

# Libya Women Economic Empowerment



**LWEE**

MEDA's Libya Women Economic Empowerment (LWEE) project is giving businesswomen the chance to grow and thrive in a country in dire need of a diversified economy.

In 2011, Libya emerged from a dictatorship that had made entrepreneurship extremely difficult and isolated its citizens from regional and global markets. Women can play a critical role in ensuring Libya builds a vibrant private sector and a country that can rise above instability and strife.

Launched as a pilot in 2012 and jointly funded by USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and MEDA supporters, LWEE aims to address some of the constraints faced by women entrepreneurs and create job opportunities for Libyans.

Phase one (2012-2014) achievements:

- Training 200 women entrepreneurs on fundamental business skills

- Eight women awarded matching grants to increase their capital at a Libya-wide business plan competition and mentoring
- Capacity building of local partners that provide services to businesses – specifically those who helped implement the project and women-owned businesses – in the private sector.

Phase two (2014-2016) will continue working with women-owned and managed businesses in urban and rural areas by enhancing business networks, market linkages, developing web-enabled technologies, sustainable businesses, financing programs and tools for increased access to finance.

Meet eight of the strong, knowledgeable and competitive businesswomen who are overcoming societal barriers to operate successful job-creating enterprises.



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## FATHIA IMBARKA

Fathia Imbarka left school once she reached the elementary level, but always took pleasure in making handicrafts. She decided to take courses in topics such as sewing, embroidery and painting on glass to develop her skills.

When Fathia joined LWEE, she wanted to expand her small home-based sewing business to a store selling traditional costumes, but realized it was over her budget. Instead, Fathia went on to open a small beauty salon in partnership with a close family friend. "The LWEE program made me believe in my skills and ability to do what I want. The trainers showed us how to do our accounting and finances and how to deal with customers."



Each woman provided half of the start-up costs and they rented a space in the Hadba area of Tripoli. Fathia and her partner serve the customers themselves and split the administrative work between them to save on costs. "Sewing traditional costumes is my ultimate goal," Fathia notes. "I'm getting on my feet now and saving so I can open my dream store and show people how to wear them the original way."

## HUDA ALSHABAA

Huda Alshabaa of Tripoli is a woman full of passion and ambition. In 2013, after studying agricultural and environmental sciences, she founded the Libyan Environment and Sustainable Development Organization and now serves as its director.



When Huda saw people haphazardly constructing buildings with no regard for the environment, she got an idea. "People are lacking awareness and destroying forests and youth can't find jobs. So why don't I start a waste recycling business to protect the environment and target youth?"

She decided to start small, with a focus on paper recycling. Huda has a financial plan, but is seeking capital so she can present her project at MEDA's matching grants fund competition. "My mother tells me this business is for a man to run, but I tell her that I have to make this factory happen - I am going to be a businesswoman! I'll start by collecting waste, then grow into manufacturing."



## ESRA ABUDAYA

Esra Abudaya, 25, is a passionate, clever and creative young woman. Ambition drives her: In 2014, she worked as a MEDA project officer and was running her own online business selling makeup.

Later that year, Esra left MEDA to pursue her business plans – an event planning company. She conducted a feasibility study, gathered supplies and researched business requirements. Esra's family supported the idea: Her husband provided a small office next to their home and her mother believed in her business, providing her with seed capital of \$1,000 USD.

Esra has launched her new business, Velvet, to design and manage weddings and other parties. It has already been met with great success, particularly on the company's Facebook page, which received 10,000 likes in its first week.



## HUDA HREWIT

Huda Hrewit is a mother of two and an owner of a private school in Bani Waleed. Huda joined MEDA's economic empowerment training program to gain knowledge in business planning to support her business experience.

She launched her school in 2009 with loans from family and friends, starting with a kindergarten and adding more senior classes each year for her students to advance. Today, Huda's school consists of an office, four classrooms, a playground, nursery room, small cafeteria, six bathrooms and a computer lab.



What makes her school a success? "Before we hire teachers, I create a panel to conduct an entrance exam, so only the best teachers join us. We pride ourselves on raising children, not only educating them."

Now, after joining the LWEE program, she feels confident enough to apply for the business plan competition to launch her private business. She has a number of project ideas, such as an entertainment club for families or retirees, or a comprehensive center for medical tests.

## FAIZA ALSGHAIR

When single mother and Arabic language teacher Faiza Alsghair began struggling financially, she started preparing meals at home for special occasions to reduce costs. This sparked an idea to start her own business in Tripoli – a small pastry factory and shop.



Faiza joined LWEE's business and entrepreneurship training with great determination that was noticed by MEDA staff. Her dream to win the business plan competition came true. Faiza believes the training materials and trainers' expertise, combined with the support of MEDA, friends and family, gave her the knowledge and confidence she was initially lacking.

Faiza has secured half of the budget she needs to launch by convincing an acquaintance to invest in her business idea. She won the other half through the LWEE business plan competition held in June 2014.

Now she is searching for a location and revising her business plan to include preparing meals for people working late, have no time to cook or can't afford to eat out. Adding this new aspect serves a purpose: "I want to provide more employment opportunities for struggling women and unemployed youth."

## SIHAM SALAH ALMAJDOUB

After Siham Salah Almajdoub graduated with a BSc in mechanical engineering, Siham's family encouraged her to start a business. As she began planning her business, with no previous experience, she heard about MEDA's training.

Siham attended MEDA's economic empowerment training to help her gain some business knowledge and build up her confidence. She learned how to think seriously about a number of different business ideas, and by the end of course, the plan to start an engineering company with a group of fellow engineers was underway.



Working together, the group determined the company's potential, budget, location, name and criteria for its architectural, structural and interior design. In 2014, Wadi Alnamel (The Valley of the Ants) became a well-known brand in Tripoli, working on public projects for the Libyan state, including the maintenance of the University of Tripoli.

# SCARFY FASHION

Rihab, a university student in English, her sister Rayan, an anesthesiologist, and their friend Nalhla, an architect, are all graduates of the project's business and entrepreneurship training program.

After graduation, they established a business designing scarves, which they now proudly call Scarfy Fashion. The three ladies have created a solid partnership and officially registered their brand at the Chamber of Commerce in Tripoli.



Scarfy Fashion creates fashionable designs for Libyan women who wear a hijab and like to stand out. The scarfs are produced in Dubai to ensure they are high quality. These three women entrepreneurs recently used Facebook and Instagram to advertise online, appealing to younger women.

After successfully launching their business and receiving a number of online orders for their specially designed scarfs, they're now trying to broaden their range of products to meet what young Libyan ladies are looking for in the world of fashion. This has led them to include unique scarf designs and abayas, loose robe-like dresses, embellished with high-quality crystals in the product offerings.

What's next for these three entrepreneurial women? They hope success.

# MOFIDA KHUDANA

Mofida Khudana, with a diploma and a degree in business management, owns a modest women's clothing store in her city of Ghadamis, but she has much bigger dreams.



She wants a building to attract both Libyans and tourists – a combined centre for human development and small hotel. Mofida joined the LWEE program to learn new business skills and access resources to be better prepared to implement her new, larger plan. "I was determined to start my own business."

Since graduating Mofida has developed building plans, conducted a financial study and is finalizing her budget. "The LWEE program opened up my horizons. I learned that even if you don't have the resources to implement your idea, it's enough to have a dream and ambition."

Mofida is pursuing her business idea in the hopes of winning the matching grants fund competition in phase two of the project. She dreams of becoming a pioneering businesswoman in Libya. "There are many women in Ghadamis who run a small business from home, which I could do, but my ambitions are bigger than that."

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