

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT TO ENHANCE RESILIENCE TO LAND GRABBING

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Country: **Palestine** - Principal Organisation: **ACAD**

ABSTRACT

The Arab Center for Agriculture Development (ACAD) has used different methodologies to protect the land rights of local communities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the rehabilitation and utilisation of land by planting different kinds of plants and trees. ACAD has lobbied on behalf of local farmers to protect their land rights and has facilitated activities to strengthen the resilience of target groups,

in particular women and young farmers, by establishing agricultural cooperatives in Beit Skarya village in the West Bank. The cooperatives have strengthened the capacity of farmers to increase their incomes and sustain their agribusinesses. Furthermore, women have received technical and vocational assistance in adding value to their farm produce and have gained access to local markets.

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EFFECTIVE ACTIONS AGAINST LAND GRABBING

COMPETENCIES

AREAS

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RURAL LAND GOVERNANCE WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS AND GENDER JUSTICE YOUTH

SKILLS

**ADVOCACY AND CAMPAIGNING
LAND MONITORING,
INDICATORS AND
ALTERNATIVE REPORTING
LAND POLICY AND
MULTI-STAKEHOLDER
DIALOGUE
PROJECT DESIGN AND
IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT
ESTABLISHMENT AND
STRENGTHENING OF LOCAL
INSTITUTIONS
RESEARCH AND TRAINING**

BACKGROUND

Khallet or Kherbeet Beit Skarya (Beit Skarya hamlet) is located some 5km east of the 1949 Armistice Line (Green Line) and about 8.5km to the southwest of the city of Bethlehem. The village comprises a total area of 17,249 dunums (1724.9 hectares), and is home to 112 farming families. It is surrounded by the Gosh Etzion settlement compound, which comprises 12 Israeli set-

tlements, a military camp and offices of the Civil Administration. The Beit Skarya community is made up of farmers and pastoralists, but the area lacks the basic utilities required to provide a decent life for citizens. ACAD has worked with local communities to rehabilitate and utilise their land in order to strengthen their socio-economic situation and to prevent land dispossession.

THE CHALLENGE

The Israeli settlers view Beit Skarya as a strategic location at the heart of the Gosh Etzion settlements bloc. The villagers of Beit Skarya have suffered continuous provocation from settler communities, who have attempted to seize their land for expansionist purposes and to drive them out of the area by destroying their homes and agricultural lands, with cooperation from the Israeli Army. Their actions have negatively affected the livelihoods of community members.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGE

ACAD has worked with the Beit Skarya community to prevent the confiscation of their lands by ensuring their utility and rehabilitation. Through a comprehensive land assessment, ACAD was able to identify all lands that were susceptible to confiscation for expansionist and settlement purposes.

Using the rehabilitation and reclamation of land as their main tools, ACAD and the local community have managed to prevent land dispossession. Furthermore, ACAD has facilitated activities to strengthen the resilience of women and young farmers, helping them to establish agricultural cooperatives, which have strengthened their livelihoods and agribusiness capacities. Through the cooperatives, women have received technical and vocational training in adding value to their agricultural produce and are able to sell their products at the local market

MOVING TOWARDS PEOPLE-CENTRED LAND GOVERNANCE

The Beit Skarya community has rehabilitated more than 30 dunums (3 hectares) of land. Community members have identified land for rehabilitation, and have cultivated it and planted trees on it. They have also engaged in different types of agricultural business, including adding value to their produce. Strengthening agribusinesses has a double benefit for the Beit Skarya community: it has improved their livelihoods and has prevented migration from the village to other parts of the country. The prevention of migration is essential because it ensures the presence of people in the community, maintaining the utility of the land and preventing its confiscation by the Israeli government.



THE GOOD PRACTICE IN FIVE SIMPLE STEPS

1

Conducting a needs assessment: ACAD worked with a team of technical experts to assess land fertility, residents' capacities, threats of confiscation, agricultural land laws, production, manufacturing, reclamation, and the production potential of Beit Skarya village. It used a comprehensive, all-inclusive methodology to conduct an assessment of the needs of villagers and of youth. First, it held workshops, meetings, and interviews with different actors, including the local council, residents, representatives of the ministries of labour and agriculture, donors, and the land registration department. After compiling information from its interviews, ACAD used the SPSS software program to generate a frame map and SWOT analysis.

2

Creating focus groups: Focus groups were created to analyse the frame map and SWOT analysis. These groups were comprised of representatives of the village council, residents, and others. The focus group discussions showed that members of the community were interested in utilising their land to prevent its confiscation by the Israeli government, creating land-based employment opportunities for the community, and strengthening their livelihoods.

3

Land use as a priority: ACAD worked with local communities to prioritise the utilisation of land. Through its utilisation, communities are able to secure their livelihoods, increase their incomes, and ensure that their land is protected from confiscation by the Israeli government.

4

Skills training of women and youth: Women and youth were trained on adding value to their agricultural products. In cooperation with village residents and the local council, ACAD conducted economic activities to strengthen the livelihoods of women and youth. It created producers' cooperatives in the village and trained them on different economic activities that included establishing their own agribusinesses (and other businesses), setting up savings and credit programmes within the cooperatives, creating markets where women could sell their agricultural products, and food manufacturing involving cheese, grape juice, raisins, and pickles.

5

Support for cooperatives to meet PSI requirements: ACAD taught cooperative members about different technical tools to upgrade their products to comply with Palestine Standards Institution (PSI) requirements; their products now have labels and expiry dates. It also supported the cooperatives with machinery to squeeze grape juice, refrigerators, and other kitchen equipment needed for manufacturing and packaging. ACAD has trained women on packaging, quality control of the products, and the development of geographic indications of origin (GIO).



3 THREE FACTORS OF SUCCESS AND REPLICABILITY

1

Cooperation with local communities: The local community was ready to cooperate with ACAD because it was involved in the process from the beginning. ACAD conducted scientific workshops and trainings for local people in order to enhance their understanding of the purpose of land rehabilitation. When communities understand the end goal of their efforts, they can own the process and contribute to the protection of their land rights.

2

Addressing urgent community needs: Villagers in Beit Skarya face financial challenges caused by high levels of unemployment. To address their immediate financial problems, ACAD invested in vocational training and agribusinesses for women and youth. Agribusinesses work hand in glove with land rehabilitation and reclamation processes, as they require the utilisation of land. With strengthened livelihoods, community members are more inclined to fully participate in a long-term project that seeks to protect their land rights.

3

Joint efforts by state and non-state actors: The Palestinian government and non-state actors worked together to protect the land rights of their people. They have undertaken regular field visits to Beit Skarya, and have used social and formal media, to address the plight of local communities.

5

LESSONS LEARNED

ACAD experienced numerous challenges, including being banned by the Israeli authorities from entering certain areas of the community. To overcome this challenge, ACAD worked with local community members, who guided its representatives safely into the communities. In other instances, villagers

needed to pass through Israeli checkpoints to access their land or had to work on their land under the supervision of Israeli authorities.

Limited funding proved to be a challenge in the implementation process. Lack of funding translated into shortages of seeds

and manpower to till the land. To overcome these financial challenges, ACAD created a savings and microfinance programme for the cooperatives, providing them with enough money to start up their agribusinesses.

FIND OUT MORE

Wikipedia page on Beit Skarya: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khirbet_Beit_Zakariyyah

The Economist (2014). "Palestine: No room for a new inn". <https://goo.gl/cNqWTc>

WAFAPS (2013). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TozLF_w9cE