Business Plan Competitions:
Addressing the Needs of Women and Youth Entrepreneurs

The Jordan Valley Links (JVL) project facilitates the provision of training, market linkages, business development support, and access to finance, including business grants for women and youth entrepreneurs. These grants allow JVL to intervene at key points in the development and growth of micro-enterprises where women and youth entrepreneurs may be facing limitations. Two key barriers faced by these entrepreneurs are access to finance and business development services, such as mentorship and capacity building.

Financial Support through Matching Grants

Grants awarded by JVL and local implementing partners allow micro-entrepreneurs to start or expand and adapt their businesses to match market demands and create an income stream for individuals and families who may otherwise struggle to meet their own needs. To ensure that these grants are used appropriately and not regarded as ‘free money’, the JVL project has placed two key criteria in place:

One, grants are awarded on a competitive basis to individual entrepreneurs that meet key criteria.

Two, grants are awarded on matching basis, i.e. entrepreneurs must raise or contribute a certain portion of the total amount required to start or expand their business, thus co-sharing the risk of doing business with the JVL project.
What are Business Plan Competitions?

JVL runs regular Business Plan Competitions (BPCs) to support outstanding entrepreneurs in accessing the financial resources required to establish new businesses or expand existing enterprises. It is through the BPC that entrepreneurs are selected to receive grants. Women and youth entrepreneurs that are registered to legally conduct business are invited to participate.

During these competitions, entrepreneurs present their small businesses to a panel of judges, who evaluate the applicants based on four key criteria: entrepreneurship capacity, commercial viability, cost-effectiveness, and cross-cutting foci.

As described in the following chart, MEDA partner organizations issue a call for applications both online and through in-person awareness sessions, and conduct an initial screening, selecting the most promising business applicants to participate in a pitch competition.
Grant Provision with Business Support and Coaching

A key component of the granting process is ongoing support from the JVL team to address gaps and challenges faced by entrepreneurs. Throughout the application, evaluation and pitching process, JVL and its local partners provide business support to strengthen the business concept and plan, ranging from advice to reducing fixed costs to sourcing for cheaper inputs, among others. Following the signing of grant agreements and provision of grants to entrepreneurs, JVL and its local partners then conduct monitoring and mentoring visits to determine what successes and challenges the entrepreneurs may be experiencing and provide them with targeted recommendations to improve their business operations. This allows JVL and its local partners to design and refine capacity-building trainings to better serve the needs of women and youth entrepreneurs.
Conclusion

As of July 2020, JVL has implemented and concluded eight rounds of the business plan competition. Grants have been awarded to 95 women and youth entrepreneurs for either individual or group businesses in the sectors of community-based tourism, food processing, and clean technology. Grants to savings and loans groups and their members have largely been in the retail, services, and food sectors. The project expects to hold six more rounds of the business plan competition in the coming months.

The project’s business plan competition is proving to be a unique and valued opportunity for entrepreneurs to obtain funding and business support that they may not otherwise be able to access. BPCs have been instrumental in addressing the two limitations that entrepreneurs in the Jordan Valley are facing: lack of funding and little business development knowledge. Incorporating BPCs as a funding and training strategy can be a useful intervention to invest in the financial, professional, and personal development of entrepreneurs.

This summary document is an overview of the project’s business plan competition; a more comprehensive learning document is currently being produced that will build on the lessons and experiences of applicants, implementing partners, and JVL staff.

About Jordan Valley Links

The Jordan Valley Links (JVL) project aims to improve the entrepreneurial and business acumen of women and youth in the Jordan Valley to increase their contribution to Jordan’s economic growth. The project facilitates access to finance, training and mentorship and works in food processing, community-based tourism, and clean technologies, ensuring these sectors strive for environmentally sustainability and gender-responsive practices.

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