Evaluating a vocational training programme for women refugees at the Zaatari camp in Jordan: women empowerment: a journey and not an output

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ABSTRACT
This study aims at evaluating a vocational training programme entitled ‘Women and Girls Oasis’ at the Zaatari Refugee Camp in the city of Mafraq, Jordan. The research study was undertaken in 2014/2015, and highlights the impact of such vocational training programmes on the well-being of Syrian women refugees. The results show that ‘Women and Girls Oasis’ Programme enhanced women’s confidence and self-esteem, improved their occupational business, and entrepreneurship skills, helped them generate income to build a better life for their shattered families; and gave them hope and opportunities after experiencing war firsthand. The study reveals that in a refugee community, patterns are deconstructed and gender roles may be changed; this gender equality and women empowerment are seen as perquisites for sustainable development and achieving the millennium development goal. The study offers recommendations for UN Women, UNHCR and similar NGO’s concerned with the well-being of refugees in Jordan and neighbouring countries.

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Introduction

Since the start of the Syrian Civil war in 2011, there has been an influx of refugees fleeing to Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and neighbouring countries. ‘Refugeeism’ is defined as forced displacement and migration as well as the life of the displaced persons which often takes place in camps and settlements and is influenced by protection and aid mechanisms (Krause, 2014, p. 30). It is estimated that 41% of these refugees are children, 30% are women and 29% are men (Al Kilani, 2014). Many of those people lost their homes and belongings; their education was interrupted and their human rights were violated. They witnessed war firsthand and were forced to leave their country to find a safe haven elsewhere. Men, women and children have since been exposed to traumas and psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, insomnia, neurosis and stress disorders. In Jordan and other neighbouring countries, they either live in tents or makeshift apartments (caravans) inside refugee camps or outside the camps and in both cases, with limited resources.

Since the start of 2014, more than 1,00,000 Syrian refugees have been registering in Syria’s neighbouring countries every month. Over 6,20,441 Syrians have crossed the borders into Jordan (The Lutheran
world Federation. org, 2015). Out of those, many are women who had been forced to become the breadwinners for their families in the absence of males heading the families. According to a report by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 1,45,000 Syrian families living in Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan were led by women. UNHCR’s special envoy, Angelina Jolie said: ‘Syrian refugee women are the glue holding together a broken society. Their strength is extraordinary but they are struggling alone. Their voices are an appeal for help and protection which cannot be ignored’ (The Guardian, 2014).

The crisis in Syria has had a toll on the Jordanian economy; it is without doubt a challenge for a government with serious budget constraints to support some 5,00,000 registered refugees (Saif, 2013). Jordan is indeed struggling to balance human rights and national security in the economic, political and social fields. Despite the fact that Jordan is not a party of the 1951 convention for refugees, it has not sent back any refugee to Syria (Al Kilani, 2014). However, there are Syrian families who have decided to go back home for a number of reasons varying from the high cost of living in Jordan to harsh weather conditions, as in the Jordanian Valley in summer.

**Literature review**

Forced migration is a global issue that causes political conflict, economic hardship, social disruption, lack of health infrastructure and other risks pertaining to health and the well-being of individuals. According to USCR (2003), 34.8 million refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons lived in forced migration (Pavlish, 2005). The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2004 reported that there were 17 million refugees living in forced migration. For example, in Africa, there were approximately 4.6 million refugees living in camps along the African border, the majority being women with their children (Baines, 2001). UNHCR is strongly concerned with the well-being of women who comprise approximately 51% of the refugees. Yet, refugee women, more than men, face a number of challenges within forced migration and resettlement such as exposure to sexual violence and unequal access to humanitarian assistance (Global Consultations, 2002; UNHCR, 2001). In a refugee camp in Tanzania, women suffer from underprivileged status as a woman, overwork and exploitation. They are used for labour work, maintaining the camps, in addition to providing food and shelter for the children. In a 1994 survey of 205 Liberian women, aged between 15- and 70-year olds, 49% claimed that they were sexually abused by Liberian soldiers during the 1989–1997 Civil War (Swiss et al., 1998). In Rwanda, approximately 5,00,000 women reported being raped during the 1994 genocide (United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2003).

Refugees living in forced migration are also faced with the challenge of adapting to a new culture, a new environment, a new life. According to Berry’s model of acculturation, the individual’s first psychological response to the new culture is a reduction of mental health status due to stress, anxiety, confusion, feelings of alienation and marginality. For e.g. in Brown, Schale, and Nilsson’s (2010) study of Vietnamese refugee women, their proficiency of English and the age at which they arrived at the camp affected their mental health. Those who had poor English were more distressed than those who did not. The same thing was true for those refugees who were at an older age when they arrived at the camp (Var, 2013).

Social support while a refugee is an important factor in reducing the many challenges that women face. Social support is defined as the perception or experience that one is loved, cared for, esteemed, valued and a part of a social group (Wills, 1991). The literature shows that it can have positive impact on both mental and physical health by reducing the severity of the situation and enhancing the well-being of the individual in general. One form of social support, other than the family and friends, is involving women in work that helps in promoting their satisfaction level and the feeling of being valued. For e.g. Friedan (1963) in her famous book, ‘The Feminine Mystique’ gives a depiction of how securing a job can lead to growth and satisfaction and the feeling of being valued. In a study conducted in South Central Pennsylvania on Asian immigrants and refugees to measure women’s satisfaction with life and the level of their personal well-being, the results indicated that women who were employed showed higher levels of personal well-being than those who were not. Being employed helped in boosting
their self-esteem and confidence: knowing that their jobs were of importance. Economic hardships were also lessened because women felt they were able to contribute in providing for their families, and thus meeting their physiological needs. The results also proved that with time, acculturation did improve. In essence, women were able to raise their socio-economic status, lessen financial constraints and enhance their personal well-being.

The same is true for Syrian women refugees who face poverty, harassment and isolation. The civil war in Syria has left many women vulnerable and with no husbands. Their husbands have been killed, detained, captured or separated from their families. In one out of every four families, they became the sole providers for food and shelter for their children. One in five women has paid jobs, while one in three reported they did not have enough to eat. One in three is too scared to leave their homes, while 60% express feelings of insecurity. According to UNHCR Representative in Jordan, Andrew Harper, 60,000 Syrian families living in Jordan were headed by women. Some 1,50,000 were living outside the refugee camps and were entirely dependent on cash assistance and aid agencies. Eight thousand families were headed by women (Melkawi, 2014). Gender-related issues in the camps were also prevalent. Girls between the ages of 15 and 16 years old were forced into early marriages for financial stability and protection.

Displaced people, asylum seekers, living in exile are confronted with complexities and uncertainties about their future. Adults, for example, are in need of opportunities that will help them gain knowledge and skills for a healthy life away from criminal activities and violence. Girls and women are the most susceptible to sexual abuse and exploitation in refugee camps. In many cases, girls turn to sex for money in order to support the family (Robinson & Alpar, 2009). For that reason, women refugees are a vulnerable group that must have protection, especially in the camps.

The fact that women make up two-thirds of the world’s non-literate populations has been a cause for concern and further investigation. Thus, there are many effective ways to improve the social status of marginalised populations, especially women, via literary interventions or what we call vocational skills training programmes. On the one hand, it is of utter importance to identify the social and economic benefits of such programmes and interventions and, on the other, how such programmes contribute to sustainable development and women empowerment. According to UNHCR, women empowerment is defined as:

[a] process through which women […] in disadvantaged positions increase their access to knowledge, resources, and decision making power, and raise their awareness of participation in their communities, in order to reach a level of control over their own environment. (UNHCR, 2001b:3)

To name a few of the programmes involved in women empowerment, the UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) launched its regional ‘Technology Based Training for Marginalized Girls’ project to challenge gender-based perceptions of technical and vocational training and to develop integrated training approaches using formal and non-formal education that would contribute to national poverty alleviation efforts (UNESCO, 2008). Also, 50 refugee women began two-year vocational training courses in the Central African Republic as part of a new $80,000 initiative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. These women participated in classes pertaining to business management and accounting, finance and banking and computer science and marketing (UN Foundation.org, 2003). UNHCR also helped 550 Sudanese and Congolese refugee women start their own businesses such as a movie theatre, a fish shop and various farming enterprises. The Hashoo Foundation1 has been helping Afghan refugees in Pakistan since 1999 through a funded project entitled ‘Skills training and income generation for Urban Afghan refugees’. The objective of this project is to equip men and women with vocational skills tailored to their needs. These skills which include, but are not limited to, tailoring, cooking and beautician will help them immerse in the labour market to increase their household income (Hashoo Foundation.org). Also, the Hashoo Foundation has been supporting women in the northern areas of Pakistan through a Honey Bee Farming Project, initiated in 2007 with the aim of empowering women economically. This is done by expanding their entrepreneurship opportunities to compete in the labour market, and thus improving their status in the community as well as involving them in the decision-making process in a male-dominant society (Hashoo Foundation.org).
In Thailand, the Agency of Technical Cooperation & Development (ACTED)\(^2\) underwent a vocational skills training programme entitled Training of Trainers for Myanmar refugees including men, girls and women. This project aims to equip these refugees with the needed skills to find a job when they return back home safely. The skills include hairdressing, beauty therapy, office management, hotel management and repair of small electronic gadgets (ACTED website). In Africa, the Agriculture Support Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture reached out to women to improve their farming and entrepreneurship skills. The results were very promising: women became involved in decision-making at both their homes and in the community and their self-esteem and confidence increased (GENDERNET, 2011).

In the Middle East, the American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA)\(^3\) provides Palestinian refugees in Lebanon with vocational skills to compete and excel in the job market or to start their own businesses in order to help their families financially. These skills encompass hairdressing, carpentry, plumbing, graphic design, farming, information technology and tourism. One inspiring story is of Manal, a Palestinian refugee living in Nahr El Bared camp, in Northern Lebanon, who joined ANERA’s tailoring training classes after her house was demolished. Upon completing the training, she was appointed as a sewing and pastry-making teacher for women at the Women’s Program Centre; the first women graduates entered the job market within six months. This is what Manal had to say about the programme: ‘As women, sewing is the best thing to learn, if we want to support our families and make a living’. The Union Aid Abroad (APHEDA), a Palestinian non-government organisation based in Beirut, in coordination with the Women’s Humanitarian Organisation (PWHO), provides training for women in Palestinian refugee camps across Lebanon. The projects cover technical and vocational areas and offer studying opportunities and training for women in home maintenance, business administration, computing, accounting, knitting, hairdressing, dressmaking, nursing and traditional crafts (apheda.org).

In Jordan’s Zaatari refugee camp, INTERSOS,\(^4\) in coordination with UN Women, established a ‘safe place’ under the name of ‘Women and Girl’s Oasis’ in November 2012 which was funded by the Government of Netherlands. Refugee women and girls could meet and receive assistance out of the standardised family control system (unwomen.org). On the one hand, this system allows Syrian refugee women to work and receive ‘cash for work scheme’, and, on the other, it allows them to engage with a peer-to-peer support mechanism and empowerment process. Moreover, this safe place supports women’s growth allowing them to develop personally and socially; they narrate to each other the stories of violence and abuse they experienced in the Syrian conflict, allowing them to re-build confidence, self-esteem and self-reliance. The activities provided to women encompass tailoring, hairdressing, drawing, English classes, mosaic and handcraft workshops and football for girls.

**Research issues and conceptual framework**

The purpose of the study is to evaluate a vocational skills programme entitled ‘Women and girls Oasis’ at the Zaatari Syrian Refugee Camp in the city of Mafraq, in Jordan. The programme is supported by UN Women Jordan, in coordination with INTERSOS, to help support Syrian refugee women by receiving training, become professionals and earn a living (UN Women). The immediate objectives of the study and the research questions are:

- To corroborate that women’s economic empowerment is a prerequisite to sustainable development and to the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals.
- To identify the technical and vocational skills provided to refugee women in the Zaatari camp.
- To assess the Technical and Vocational Skills Programme in light of its impact on skill development, economic outcomes and measures of well-being.
- Based on the knowledge gained in the course of achieving the objective, to provide recommendations for UNHCR, other NGO’s and possibly local authorities to improve Vocational Training in Zaatari and other refugee camps, and possibly to duplicate that activity outside the camps.
Research questions

(1) Do you feel that the vocational skills programme helped impact your economic situation?, i.e. has it helped you in generating an income? Did your economic situation improve compared to how it was before the training?

(2) Do you feel that the vocational skills programme helped you gain self-confidence?, i.e. did it enhance your confidence?

(3) Do you feel that the vocational skills programme broadened your business and entrepreneurship skills?, i.e. are you more aware of the market and its needs?

Methodology

This research study is based on fieldwork carried out in the Zaatari Syrian refugee camp in Jordan. The study relied on both primary and secondary sources of information and data. The former was based on a survey assessment conducted with women in the ‘Women and Girls Oasis’ programme in Zaatari and the latter consisted of existing literature pertaining to refugees in various parts of the world, including the Middle East, specifically Syrian refugees. A qualitative inductive research approach was employed using structured interviews previously set by the researchers. The triangulation of the interdisciplinary research design and multi-method approach serves the validation of the results.

Sampling and profile of participants

A purposive sample method was used to select the Zaatari Syrian refugee sample. The sample included 26 women who had been trained at ‘Women and Girls Oasis’ and were still working there. The average age of the women surveyed is 35.57 years. Nine women (34.7%) are less than 30 years old; 13 (50%) are between 30 and 49 years old; 3 (11.5%) are 50–60 years old; and 1 (3.8%) is over 60 years old. Thirteen women (50%) are married; 2 (7.7%) are divorced; 4 (15.4%) are widowed (lost their husbands in the Syrian conflict); and 7 (26.9%) have never been married. The average number of individuals dependent on those women is 5.42, with a range of 2–9 individuals. All of those women used to live in the Syrian Daraa’ district. Fourteen women (53.8%) fled the war in 2012, while 12 women (46.2%) fled the war in the year 2013. In regards to education, 25 women (96.2%) can read and write and only 1 woman (3.8%) Table 1. Profile of participants.

| Age group | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| <30       | 9         | 35      | 35                 |
| 30–49     | 13        | 50      | 85                 |
| 50–60     | 3         | 11      | 96                 |
| >60       | 1         | 4       | 100                |
| Total     | 26        | 100     | 100                |

| Marital status | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Married        | 13        | 50      | 50                 |
| Divorced       | 2         | 8       | 58                 |
| Widowed        | 4         | 15      | 73                 |
| Never married  | 7         | 27      | 100                |
| Total          | 26        | 100     | 100                |

| Education level | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative percent |
|-----------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Tertiary        | 4         | 15      | 15                 |
| Secondary       | 12        | 46      | 61                 |
| Elementary      | 9         | 35      | 96                 |
| No education    | 1         | 4       | 100                |
| Total           | 26        | 100     | 100                |
cannot. Four women (15.4%) received tertiary education; 12 (46.2%) received secondary education; 9 (34.6%) received elementary education; whereas 1 woman (3.8%) did not receive formal education. Fifteen women (57.7%) were not continuing their education; 3 (11.6%) were continuing their vocational training, while 8 (30.7%) were continuing their apprenticeship provided by UN Women Organisation.

In terms of employment status, 7 women (27%) indicated that they were not working but rather studying and receiving training, 12 women (46.2%) were employed at ‘Women and Girls Oasis, 5 women (19.2%) were self-employed and 2 women (7.6%) did not answer. Two women (7.7%) indicated that they did not work throughout the whole year; 22 women (84.6%) worked throughout the whole year; and 2 women (7.7%) did not answer. Seventeen women (65.4%) contribute 100% of the family income; 1 woman (3.8%) contributes 90% of the family income; 2 women (7.7%) contribute 75% of the family income.

**Table 2.** Skills provided by ‘Women and Girls Oasis’ Programme to the Syrian women refugees.

| Skill          | Percentage of women refugees | Total |
|----------------|------------------------------|-------|
|                | A lot | Little | None | No answer |       |
| Tailoring      | 62    | 27     | 4    | 7          | 100   |
| Hairdressing   | 23    | 15     | 4    | 58         | 100   |
| English language | 4    | 23     | 12   | 61         | 100   |
| French language | 0    | 4      | 27   | 69         | 100   |
| Drawing        | 19    | 23     | 0    | 58         | 100   |
| Craft making   | 23    | 15     | 4    | 58         | 100   |

**Table 3.** Other skills possessed by the women refugees who participated in the ‘Women and Girls Oasis’ programme.

| Skill           | Percentage of women |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| Flower arrangement | 12                 |
| Mosaic          | 8                   |
| Landscaping     | 8                   |
| Embroidery      | 8                   |
| Culinary arts   | 8                   |
| Computer        | 4                   |
| Singing and acting | 4               |
| None            | 23                  |
| No answer       | 27                  |

**Table 4.** Skills which the women refugees wished to acquire for free.

| Skill              | Percentage of women |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Computer           | 31                  |
| English language   | 12                  |
| Sculpture and drawing | 4               |
| Tailoring          | 8                   |
| Calligraphy        | 4                   |
| Hairdressing       | 4                   |
| None               | 4                   |
| No answer          | 35                  |

**Table 5.** The extent to which the women refugees were using the skills they had acquired in the programme.

|                  | No. of women | %   |
|------------------|--------------|-----|
| Were using the skills | 20           | 77  |
| Never used it    | 3            | 11  |
| Used it in the past | 1            | 4   |
| No answer        | 2            | 8   |
| Total            | 26           | 100 |
Table 6. Awareness of the women regarding the advantages of the programme and orientation they received before it began.

| Perception                                | Number of women | %   |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----|
| Aware of the advantages                   | 19              | 73  |
| Not aware of the advantages               | 7               | 27  |
| Total                                     | 26              | 100 |
| Orientation enables them to make good decisions concerning the skills they wanted to acquire | 20              | 77  |
| Did not receive orientation               | 3               | 11  |
| Orientation did not help                  | 1               | 4   |
| No answer                                 | 2               | 8   |
| Total                                     | 26              | 100 |

Table 7. Aspects of the programme which met the participants’ expectations.

| Aspect                              | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| The location                        | 1         | 4       |
| A profession that I love            | 2         | 8       |
| Development of profession           | 1         | 4       |
| Help family financially             | 6         | 23      |
| Getting to know colleagues          | 5         | 19      |
| Location and hobby                  | 1         | 4       |
| Upgrading experience                 | 4         | 15      |
| Acquiring experience                | 1         | 4       |
| In my own area of expertise         | 1         | 4       |
| No response                         | 10        | 38      |

Table 8. Ability of women to conduct their own work while participating in the programme.

| Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------|------------|
| Yes       | 21         | 81        |
| No        | 5          | 19        |

Table 9. Types of assistance received by participants after completing the apprenticeship programme.

| Assistance       | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------|-----------|------------|
| Mosaic work      | 1         | 14         |
| Volunteering     | 1         | 14         |
| Field work       | 2         | 29         |
| No response      | 3         | 43         |
| Total            | 7         | 100        |

Table 10. Assessing the impact of the programme in helping trainees to generate an income.

| Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------|------------|
| Yes it helped | 25         | 96        |
| No it did not help | 1         | 4         |
| Total     | 26         | 100       |

Table 11. Describing the economic situation of trainers after training compared to before training.

| Economic Situation | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| Rich               | 9         | 35         |
| The same           | 7         | 27         |
| Richer             | 3         | 11         |
| Poor               | 4         | 15         |
| No answer          | 3         | 12         |
| Total              | 26        | 100        |
income; 1 woman (3.8%) contributes 50% of the family income; and 1 woman (3.8%) contributes 15%, while 4 women (15.4%) did not answer. The above information is shown in Table 1.

**Instrument**

The instrument utilised in the study is a questionnaire that was self-administered, and which was presented in the form of an interview to some of the participants. It is comprised of two parts: the first part is factual and solicits demographic information about the participant such as age, socio-economic status, marital status, education, vocation, skills and year of flight from Syria; while the second part consists of attitudinal questions and solicits information about the participants’ opinions and attitudes towards the vocational programme under the auspices of UN Women. The questionnaire includes a check list and open-ended questions. See Appendix 1.

**Results**

The results of the research are presented in tabular form, Tables 2–12. According to the women refugees involved in the ‘Women and Girls Oasis’ programme, the highest level of skills provided in the programme was in tailoring and the least in French language, see Table 2. They also mentioned a number of other skills which they possessed where flower arrangement came at the top and where at least 23% had no other skills, see Table 3.

Moreover, they mentioned a number of skills which they would like to acquire, for free. Computer skills came at the top of the list, see Table 4.

They also mentioned the extent to which they were utilising the skills which they had acquired in the ‘Women and Girls Oasis’ programme. The majority (77%) stated that they did utilise them, see Table 5.

The women were asked if they had been aware of the advantages of the ‘Women and Girls Oasis makes’ programme before it began and if they received any orientation for that. The majority (73%) said they were aware of the advantages of the programme and (77%) said they received orientation which enabled them to make good decisions, see Table 6.

The women identified the various aspects of the programme which met their expectations. Helping family financially came out as the number one aspect, see Table 7.

In answer to the question of whether they had time to conduct their own work while participating in the programme, the great majority of women (81%) said they did, see Table 8. They also identified fieldwork as the main assistance they received after completing the programme, see Table 9.

Questions 29, 31 and 37 in the questionnaire answer the first research question: Do you feel that the vocational skills programme helped impact your economic situation?, i.e. has it helped you in generating an income? Did your economic situation improve compared to how it was before the training? The results indicate that 96% of the women thought the programme impacted them positively and thus helped them generate income, see Table 10, and that their economic situation became better after the programme, see Table 11. This corroborates with the study conducted on Asian immigrants and refugees which reveal that economic hardships are lessened because women felt they were able to contribute in providing for their families, and thus meeting their psychological needs. In essence, women were able to raise their socio-economic status, lessen financial constraints and enhance their personal being (Var, 2013).

| Table 12. Business and entrepreneurship skills of trainees improved by the training programme. |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Occupational skills | 15 | 58 |
| Business skills | 8 | 31 |
| Psychological and moral support | 13 | 50 |
| Market skills | 5 | 19 |
| Communication skills | 16 | 62 |
| No response | 1 | 4 |
Question 36 in the questionnaire answers the second research question: *Do you feel that the vocational skills programme helped you gain self-confidence? Did it enhance your self-confidence?* All 26 women trainees (100%) said that the vocational skills programme enhanced their self-confidence. The findings of Friedan (1963) corroborate with these results. Frieden mentions how securing a job can lead to growth and satisfaction and the feeling of being valued. The results also coincide with Wills (1991) emphasising the importance of social support which in turn has a positive impact on both mental and physical health by reducing the severity of the situation and enhancing the well-being of the individual in general.

Question 32 in the questionnaire answers the third research question: *Do you feel that the vocational skills programme broadened your business and entrepreneurship skills?* The women indicated that their skills which improved were communication skills, occupational skills, psychological skills and business skills, respectively, see Table 12.

**Conclusions: empowering women in refugee camps**

What do these results mean for women empowerment? And what inferences can be made for the empowerment of women in refugee camps? Economic empowerment is a prerequisite to sustainable development; gender equality is an essential dimension for sustainable development and women empowerment. To reiterate, UNHCR defines women empowerment as:

> [a] process through which women [...] in disadvantaged positions increase their access to knowledge, resources, and decision making power, and raise their awareness of participation in their communities, in order to reach a level of control over their own environment. (UNHCR, 2001b:3)

Based on this research study, the following seven inferences can be made: (1) becoming a refugee means that community patterns are deconstructed and gender roles may be changed. Displacement can give women refugees the opportunity to assume different gender roles. The study shows the role of women as breadwinners in the refugee camp, as opposed to being dependent on their spouses for their living needs as in their original communities, (2) access to livelihoods empowers women and allows them to have a stronger voice in society. The study reveals that women in refugee camps are the decision-makers with a high profile in their community contrary to their spouses who had lower roles. Thus, women in the refugee camps had more choices over their lives and decisions which are imperative to empowerment, (3) equipping women with skills through vocational programmes yields positive results such as improving nutrition, diminishing poverty and exploitation of all kinds, reducing mortality rates and ensuring access to education, (4) vocational programmes in refugee camps impact culture by changing the mindsets of the refugees, especially when it comes to gender roles, i.e. it is acceptable for women to participate in society and enjoy equal rights as men, (5) all women in the study felt that their self-confidence and self-esteem increased after joining the programme. This is in agreement with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943) which confirms that when physiological needs, safety needs and love and belonging are met, individuals reach their self-actualisation. The study reveals that after joining the programme, women enhanced their self-confidence, improved their financial security as well as developed new friendships and became role models for their families, (6) most of the women interviewed witnessed violence and the death of their spouses or loved ones. However, these women were able to show resilience by participating in vocational programmes and thinking of rebuilding their lives for a better future for their children and (7) self-efficacy among women refugees was evident as both a personal and social construct. In the personal construct, results revealed that the women refugees developed the skills needed for ensuring a better future for their families; in the social construct, they were able to build positive rapport, enhance communication skills and long-lasting relationships which in turn boosted their self-confidence. The study shows that with modest funds much can be done to alleviate the harsh circumstances of the refugees and to give them hope and opportunities for a better life.
Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations: (1) UN Women Organisation should compile a database for women refugees who trained and worked at Women and Girls Oasis. This will be helpful for future studies concerning refugees in other host countries, (2) the UN women Organisation should enlarge their activities by offering training in other skills which are suitable for women, (3) the UN Women Organisation may explore the possibility of finding jobs for the women trainees in the local community, (4) UN Women can select a number of women refugees and train them in various skills to become trainers, and subsequently train other women on their own, independent of the UN, which ultimately creates additional employment opportunities, (5) based on the successful results of the women training programme, the UN organisations may extend this activity for refugee men in a selective number of skills, (6) the UN organisation may periodically evaluate the outcomes of their activities to improve them, (7) UN Women can involve and integrate women in the implementation of activities and decision-making processes by allowing them to identify and justify the skills they wish to train in, (8) the inclusion of soft skills and life skills should be encouraged in any vocational training programme in order to achieve sustainable development; empowerment per se should be broader than technical competencies. Such skills include, but are not limited to, communication skills, creative skills and interpersonal skills, (9) the inclusion of green skills in the training programme which encompass leadership skills, adaptability to apply new technologies and environmental awareness and the 3 R's (reduce, reuse and recycle) in an agricultural environment which are in turn needed for new occupational categories should be encouraged and (10) having said this, it will be good to design a vocational skills training programme tailored to the needs of women refugees that includes a practical and theoretical framework. Once women refugees are trained on vocational skills, they can then enrol in soft skills, hard skills and green skills classes as a requirement to graduate from the training programme.

Notes

1. Non-profit organisation in Pakistan since 1988 providing services to underprivileged members in society.
2. Non-governmental, non-political organisation and non-profit organisation set up in 1993.
3. A leading development organisation improving the lives of Palestinian refugees and poor families in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon.
4. A non-profit humanitarian aid organisation that works to assist victims of natural disaster and armed conflict that was founded in 1992.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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APPENDIX 1

Evaluating A Vocational Training Program for Women Refugees at the Zaatari Camp in Jordan: Women Empowerment: a Journey and not an Output

Demographic Information:

1. Respondent/Refugee Name (Code): ______________________
2. Age: ______
3. Relationship Status: □ Married □ divorced □ separated
□ widowed □ never married
4. Are you disabled: □ no □ yes
5. How many dependents do you currently have: ____________
6. Year of flight from Syria: ____________

EDUCATION

7. Can you read and/or write? □ No □ read only □ read and write
8. What is the highest level of education you completed?
□ Primary □ secondary □ tertiary □ post-tertiary □ none
9. When (Year) did you get the above mentioned education? ____________
10. Are you currently continuing your studies? □ no □ yes
11. If yes, what kind of studies are these?
1. □ Formal academic education
2. □ Vocational training
3. □ Apprenticeship

VOCATION

13. What is your employment status? □ Unemployed □ studying/training
□ housewife □ employed working for employer □ self-employed □ other
14. Are you working the whole year through? □ no □ yes
15. What percentage of the family income do you contribute to? ____________
16. Have you ever worked in the area of training you received during vocational training?

□ no  □ yes

17. In which of the following sectors do you engage in as a form of income generation?

□ Tailoring

□ Hairdressing/salon

□ English Language

□ French Language

□ Drawing

□ Craft making

□ Other

18. How much knowledge do you consider yourself to possess on the following skills:

Tailoring:  □ None  □ little  □ a lot

Hairdressing/salon:  □ None  □ little  □ a lot

Literacy:  □ None  □ little  □ a lot

English course:  □ none  □ little  □ a lot

French course:  □ none  □ little  □ a lot

Drawing:  □ none  □ little  □ a lot

19. What other skills do you possess? ________________________________

20. If training on skills was provided for free, what skills would you like to learn?

21.a Have you ever used/are you using the skills you were trained in as part of your apprenticeship?

□ I have used it but not anymore

□ I am currently using it

□ No, I never used it after the training

21.b If no, explain:

□ Issue with quality of apprenticeship or tools provided

□ Issue with my interest or availability
☐ Issue with the availability of work

☐ Other

22.a had you been aware of the advantages of apprenticeship before you registered for the training? ☐ No ☐ Yes

22.b. If yes, what kind? Please explain what they are?

23. Did the orientation you received help you make a better decision on what kind of apprenticeship to register for?
☐ I did not receive an orientation

☐ Yes, it helped me make a good decision

☐ Yes, it helped to some extent

☐ No, it did not help

24. Was the training what you expected?
☐ Yes, it was more than what I expected

☐ Yes, it met my expectation

☐ No, it disappointed me

☐ I didn’t have an expectation

25. If yes, please tell me what aspect met your expectation. If no, please explain why not.

26. Did you have time to conduct your own work while you were participating in the apprenticeship? ☐ no ☐ yes

27. If no, would it have made any difference if you had been able to work?

☐ no ☐ yes

29.a after completing the apprenticeship could you use that training to support you and your family or generate an income?

☐ Yes, totally

☐ Yes, to some extent

☐ No

29b. If no, please explain why:

☐ I was not skilled enough after the apprenticeship
There was no opportunity where I lived to use my skill from the apprenticeship
I needed cash/capital/tools to use my skill from the apprenticeship
I did not want to use the skills I received through my apprenticeship
I was not physically well enough to use the skill I received through the apprenticeship
Other:

30a In the time after you completed your apprenticeship, did you receive any follow up of assistance from the trainers or the institutions which arranged your apprenticeship?

☐ no        ☐ yes

30b If yes, please describe the follow up or additional assistance

31. In comparison to when you started your apprenticeship, how would you assess your current economic situation?

☐ Poorer
☐ The same
☐ Rich
☐ richer

32. What did you find specifically helpful in the apprenticeship?

☐ None
☐ Improvement in occupational skills
☐ Improvement in business skills
☐ Moral/psychological support
☐ Improvement in the awareness of the market
☐ Communication with people of the same vocational interest
☐ Other

33. What do you think should be improved during the training?

34. Did your trainer provide entrepreneurship courses during the training?

☐ No I didn’t receive any
☐ Yes, but limited amount
☐ Yes, I received the right amount of entrepreneurship courses

35. When encountering business/career problems after your apprenticeship, would you ask your trainer for help?
   ☐ No, not at all  ☐ Yes, I would

36. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

a. The apprentice has increased my competitiveness to find a job
   ☐ no  ☐ yes

b. It increased my confidence  ☐ no  ☐ yes

c. I have obtained more trust from my family after the apprenticeship
   ☐ no  ☐ yes

d. I have obtained more trust from my community after the apprenticeship
   ☐ no  ☐ yes

e. I have got to know more people since my apprenticeship
   ☐ no  ☐ yes

37. How would you say you are doing economically in comparison to others in your community/camp?
   ☐ Worse than all the others
   ☐ Worse than most of them
   ☐ Better than some, worse than some
   ☐ Better than most of them
   ☐ Better than all of them