

Four Remarkable Women.
A photographic study by
Elizabeth and Charles Handy.

Four Remarkable Women

Can Business change society? Four women from the farming co-operatives of the West Bank in the Occupied Palestinian Territories prove that it can transform the lives of all involved – if there is determined and passionate leadership.

The co-operatives are enabled and supported by the New Farm Company and Oxfam's Enterprise Development Programme.



The Background

In 2008 Oxfam launched its Enterprise Development Programme (EDP). This sets out to provide finance, training and support to fledgling businesses in the developing world, to help them grow into long-term sustainable enterprises. These businesses are a mix of co-operatively and privately-owned enterprises, with a particular focus on agriculture and women.

In effect the EDP is a social venture capital fund, with a first round target of £6m. There are currently 11 enterprises in the portfolio growing to 30 in the first five-year phase. Growing these businesses and others like them will help to lift many thousands of people out of poverty and transform their lives.

In 2009 Oxfam invited Elizabeth Handy, a portrait photographer, and her husband Charles, a management writer, to document one of these projects in words and photographs, with a view to exhibiting it in centres of business in the UK. The exhibition hopes to raise awareness of the Programme and inspire greater support. For some it might also open a window on a world of which they see or know little.



Elizabeth and Charles Handy www.lizhandy.net

The Particular Project

The project that Oxfam suggested we focus on was in the West Bank in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This is different from most of the other projects in that it is focused not on one co-operative but on several, each making different forms of processed foods. They are, however, all bonded together by The New Farm Company which packages, brands and markets their products. It also provides training and quality control as well as soft loans and grants. Oxfam's EDP provides the finance for these grants and loans as well as the initial market research, business development services and project management.

It is an ingenious model, because it allows these small co-operatives to remain independent yet, by combining through the New Farm Company, to have a sizeable presence in the marketplace. Nor need they fear any exploitation by the middleman because they are part owners of the New Farm Company, which, in 2009, with the help of the EDP, turned a significant operating loss into a \$25,000 surplus.

The New Farm Company currently works with 11 co-operatives and has plans in due course to double this number. After visiting the current set we decided to focus on just four of them, each led by a passionate and determined woman, individuals who have created a viable business out of nothing, worked with and given new life to many other women, enhanced their own well-being as well as the future for their children, and provided inspiring examples of leadership.

They owe much, however, to the vision of the founder of the New Farm Company, Daoud Istanbuli, and to Oxfam. Together, this enlightened partnership has already changed the lives of everyone involved.



Daoud Istanbuli, the New Farm Company

"I am Daoud Istanbuli. After I retired from the Ministry of Agriculture I resolved to do what I could to help the small village co-operatives in the food industry of the West Bank. What they lacked, I knew, was access to markets beyond their local villages. The New Farm Company provides that missing link. Together we can be more successful.

We offer training, provide quality control, packaging, and marketing for their products. Any profits we make return to the owners, who include all the participating co-operatives. I myself take no salary. We have 11 co-operatives at present. Soon, I hope, we will have double that number.

I started the company in 2000. It had taken three long years to persuade the co-operatives to join me. But now I have the help and support of Oxfam, who provide grants and loans to the co-operatives as well as technical and commercial training and advice.

Co-operatives, I believe, work best when they are small, but to have strength in the market they need to combine. If they also have shares in the combination, then so much the better. And if some of the co-operatives can transform the lives of women, offering them dignity and a life of their own, then that too pleases me greatly."



My Still Life Photograph

“This beautiful picture illustrates the key values in my life.

Olives have roots that go deep. They live long, and the older they are the more they produce, which I find comforting, as well as a challenge. Their oil too, I am told, gives out a light in the dark.

Camels can last for thirty days without food or water, they are the most resilient and patient of animals. I know from my own experience that nothing worthwhile is achieved without patience.

Food is the stuff of life, the growing of it, the cooking and the eating of it, all of which I love, so the **pestle and mortar** is a necessity in my life.

The **candle** reminds me of my teenage years when our family lived in one room with no light, so that I had to do all my studies by the light of a candle. It taught me that you can do anything, no matter how difficult, if you have to.

Then, in the centre, there is a **coffee cup**. I am an Arab. If we see a stranger arrive, we must offer him coffee, but we will taste it first to show that it is safe. It symbolises hospitality, trust and friendship, the Arab virtues.

All of these, my values, come together in the final object, the **packet of thyme**, one of the products of the New Farm Company.

Like the olive, we aim to keep the farmers and the villagers rooted to their land, but we and they need the patience of a camel, the determination of the candle, the friendship and trust of that coffee cup ritual, and, of course, it is all about food, without which none of us would be here.”

Daoud Istanbuli





Muna Jaber and the Jericho and Al Aghwar Co-operative for Bee Farming

"My name is Muna Jaber. I am the Secretary and Treasurer of this honey co-operative, and was, at first, the only woman among 42 men. Inspired by me there are now five of us, with another 30 about to join. Others are interested and we hope, eventually, to outnumber the men.

Sami Khaleel Abu Asal is the elected Chair but it really needs a business-minded person to run it. I have a degree in management and used to work as PA to the CEO of a mineral water company.

Actually, I prefer not to be the Chair because I want more control of my time; I have four young children and I like to study. There are five of us on the management committee, all voluntary. It's easier, I think, if one of them sits in the big chair while I do the work.





We are now beginning to make our own hives, in the hope that we can not only meet our own needs but sell them to other co-operatives.

At present the honey pays for the education of my children as well as giving me interesting work and dignity. My husband drives a bus, but I am the one with ambition. I had a maths teacher at school who encouraged me a lot. She told me, 'If you have ambition, don't stop!'

My life is full. I am a beekeeper, a businesswoman, a wife, a mother, and, yes, a daughter-in-law, all at the same time! I could even be a Doctor of Management one day. Why Not?"





Born to Business. Huda Shadeed and The Dura Co-operative Society

“My name is Huda Shadeed. I am, officially, the Purchasing Manager of the Society but I work in the shop four days a week and am the real leader and organiser.

There are 20 members in the Co-operative, which started in 2005 with an initial investment of \$180 each and some training from the Ministry of Agriculture, arranged by the New Farm Company.

In the Co-operative we have divided ourselves into groups, each with a specific task. I run the local shop, and do all the purchasing, but our main product is couscous.

Some of the couscous is made on our premises, but there are 12 members who do it at home. Most of it is sold to the New Farm Company. We also make our own pickles, pastries and sweets and do some catering for the local schools. I even do a bit of embroidery for sale, when I have time.





The Co-operative brings in useful money that helps in the home, and with the education of our children – I have seven girls and two boys! But it also helps us to build social relationships and to expand our worlds. We want to prove, as women, that we have control over our own destiny.

It was my father who made me the competent business woman that I am. He was a farmer and a shopkeeper. I was the youngest of nine children and he took a special interest in me.

I live in a good place, surrounded by friendly people. I have a busy life, but an exciting and enjoyable one. I hope my father would be proud of me.”





Ilham Ma'moun and The Deir Ibz'a Women's Co-operative

“My name is Ilham Ma'moun. I am 38 years old, the mother of eight children and the elected Chair of the Co-operative Association of Deir Ibz'a for the Rural Development of Women.

I started it in 1994 with five friends when I found that I had a little leisure time. To begin with we focused on training in first aid and baby care, with the help of the Palestinian Red Crescent.

The Co-operative now has 30 members with another 40 contributing to a savings and loans organisation which I also set up. We run a shop which sells New Farm Company products as well as the members' own home-made honey and thyme. The younger members provide the labour for the New Farm Company on a seasonal basis. Here they can be seen boarding the bus that will take them to the factory.





I am proud to say that in the last six years the Co-operative has been growing steadily. The money is pooled, amounting to some 15 per cent of total household income. I keep the accounts, although we have to employ a qualified accountant to sign them off.

Our families decide together how it should be spent. Some goes to help educate the children, some on useful things like washing machines. And now that we go out to work our husbands take more responsibility in the home, while we women have more freedom and self-respect. It is easier when the husband supports his wife in her work, as mine does.

Recently I have started to make honey for the Co-operative and even to grow mushrooms. I am the first woman to be elected to the village council where my grandfather was once the mayor. Maybe one day it could be me.

Life, I think, is full of opportunities if you know where to look.”





The Family Provider. Dalal Amro and the Agricultural Processing Co-operative in Hebron

“My name is Dalal Amro. I have nine children and my husband no longer works, so I am the main provider of the household. It’s hard work! I spend four days a week at the Co-operative which I started six years ago.

We are all women. It’s better that way. So far I’ve inspired 23 others to join me and we hope to grow to around 50 in three-to-five years.



The main product of the Co-operative is grape molasses that we call Dibs. In a Muslim country there is no point in making wine so we take the grapes from the local growers and press them to make the molasses. It is three months of hard work for us all in the autumn. Most of this is now sold to the New Farm Company, who have also provided us with our refrigerator and oil press.



The rest of the time we make cheese and yoghurt with the milk from local farmers, which we sell from our own premises or to local shops. We have just moved into larger premises next door to my house and shop. That will give us room for even more activities and will act as a showroom. I am looking forward to the challenge.

Recently, I opened a handicraft shop next door to my house, selling handicrafts made and brought to me from the surrounding villages.

There is also the savings and loan account that I run for 20 members of the Co-operative, and, of course, the chickens, sheep and vegetables that I look after at home, with my husband.

The Co-operative has certainly enhanced my standing in the community, given us all a club of friends and got me out of the house. As well, of course, as some essential income, although it took two years before we made a profit.”



Oxfam's Enterprise Development Programme



Palestine
Processed Natural Foods



Colombia
Dairy



Honduras
Vegetables



Indonesia
Vanilla



Liberia
Rice



Sri Lanka
Dairy



Russia
Urban Microfinance



St Lucia
Vegetables



Ethiopia
Sesame



Tanzania
Sisal



Haiti
Dairy

The Enterprise Development Programme supports small and growing businesses across the developing world, providing a mix of financial support, training and advice. For more information please contact:

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www.oxfam.org.uk/edp

Hugo Sintes-Pons, EDP Manager

"My name is Hugo Sintes-Pons. I am in charge of this hugely exciting programme which operates in some of the poorest countries in the world. We plan to increase the portfolio to around 30 enterprises in the near future. Given Oxfam's global network I find that there is never any shortage of new proposals.

We focus on businesses that produce and process food. By creating wealth our aim is to overcome poverty for all involved, especially women, since they are the most marginalised, but also the most business-savvy and the most concerned with their family's welfare.

I'm very grateful to all our supporters who share both their wealth and their expertise. If you would like to get involved we would be delighted to hear from you."



“Life, I think, is full of opportunities if you know where to look.”
Ilham Ma'moun



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