and <i>aflaj</i> managers improved towards a sustainable food systems	
	Indicator	Improved technical and organizational skills of Omani farmer association and <i>Aflaj</i> managers
	Baseline	Limited capacities in sustainable production practices and collective commercialization.
	End Target	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At least one contract signed between one producers' organization and a processing small and medium enterprise (SME). - One vegetable collection mechanism for an agricultural association is implemented.
	Comments and follow-up action to be taken	<p>This outcome was achieved through a multifaceted approach. The project developed a comprehensive learning tool, the andragogical guide, which provided targeted training on governance, service delivery, membership mechanisms and collective marketing. This equipped farmer associations and <i>aflaj</i> managers with essential skills for effective management. Additionally, a study conducted by an FAO expert generated a collection of good practices focusing on water conservation, biodiversity protection and enhanced agricultural yields. Disseminating these practices empowered associations and managers to implement proven strategies, boosting efficiency and productivity. The Omani delegation's study tours to Mauritania and Tunisia offered hands-on experience in effective irrigation techniques and water management systems. Observing these methodologies in action allowed participants to adapt successful strategies for their own contexts. Continuous dialogue between producer organizations and government entities fostered collaboration, enabling stakeholders to address challenges and explore innovative solutions. Finally, the documentation of methodologies ensured that the skills and efficiencies gained are sustained over time, providing a resource for future training efforts.</p> <p>Overall, targeted training, knowledge sharing, practical experiences and institutionalization of best practices led to significant improvements in the skills and efficiency of farmer associations and <i>aflaj</i> managers, promoting sustainable food systems in the region.</p>

Output 1.1	Organizational capacities of the Agricultural Association for service provision and governance strengthened		
	Indicators	Target	Achieved
	Number of new Omani Agricultural Association members and services.	- Improved membership of the Omani Agricultural Association by 20 percent. - One farming contract. - One viable legislation for cooperatives adapted to the Omani context submitted to Government of Oman.	Yes
Baseline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 155 members. - Limited access to contract farming. - No legal framework for cooperatives. 		
Comments	<p>In 2021, a Letter of Agreement was signed with the goal of continuing collaboration with the OAA and deepening efforts to enhance the organizational capacities of the Omani Farmers Association, focusing on service provision and governance.</p> <p>In response to Activities 1.1 to 1.5, a three-week mission to Oman was organized. The main objectives of this mission were as follows: (i) Gain a deeper understanding of the realities faced by Omani farmers, following visits to five governorates, to better support them; (ii) Continue discussions on key topics, particularly membership and collective marketing, to contribute to the development of the OAA and its strategic plan; (iii) Organize a national workshop to define the necessary conditions for the development of an association like the OAA. During the mission, meetings were held with associations in each of the five governorates. Thematic events in these regions facilitated a better understanding of the connection between collective marketing, membership, and the ongoing dialogue with the government. The exercises carried out led to the conclusion that a unified approach is essential when it comes to collective marketing. Discussions, including those on the Quebec agricultural model, helped clarify the distinct roles of the OAA and the government. A national workshop took place in Muscat, Oman, on 30 and 31 January 2023, with participation from all branches of the OAA, as well as presidents and representatives of the administrative board. The main findings from the mission were presented during this workshop, and various methods for financing the association were analysed by the elected officials. Additionally, strategies to further professionalize the OAA were explored.</p> <p>Key conclusions from the mission included: (i) The election of the president and vice-president highlighted the democratic values upheld by the Association at the national level; (ii) The regional associations appear to be evolving in a way that respects their regional specificities; (iii) A strong attachment among members to their culture, history and territories was observed; (iv) There is a promising commitment from the community to develop agriculture and livestock breeding, which would ensure greater food security for the country; (v) The ongoing dialogue between associations and government authorities bodes well for the future; (vi) The agricultural technical skills observed leave no doubt about the potential for the future of agriculture in Oman.</p> <p>Additional, more specific findings also emerged, particularly in relation to the associations united under the national OAA, including areas such as: membership; marketing of agricultural products, and the broader socio-economic context.</p>		
Activity 1.1.1	Provide trainings on strategic planning and develop a strategic plan, including action plans of the association to meet the members' needs based on the findings of the previous FAO-UPA virtual trainings		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	<p>The discussions on membership and collective marketing during the organized mission were significant, laying the groundwork for the future development of the OAA and its strategic plan.</p> <p>Agriculture in Oman varies greatly across different governorates. These differences are not only due to climatic and geographical factors but also to cultural variations, which contribute to the unique characteristics of each region's agricultural production. At the time of the project, it was found that the development of an action plan was still in its early stages. As a result, it became essential to create a guide that would focus on the key aspects necessary for the professionalization of agricultural associations, enabling them to successfully pursue their development.</p> <p>The guide addresses a wide range of topics, from elements related to organizational growth to the multiple factors that influence the marketing of agricultural products. It also covers the complex issues associated with relationships between the associations and the government. By providing these tools, the guide has enabled producer organizations to gain a clearer understanding of the critical factors that will drive their development.</p>	

Activity 1.1.2	Revise the membership's mechanism (contributions and membership fees) and engagement strategy to ensure the financial viability of the association	
	Achieved	Yes
Activity 1.1.2	Comments	Regarding its membership, it was evident that for the majority of members, agriculture is a second career or an additional economic activity alongside their primary work (e.g. professors who also farm, retired engineers who take up farming, etc.). The main leaders within the association practice an intensive agriculture, often utilizing advanced technologies such as drip irrigation. However, there appears to be no strategy in place to bridge the gap between association members engaged in intensive agriculture and those practicing more traditional farming methods, such as those found in the oases. This divide between members practicing modern, intensive agriculture and those following traditional methods creates a cultural clash, making it difficult to reconcile these two approaches. Traditional farmers, in particular, often feel unrepresented within the associations, leading to a sense of disconnect.
	Propose a governance structure of Omani Agricultural Association at level of Apex and branches	
Activity 1.1.3	Achieved	Yes
	Comments	The guide proposed various governance structures that would benefit the OAA. It also provided tools to help producer organizations gain a better understanding of the key factors influencing their development.
Activity 1.1.4	Design a mechanism for risk management and related services (e.g. insurance, social contract)	
	Achieved	Yes
Activity 1.1.4	Comments	The guide proposed risk management services that would benefit the OAA. It also provided tools to help producer organizations better understand the key factors involved in developing such services.
	Develop a mechanism for contract farming to ensure a collective marketing of produce and develop a marketing plan	
Activity 1.1.5	Achieved	Yes
	Comments	The fact that the associations are under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs hinders the structuring of agricultural product marketing. The mission was unable to assess the current status of the marketing company established by the government, making it unclear whether it is functional at this time. Further exploration of this aspect is needed. This situation did not foster a thorough reflection on how to organize marketing strategies tailored to the specific characteristics of each agricultural product and the particularities of each governorate. For instance, the marketing of dates, sugarcane products and tomatoes cannot be structured in the same way. The guide proposed mechanisms for contract farming that would benefit the OAA. It also provided tools to help producer organizations better understand the key factors involved in developing their collective marketing efforts.
Activity 1.1.6	Organize a study tour including trainings for Omani association members to visit to the Union des producteurs agricoles (UPA) (Quebec) in support of all above activities (maximum 3 participants)	
	Achieved	Yes
Activity 1.1.6	Comments	This activity was merged with another initiative. The Canadian delegation was invited for a second mission to Oman to participate in the Forum organized by the FAO and Sultan Qaboos University.

Output 1.2	Agricultural association advisory and marketing services focusing on selected vegetables (cherry tomatoes, cucumber and baby carrots) developed and applied		
	Indicators	Target	Achieved
	Creation of one new basket of vegetables successfully produced, packaged and marketed by OAA.	One new basket of vegetables successfully targeting school children by OAA.	Yes (amended)
Baseline	0 units		
Comments	<p>This Output was amended following extensive discussions with national stakeholders and the Lead Technical Officer. To ensure the activities effectively address national needs and are successfully implemented, an amendment was required. Following a change in governance within the OAA after the elections at the end of 2022, including the election of a new president, FAO reassessed the association's dynamics, new direction and evolving needs. This new dynamics became evident during the FAO-UPADI mission to the five governorates. The mission's recommendations highlighted the association inability of managing the commercialization of produce (such as vegetable baskets for schools) under its own umbrella, a shift from the previous presidency when the project was initially formulated, necessitating a revision of the activities under Output 1.2. This observation was further confirmed through the mapping and feasibility studies conducted in Activities 1.2.1 and 1.2.2. The idea of managing produce baskets will require further investment and development, once the association will have enhanced its capacity to cover the scope of the proposed activities.</p> <p>In light of the above, FAO Oman discussed with the Lead Technical Officer the possibility of revising the activities to better align with the national needs and the situation of the SSFF and their association. As a result, the activities were adjusted to focus on organizing a regional forum where Omani farmers and farmers from the Maghreb region can meet, share experiences and exchange knowledge. This forum aims to strengthen producers' associations across the NENA Region, promoting healthier diets and supporting agricultural development.</p>		
Activity 1.2.1	Conduct a mapping for selected farms and SMEs cultivating the selected vegetables (based on pre-identified criteria)		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	A national consultant was hired to conduct a mapping of selected farms and SMEs cultivating specific vegetables, as well as to perform a feasibility study for the project. A methodology and questionnaire were developed for this purpose, and the mapping was successfully completed. Subsequently, a report was submitted detailing the findings.	
Activity 1.2.2	Conduct a feasibility study on product development process and marketing in using by-products and value addition		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	A national consultant was hired to conduct mapping for selected farms and SMEs cultivating specific vegetables, as well as to perform a feasibility study for the project. A methodology and questionnaire were developed for this purpose, and the mapping was successfully completed. Following this, a report detailing the findings was submitted.	
Activity 1.2.3	Develop video and brochure on investment opportunities to support SSFFs to provide fruits and vegetables to schools		
	Achieved	Partially	
	Comments	The original activity "Provide a series of ToT to improve productivity of high-quality selected vegetables, packaging, cooling and transport and a series of trainings on processing" was amended as per project extension request dated 7 February 2023. A video was developed to document the forum organized under Activity 1.2.4. This video can be used to encourage investment in SSFF.	

Activity 1.2.4	Organize a forum in Oman on producer organizations towards knowledge exchange and capacity development (including a section on advisory and marketing services including direct procurement to schools)		
	Achieved	Yes	
Activity 1.2.4	Comments	<p>The original activity “Conduct a needs assessment to recommend infrastructure and equipment required to upgrade storage and processing (and if required distribution/transport) enabling longer shelf life and availability of harvested selected vegetables” was amended as per project extension request dated 7 February 2023. In collaboration with Sultan Qaboos University and the MAFWR, FAO held a forum in Muscat from 26–29 February 2024, focusing on producer organizations in Oman and the Maghreb region. The event, titled „The Status of Agricultural Associations in Oman and the Maghreb and Strategies for Their Development and Sustainability“, aimed to foster knowledge exchange and capacity building among agricultural associations, with a particular emphasis on advisory services, marketing and procurement channels, including direct procurement for schools.</p> <p>The forum was attended by representatives from government ministries, civil society organizations and agricultural associations from both Oman and the Maghreb countries (Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia). The forum served as a platform for knowledge exchange on topics such as agricultural association development, the legal frameworks governing these organizations, and case studies of successful associations.</p> <p>Key sessions during the forum included presentations on the role of agricultural associations in rural development; discussions on the governance and sustainability of producer organizations; interactive workshops on capacity-building strategies, including advisory and marketing services; presentations from local and international experts on the legal frameworks supporting agricultural associations in Oman and the Maghreb region. The forum’s second day featured a comprehensive session on the management of agricultural associations, led experts from UPADI, which introduced a practical management guide for association leaders. The final day consisted of site visits to key agricultural regions in Nizwa, offering participants a chance to observe local agricultural practices, including the use of traditional irrigation systems like <i>falaj</i> and modern large-scale date palm farming techniques.</p>	
	Outcomes of forum are documented and recommendations for next step are provided		
Activity 1.2.5	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	<p>The original activity “Design and implement collection mechanism for Omani agricultural association to collect the selected vegetables harvest from smallholders and ensure a proper storage time/temperature/duration/storage)” was amended as per project extension request dated 7 February 2023.</p> <p>The outcomes of the forum described above were captured in a comprehensive report that highlighted the key insights and recommendations developed during the discussions.</p>	
Output 1.3	Enhanced technical and organizational capacities of SSFFs and managers from selected <i>aflaj</i> sites, in governance, management and access to innovations and markets		
	Indicators	Target	Achieved
	Number of farmers working together around the <i>aflaj</i> ecosystem to produce and commercialize.	20 percent increased number of farmers working together around the <i>aflaj</i> ecosystem to produce and commercialize.	No
Baseline	- Limited collective action around <i>aflaj</i> . - Limited access to market for SSFF around <i>aflaj</i> .		
Comments	Amended		
Activity 1.3.1	Develop and implement capacity development plan including trainings for SSFF and managers in selected Aflaj sites.		
	Achieved	Yes	
Activity 1.3.1	Comments	<p>This activity was completed during the forum held under Activity 1.2.4, as capacity development for SSFF and managers of selected Aflaj sites was addressed through targeted workshops and training sessions. The second day featured a ToT programme using the andragogical guide “Agriculture for Today and Tomorrow“, delivered in collaboration with UPADI. This programme provided SSFF and managers with practical training in governance, resource management and operational efficiency, with a focus on improving agricultural practices in the unique Aflaj irrigation system. Participants were given comprehensive training materials in Arabic, fostering skills that will enhance both on-farm and community-level water management strategies.</p>	

Activity 1.3.2	Build a common vision and an action plan to promote market-oriented and economically efficient agricultural and non-agricultural activities (bringing together SSFF assets) to increase SSFF income and improve livelihoods		
	Achieved	Yes	
Comments	This activity was completed during the forum held under Activity 1.2.4. Technical sessions focused on building consensus around key challenges and opportunities for both agricultural and non-agricultural activities, encouraging participants to collaborate in creating strategies that would improve income generation and overall livelihoods. Interactive group discussions facilitated the identification of market-oriented initiatives and the pooling of SSFF resources. The final day included field visits, which allowed participants to witness successful examples of market-driven activities and sustainability practices in Oman's agricultural landscape.		
Activity 1.3.3	Organize study tours, regional workshops and site visits between Oman and Maghreb countries (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia) to exchange best practices on the integrated management of oases ecosystems (3 people max. per country)		
	Achieved	Yes	
Comments	To facilitate the exchange of experiences regarding the sustainable management and protection of oasis ecosystems between North African countries and Oman, FAO organized a trip to Mauritania from 28 May to 1 June 2023. This trip involved the presidents of four Omani agricultural associations and aimed to share successful agricultural practices implemented in oasis environments, thereby enhancing the economic benefits derived from their heritage. In the same context, and under the supervision of FAO, the Regional Centre for Research on Oases in Dguech, Tunisia, hosted the Omani delegation for a four-day visit from 5 to 8 June 2023. This visit covered various oasis regions in southern Tunisia, each with its unique characteristics. The delegation engaged with key players in the sector to foster collaboration and learn from the best practices adopted in Omani oases.		
Output 1.4	Methodologies for capacity development of Small-Scale Family Farming (SSFF) are documented and institutionalized		
	Indicators	Target	Achieved
	Number of documented methodologies and best practices.	Two units.	Yes
Baseline	0 units		
Comments	<p>This output was achieved through a series of strategic activities aimed at enhancing the organizational capacities of SSFF in the NENA region.</p> <p>Firstly, a comprehensive learning tool, an andragogical guide, was developed in three languages. This guide documented both virtual and face-to-face training sessions, incorporating innovative participatory approaches tailored for SSFF. It aimed to strengthen the organizational capacities of the OAA, improve service delivery and governance, and provide insights into risk management and collective marketing models. The guide is as a flexible toolbox, enabling producers and agricultural associations to adapt methodologies to their local contexts.</p> <p>Secondly, a study of oasis agricultural production systems was conducted by a FAO expert, resulting in a collection of good practices that address key areas such as water resource conservation, biodiversity protection, and improved agricultural yield. These practices were identified for their replicability in oases across the NENA region, contributing to the overall capacity development of SSFF.</p> <p>Lastly, the documentation of study tours highlighted best practices in agricultural development and water resource management. The Omani delegation participated in study trips to Mauritania and Tunisia, where they learned about effective irrigation systems and technologies adapted for fragile ecologies. This hands-on experience allowed the delegation to observe and analyse successful methodologies, which were then integrated into the capacity development framework.</p> <p>Collectively, these activities facilitated the documentation and institutionalization of effective methodologies for capacity development, ensuring that the knowledge gained is accessible and applicable to SSFF in the NENA region.</p>		

<p>Activity 1.4.1</p>	<p>Develop a comprehensive learning tool in the three languages of the region, documenting virtual and face to face trainings including innovative participatory approaches to develop organizational capacities of Small Scale Family Farming (SSFF)</p>	
	<p>Achieved</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>An andragogical guide has been developed as a comprehensive learning tool documenting virtual trainings that incorporate innovative participatory approaches aimed at enhancing the organizational capacities of SSFF. This guide was disseminated to improve knowledge of collective action among SSFF in the NENA region. More specifically, it aims to: (i) Strengthen the organizational capacities of the OAA regarding service delivery and governance; (ii) Document tools that empower the OAA to fulfil its role in the development of Omani agriculture; (iii) Review the membership mechanisms established by the OAA to ensure member commitment and the financial viability of the association; (iv) Provide insights into risk management mechanisms and associated services such as insurance and social contracts; (v) Deepen understanding of different models of collective marketing for agricultural products; (vi) Enable the FAO to extend this training programme to regions where it is deemed appropriate.</p> <p>To fully grasp the utility of the andragogical guide, it's important to recognize that people's perspectives are shaped by their environments. For instance, a mountain dweller does not view life the same way as someone from the plains, and those living in the extreme north think differently than those in desert regions. In Quebec, the harsh winter climate necessitated collective action, fostering joint efforts and a strong work ethic. Early settlers had to plant seeds at the right time to avoid compromising their harvests and risking starvation in winter. If communities did not stockpile firewood, they faced severe consequences when temperatures dropped. Thus, collective action became essential for efficiently managing work in the fields and forests. However, with modernity, the nature of collective action has evolved from physical group work to the use of collaborative tools. Consequently, this guide should not be viewed as a rigid recipe to follow without regard to local realities. Instead, it serves as a toolbox to help identify challenges and find effective solutions.</p> <p>The guide is intended for producers engaged in family farming and the professional agricultural associations they have established. It equips training managers to achieve desired outcomes while supporting them through andragogical approaches, the processes to follow and various facilitation tools. It enables users to: (i) Access an online training programme covering three identified themes, incorporating lessons learned from the OAA to facilitate improvements; (ii) Utilize trainers in rural areas across different countries who now possess a comprehensive tool for effectively training leaders of producer organizations; (ii) Expand the online programme by the FAO and UPADI in regions where it is deemed appropriate, particularly in Arabic-speaking countries. In summary, this guide offers valuable methodological support to producer organizations. Moreover, the online training format represents a novel approach that is rarely employed in rural areas. As such, the guide is positioned to be a pioneering resource, contributing to the development of new training pathways that blend face-to-face and online formats.</p> <p>This guide was created thanks to an online training experience conducted with the OAA over three months and to excellent cooperation between the FAO Office in Oman and UPADI in developing and executing this training, building upon the identification and consolidation of lessons learned by the three partners.</p> <p>During the training programme with the OAA, twelve sessions, each lasting 2.5 hours, covered three thematic areas. Building on this experience, UPADI now offers 18 training sessions, with 16 sessions lasting 2.5 hours and two sessions of approximately one hour and 15 minutes each. The first two sessions, lasting about one hour and 15 minutes each, are integral to the programme. Their goal is to ensure participants have a solid grasp of the chosen platform, such as Zoom. Rather than providing explanations, the approach focus on exploring the platform's various functions through practical exercises. For instance, participants are invited to introduce themselves while demonstrating how to use build-in features.</p>

Activity 1.4.1	Develop a comprehensive learning tool in the three languages of the region, documenting virtual and face to face trainings including innovative participatory approaches to develop organizational capacities of Small Scale Family Farming (SSFF)	
	Achieved	Yes
Activity 1.4.2	Comments	<p>The remaining 16 sessions are organized as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organizational Development: 5 sessions - Collective Marketing: 7 sessions - Continuous Dialogue between POs and Government: 4 sessions - The ABCs of the Platform - Features to Facilitate Participation - Membership - Member Services - Autonomy and Financing of the Association - Associative Structure - Legal Framework for Associations - Produce to Sell - Market Economy - The Market and Its Rules - Different Methods of Collective Marketing - Collective Marketing Agreements - Different Relational Modes Between Actors in the Same Sector - Risk Management - Various Dialogue Modes - Basics of Negotiation - Negotiation Techniques - Essential Communication, Global Summary of the Entire Training, and Evaluation Programme <p>Each session is structured into four fundamental parts: (i) An introductory segment using various tools such as photos, short videos, proverbs or caricatures; (ii) A training segment where content related to the session's thematic area is presented by the facilitation team; (iii) Interactive exchanges between participants and their trainers; (iv) An evaluation segment, allowing participants to express key takeaways and suggestions regarding the session. Each session details the scope of content and the expected duration, with a focus on encouraging participant involvement and adapting to the diverse learning styles of adult learners.</p> <p>The guide is designed primarily for trainers. It includes an introductory section followed by all 18 sessions. Each session, except for the first two, contains a section outlining objectives, progress, tools for each exercise, time allocation, necessary materials and other relevant detail; and a second section that should be provided to farmers at the end of each thematic area of the training programme.</p> <p>While the training programme and educational guide were designed as a cohesive whole, they can also be used modularly. For example, the three themes can be addressed independently. The organizational development theme could serve as a standalone training programme, as could the themes of collective marketing and dialogue between producer organizations and government. However, many topics within each thematic area are interconnected, making it challenging to separate them entirely.</p>
	Achieved	Yes
Activity 1.4.2	Comments	<p>As part of this project, a report on the oasis agrosystem and the promotion of good practices was developed by a FAO expert. The findings from this study resulted in a comprehensive list of good practices that encompass various areas, including water resource conservation and management, biodiversity protection, improvements in agricultural yield and product quality, farmer organization and product valorisation. Most of these good practices are replicable in oases within the same country and in other countries across the NENA region.</p>
	Achieved	Yes

Activity 1.4.3	Document study tours featuring key best practices in the selected countries, including one short video on agricultural associations and the irrigation systems in Maghreb and Oman to raise public awareness	
	Achieved	Yes
	Comments	<p>As part of the project, the Omani delegation participated in two study trips organized in Mauritania and Tunisia, aimed at promoting the role of associations in agricultural development and water resource management.</p> <p>The first study trip to Mauritania, held from 28 May to 1 June 2023, involved the four presidents of Omani associations and focused on improving irrigation systems. The delegation conducted field visits to a civil dam in Tiaret, the Salkalil dam and a palm oasis to learn about various irrigation techniques. Discussions emphasized the importance of dams in preserving underground lakes and explored different methods to enhance irrigation systems to meet the needs of palm trees.</p> <p>In the same context, FAO organized a second study trip to southern Tunisia, where the Omani delegation visited the Ibn Chabbat palm grove in Nafta. There, they discovered effective gravity-fed irrigation practices developed by the mathematician Ibn Chabbat. The delegation also visited the Nafta basket at the Ras El Ain oasis, where they learned about technologies adapted for old oases, including geo-membrane reservoirs for storing irrigation water. Additionally, they explored the Daguesh oasis and its ancient irrigation system in the seven wells region known as "Al Mikayel".</p> <p>To further facilitate the exchange of experiences between Maghreb countries and Oman, five representatives from the Maghreb visited Oman to promote good agricultural practices, the role of associations and agricultural irrigation systems. They also identified the operation and distribution of water quotas during a visit to Dris Falaj in Nezoua.</p>

Partnerships and Outreach

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