



Building Sustainable Livelihoods for Sudanese Women Farmers
Narrative Report to Forix Foundation
December 2019

With generous support from Forix Foundation, MADRE and our partner **Zenab for Women in Development (Zenab)** are empowering women farmers throughout Sudan with the resources, knowledge and skills to adapt to and mitigate the effects of the climate crisis; build sustainable livelihoods and economic independence; and ensure food security for themselves, their families and their communities.

Small-scale women farmers—typically between 20-50 years old—produce much of the food their communities and families eat and represent a large portion of Sudan’s agricultural workforce, with over 70% of women relying on subsistence farming. Yet rural women in Sudan face ongoing crises of poverty, discrimination and changing weather patterns, which in turn have contributed to widespread food insecurity and malnutrition among Sudanese families. Nearly 6 million people in Sudan are estimated to be severely food insecure. In addition, communities in Sudan have consistently dealt with soaring prices of agricultural inputs, fuel and food, among other necessities. These challenges have been exacerbated by ongoing protests and violent crackdowns on civilians occurring throughout the country since December 2018 and resulting in the April 2019 coup d’etat that ousted long-time President Omar al-Bashir.

Interim Report - September 2019

Despite political unrest, beginning in May 2019, Zenab traveled to four villages in Sudan to register 400 women farmers for sustainable agriculture programs. Zenab focused their outreach on remote, rural and underserved villages that are without or have limited access to programs — government-sponsored or otherwise — that provide support to women farmers. Priority registration was given to small-scale women farmers (those with less than five feddans¹ of land for each crop) as well as widows, women with disabilities and female-headed, low-income households. In July, with Forix Foundation’s support, Zenab purchased 1500kg of millet seeds that they distributed to the 400 registered women farmers across the villages of Wad Sanussi, Wad Daif, Kom Shitaa and Jomla. Millet is one of the most important food commodities in Sudan and a food staple for poor households across the country. Zenab also distributed sesame and corn seeds.

Zenab reports that women farmers faced three significant challenges this harvest season. First, the ongoing political situation throughout the country limited the availability of fuel for tractor use. With Forix Foundation’s coverage of key costs for the harvest — including seeds and tractors — Zenab was able to use additional funds from MADRE to secure the necessary fuel. The tractor proved invaluable to cultivating 255 feddans of farmland to date for planting; cultivating this large an area of land would have been far too labor intensive for the women to do manually.

Additionally, following a pest attack on a portion of the millet and sesame crops, women farmers had to repeat some of the planting. To avoid additional pests, corn farming was delayed until early September. Since Forix Foundation’s support provided tractors and enabled Zenab to purchase 500kg

¹ A unit of area used in Egypt and Sudan, equal to 1.038 acres

over the projected 1000kg of millet seeds initially budgeted, women farmers were able to adapt to and recover from the pest attack and replant this vital food staple. Lastly, women farmers reported experiencing low precipitation levels to date—10 days only—despite the rainy season that extends from April to December.

Final Report - December 2019

As reported to Forix Foundation in September, due to the busy harvest schedule for the women and the associated challenges they faced, Zenab decided to postpone their trainings towards the end of harvest season. From December 1-5, 2019, Zenab organized an agriculture training for 279 women farmers—79 more women than initially projected to participate— from Wad Sanussi, Wad Daif and Kom Shitaa on water harvesting and seed treatment for early planting to help ensure quality crops and mitigate risks of pests and diseases. Eco-friendly pest management was particularly important to provide training on given the recent pest attack faced by women farmers earlier in the harvest season. The training also included information on the following topics: types of technologies in water harvesting; germination; use of traditional tools for seed cultivation and different cultivation methods; and safety training for farmers. The training was led by two agricultural experts from the national committee on agricultural research and three trainers from Zenab.

Zenab reports that the trainings continue to be in high demand. More women farmers are hearing from their peers about the positive impact Zenab's agricultural trainings have had on women's farming knowledge and techniques, and many contacted Zenab requesting to join the agricultural training in early December. With growing demand, and in spite of the harvest challenges faced, Zenab decided to allow 79 additional women to register and attend the training, which was made possible with Forix Foundation's support. As a result of increased participants and the extension of this training from two to five days, Zenab made the decision to postpone the compost and sanitation training and reschedule it for February 2020. This postponement will also accommodate an extended harvesting period, likely into January. Zenab reports that due to the climate crisis, women farmers are experiencing longer harvest seasons each year; changing weather patterns, especially during the rainy season, and the different crop pests each situation brings, has required women to adjust and adapt accordingly each year. Women farmers' ability to consistently overcome the shifting challenges of climate breakdown on their lands and livelihoods and to successfully leverage resources and opportunities provided to them to support themselves and their families is a testament to their growing resilience and leadership.

To date, one woman from Kom Shitaa village, Hanan, reports that she had a good season this year thanks to MADRE and Zenab's support. The improved seeds and the help of machinery made a significant difference in her production, producing a total of 14 sacs of sorghum, 7 sacs of millet and 1 sac of sesame. In addition to this yield, Hanan was also able to produce extra crops to feed her animals and sell in the market. She plans to use this extra income to send her children to school. Although Hanan reported that the midge fly affected her sorghum crop this harvest period, with Zenab's training and accompaniment, she was able to handle these pests organically and contain the pest problem to save a portion of her crop.

Thoraya from Wad Sanussi village also had a similar success story: she was able to provide food for her family as well as sell the additional yield to secure income. In fact, Thoraya had enough crops left over to use as fodder for her animals, further supporting a diversified livelihood and source of food. She says that her crops have improved nutrition for her family; further, she is now able to sell extra crops and use the income to send her daughters to school.

In addition, with MADRE's support, Zenab recently established an agricultural cooperative center that houses women farmers associations from neighboring localities under one umbrella. The center is a shared space in which women farmers from surrounding villages exchange knowledge on conservative agriculture and environmentally-friendly farming methods. The center was established

close to a new water well that Zenab provided as part of their support to the women farmers union. The well was designed to serve women farmers of the neighboring villages, who previously had to travel long distances by foot to obtain water for their crops. Although this specific project was not funded by Forix Foundation, we share this new development to highlight Zenab's efforts to maximize MADRE and Forix Foundation's investment to increase their reach and support throughout Eastern Sudan and meet more women's needs.

With Forix Foundation's support, MADRE and Zenab are enabling women to ensure food security for themselves and their families, while protecting rural communities from the impacts of climate breakdown. Zenab continues to report that their women-led agriculture initiatives have inspired and empowered more Sudanese women to take on leadership roles in their families and communities, helping women overcome challenges of discrimination, exclusion and poverty to transform their lives for the better. In addition, increased economic independence of women has had a positive impact on girls, who are welcoming opportunities to pursue an education and engage in intergenerational learning with women leaders in their communities.

We thank you sincerely for your invaluable partnership this grant period in support of women farmers and their families throughout Eastern Sudan.

Below are photos of the registration, seed disbursement and harvest progress.

© Zenab for Women in Development





Below are photos of the agriculture training.
© Zenab for Women in Development

