



Joint Programme 2023 Annual Progress Report

Building Resilience & Ending Vulnerabilities in Small Island Developing States

Cover page

UNCT/MCO: The Bahamas and Bermuda

Reporting Period: 1 January - 31 December 2023

JP title: Building Resilience & Ending Vulnerabilities in Small Island Developing States

Thematic SDG Areas: Decent jobs & universal social protection;

Gender Marker: Gender-transformative (for example, the JP explicitly aimed to address the structural and root causes of gender inequality, such as by combining social protection with community dialogues and economic empowerment activities that aim to shift gender social norms and power relations)

Engine Room Activities: Devising a market-ready pipeline; Developing the 'deal room' (financing mix) ;

Total estimated expenditures: USD \$286,664.23

Total estimated commitments (including expenditures): \$466,002.93

Executive Summary

The JP focuses on the engine room actions "Developing the deal" and "Devising a market-ready pipeline". The main three results achieved so far include increased capacity of government and finance professionals and the subsequent development of new financing tools for gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as the development of an engendered and inclusive gender acceleration curriculum.

Thirty-five Government officials and finance professionals are now better equipped to assist women, youth, and Persons with Disabilities (PWD) in securing capital for Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs). UNESCO's Meaningful Youth Engagement training reinforces capacities for youth practitioners in public institutions, facilitating better collaboration with young people. This knowledge transfer is evident in the creation of two financing vehicles set to roll out by April 2024, which should leverage 2 million USD in blended finance, 115'000 USD in grants, and up to 10 million USD (for the wider Caribbean) in targeted MSME loans.

The project also addresses downstream bottlenecks to accessing finance, such as data collection and business development in the cultural, creative, and tourism sectors in The Bahamas. The partnership between the Bahamas Development Bank and C15 Studios Ltd., enables creatives to access financing, enhancing project reach and sustainability by linking to CARICOM's Regional Registry of Artists and Cultural Workers, facilitating access to the Economic Partnership Agreement with the European Union.

Outcome 2, focusing on entrepreneurship development, has seen the completion of the Gender Equity Financing & Accelerator Curriculum, which will be implemented in three business accelerator programs tailored to the different sectors and will support 175 entrepreneurs, incorporating impact measurement, gender-sensitive components, and mentorship models. In partnership with The University of The Bahamas CeLearn Department, capacities for women-owned businesses in the agricultural sector is set to facilitate knowledge and technical skills across five islands. Youth voices, perspectives, and skills are strengthened through the Youth as Researchers Initiative and the Youth Leaders Certification Programme, incorporating elements from UNESCO's Caribbean Heroes Academy into local youth accelerators.

The strength of the project is its broad involvement of over 60 actors, close partnerships with government and private sector entities, as well as leveraging the PUNO's respective expertise. The JP contributes to equal access to decent jobs and livelihood opportunities aligning with SDGs 5 and 8 by promoting women's economic empowerment, supporting youth in business, and increasing access to financial services for MSMEs.

Given the complex partnerships and nascent nature of entrepreneurship and Gender Lens Investing in the Caribbean as well as internal constraints, implementation was slow to start but is now fully underway given accelerated workplans. Learning from these challenges, the project now ensured adequate staffing on the ground and increased coordination among partners.

The sustainability of the project lies in its close collaboration with partners in The Bahamas and Bermuda, localizing implementation by collaborating with and strengthening capacities of government partners and entrepreneurship ecosystem actors to become more inclusive and better integrate gender equality and women's empowerment. Furthermore, by supporting the development of finance products which have been made market-ready through this joint project, additional funds can be capitalized for women-entrepreneurs in the Caribbean, contributing to long-term growth and success.

Annual Progress

Overall progress against 3 key results in 2023:

Training of government officials and finance professionals and launch of new Financing Tools for Gender Equality

Focusing on the engine room action “Developing the deal”, outcome 1 has increased the available knowledge and capacity through the training of 35 government officials and finance professionals on gender lens investing, and the ongoing development of two financing vehicles.

The heightened understanding of women entrepreneurs’ needs and barriers to accessing finance, along with innovative solutions, empowers government officials and finance professionals to assist women, youth, and PWD in securing capital and navigating the challenges and opportunities of gender and youth-led Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs).

This practical knowledge transfer is evident in the creation of two financing vehicles set to roll out between February – April 2024. The Bahamas Development Bank’s concessional blended financing mechanisms will now offer low-to-no-cost loans, facilitating \$2 million for 90 women entrepreneurs. Simultaneously, the SDG Fund will provide \$115,000 in direct small grants to at least 60 entrepreneurs. For businesses ready for commercial loans, the SDG Fund collaborated with Portland Private Equity to establish the Inspire Capital Fund, launching in April 2024, offering three financial products.

Entrepreneurship training and non-financial products developed

The second engine room action focuses on devising a market-ready pipeline for entrepreneurship development and support, specifically targeting women and youth in agriculture, sustainable tourism, and creative cultural industries (outcome 2). The completed Gender Equity Financing & Accelerator Curriculum will enhance the technical capacity of women, youth, and PWD in sustainable and inclusive business practice, complementing local business accelerators. Three accelerator programs, starting February 2024, will support 175 entrepreneurs by incorporating impact measurement, gender-sensitive components including the Women’s Empowerment Principles, and mentorship models.

The Gender Equity Financing & Accelerator Curriculum provides value-added components such as the introduction of an impact measurement framework and knowledge management practices, gender-sensitive components and the Women’s Empowerment Principles, a women-focused mentorship model and links to digital accelerator management platforms.

In Partnership with The University of The Bahamas CeLearn (Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning) Department, women owned or lead businesses in Agri-Business, Agri-Tourism and Agriculture will further their business knowledge and technical skills with internship placements and guided coaching and mentorship across five islands in The Bahamas.

The Youth Leaders Certification Programme (led by the Division of Youth) incorporates the Caribbean Shereroes Academy and elements around human rights, gender equality and sustainable development.

Business ecosystem for the orange economy strengthened

The new multi-stakeholder strategy for data collection, management and business development in the cultural, creative and tourism sectors in The Bahamas integrates GEWE and promotes an inclusive and diverse Orange Economy ecosystem.

Partnership between The Bahamas Development Bank and C15 Studios Ltd. enable creatives to access financing, enhancing project reach and sustainability. Initiatives like the Artist Registry of The Bahamas, hosted by the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, is underway and will serve as a significant resource to the Ministry, creative and cultural practitioners, as well as the wider public. It contributes to the CARICOM’s initiative on Regional Registry of Artists and Cultural Workers and facilitates access to the Economic Partnership Agreement with the EU.

Youth voices, perspectives, and skills are strengthened through projects like the Youth as Researchers Initiative.

Main Challenges, adjustments and lessons:

The main constraints experienced by the program were internal, causing delays in implementation.

The project was designed to foster innovation and catalyze longer-term system changes through complex partnerships combining private sector, government, and UN Agencies collaborations. Given the particularities of The Bahamas and Bermuda and the innovative nature of the project, the design and inception stage required more time than anticipated, including establishing and registering the Inspire Capital Fund to provide loans for women entrepreneurs, as well as formalizing partnerships with the Bahamas Development Bank (BDB) and the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation. Given the complex partnerships, ensuring feedback and the integration of the vision and expertise in key documents and strategies, has caused additional delays.

Entrepreneurship and Gender Lens Investing are nascent fields in the Caribbean, with limited existing knowledge and data on the entrepreneurial and financial landscape. While the project addresses this constraint by undertaking needs assessments, their start was delayed given challenges with UN internal procurement and staffing processes.

Delays were also experienced in the signing of the project document with national partners given changes in government leadership and administration at The Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources in The Bahamas. Thus, the project became operational for FAO in late 2023. Subsequently, this stalled the hiring of key staff. Further onboarding of implementing partners and service providers was stalled due to new procedures within the UN agencies (e.g., the introduction of a new business management system) which subsequently pushed back the start dates for implementation.

Delays were experienced in the development of the GEFAP Curriculum due to capacity constraints of local stakeholders to provide the requisite information required and feedback on the documentation submitted to allow for validation of same.

Learning from these challenges, the PUNOs have ensured adequate staffing in country, with FAO and UN Women ensuring a program presence on the ground and UNESCO dedicated an associate on gender equality to aid with the acceleration of the program. Furthermore, coordination amongst the PUNOs and government counterparts has increased especially in the second half of 2023 to better foster synergies and leverage partnerships. Currently, several entities from public and private sectors of The Bahamas are dealing with the development of the cultural and creative industries, but their efforts will need to be streamlined for effective and efficient delivering service and guidance to the local cultural and creative industries. The coming together of the private and public sectors facilitates the collaboration of the agents of the Orange Economy with other economic sectors of The Bahamas, their activities and the technological capacities, as well as the opportunities offered by the market.

Priority Cross-cutting Issues

Cross-cutting results/issues

Gender Marker and activities undertook for gender equality

The JP is Gender-transformative (for example, the JP explicitly aimed to address the structural and root causes of gender inequality, such as by combining social protection with community dialogues and economic empowerment

activities that aim to shift gender social norms and power relations). Evidence, data collection and analysis (e.g. gender assessments of programmes; policy briefs, costing for scale-up of social services); Policy dialogues, advocacy (e.g. direct inputs to national policies, strategies, laws, including women's and girls' rights groups in coordination mechanisms); Adaptation of existing programmes (e.g. revision of eligibility criteria, removal of conditionalities); Design of new gender-transformative programmes (e.g. new cash transfers to women-led households); Capacity development (e.g. training of social workers, local governments, local communities);

SDG Transitions Acceleration

The JP is contributing towards ensuring equal access to decent jobs and livelihood opportunities for women, youth and PWD. It does this by promoting sustainable and equitable entrepreneurship both as a livelihood opportunity for youth and women, as well as a creator of decent jobs in the key economic sectors that are the backbone of many small islands. Beyond individuals, the JP also strengthens system capacities through the business ecosystem including government, business service providers, and finance institutes so they are better able to understand and respond to the needs of women, youth and PWD.

The JP primarily contributes to "enhanced scale of progress in terms of people and planet reached" by supporting the scaling up and inclusivity of entrepreneurship ecosystems and the strengthening of key economic sectors towards improving overall competitiveness. By enhancing capacities around women's and youth economic development, it is expected that not only will economic growth post-COVID be boosted, but so too will social development for women and youth and by extension the entire population, helping to reduce poverty levels. It further accelerates SDG transitions through "ensuring sustainability of the transitions in terms of additional financing", by building partnerships for financing of the SDGs, including expanding Gender Lens Investing through blended public-private finance and financing for sustainable agriculture, tourism and cultural industries. While the project has not yet unlocked additional financing, it has contributed towards the design of the Inspire Capital Solutions.

The JP leads to the acceleration of multiple SDGs, through the economic empowerment of women and gender equality. The main targets are identified as:

SDG 5.a: The JP will increase women's access to economic resources and economic empowerment by addressing underlying factors, such as access to finance, business skills development and mentorship. The results have not yet been achieved, but systems have been established for delivery in 2024.

SDG 8.3: By enhancing the capacity and skills of youth and women in business and supporting digital financial management, the JP bridges the gap between SDG 5 and 8 by equipping women and youth with the tools and other resources necessary to contribute to economic growth and provide decent jobs. Further, meaningfully engaging with youth as knowledge-holders and innovative solution drivers is key to addressing increased inequalities and gender disparities. The programme goes even further to target Sustainable Tourism, the Creative and Cultural industries, and Agri-business which shows efforts to move up the value chain industries.

SDG 8.10: The project directly increases the equitable access of small and medium-sized businesses to affordable and appropriate financial services through increasing capacity and application of gender lens investing. The commitment of the private sector in this joint programme is key as financing for development theory posits that governments cannot do it alone. Gender Lens Investing is providing a unique and scalable opportunity to support women's empowerment.

Annual Reporting on Results

Exit strategy, scaling, sustainability and next steps

The sustainability of the project lies in the close collaboration with the government partners, including the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture in Bermuda, the Bahamas Development Bank, as leading partners, but also the University of The Bahamas, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation. Overall, the JP has engaged with over 20 Government partners and substantively contributed to linking initiatives across sectors. Through the increased capacity and knowledge of government, private sector and civil society actors on integrating youth and gender perspectives, as well as the pilot of the blended finance mechanisms, the government partners will be able to continue strengthening a gender-responsive and inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystem and gender lens investing practices.

Furthermore, the Inspire Capital Fund targets capitalisation of up to USD\$ 30 million in additional funds for entrepreneurs in the Caribbean, which will have a lasting effect on increasing access to finance for women and youth-led entrepreneurs beyond the end of the project. Once the JP demonstrates evidence of Product Market Fit during the pilot, and the proposed methodologies are proven and/or refined, resulting in notable success at the Fund and enterprise level, it will be able to attract multiply sources of funding from private investors to increase the fund window available.

By highlighting the success of the female entrepreneurs benefiting from the programme more stakeholders and beneficiaries will be attracted to participating in subsequent staging of the interventions. Further, engaging youth around the SDGs and building strong foundations in research and critical thinking, sustainable development and entrepreneurship can have a lasting impact on the economies. Through the success of this program many women and youth will be well-positioned for long-term growth and success.

Given the delay in implementation of the project and the requested project extension, once the project activities have reached a critical stage, the UN Agencies will engage in further discussions with the local project partners in order to ensure the sustainability of the project results and also develop a sustainability plan.

Measuring and reporting on impact

2 million USD has been leveraged through blended financing via The Bahamas Development Bank.

Overview of progress toward Financial Instrument(s)

Completed transactions

Strategic Partnerships, Documents and Communications

Multi-stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder groups you closely partner with, as part of your JP approach

National Government; Private sector; Other;

Brief description of the nature of engagement. Outline the main outcomes and achievements resulting from the partnerships.

The Bahamas Development Bank is a lead partner for the JP in The Bahamas.

University of The Bahamas is leading the Gender Equality Advanced Accelerator in The Bahamas and also providing coaching and mentorship support.

The Ministry of Social Development and Seniors, Bermuda - Leading the implementation of the joint programme as the main partner in Bermuda

Bermuda Economic Development Corporation - Key partner in Bermuda for the accelerator and small grants programme.

The Bahamas National Commission for UNESCO -will acts as a liaison supporting mobilization of national stakeholders and coordinating partnerships in The Bahamas.

FinDev Canada, an international financial institution known for its expertise in Gender Lens Investing delivered its 2X Training for Fund Managers, resulting in 22 Fund Managers and Government partners increasing their knowledge on GLI.

Portland Private Equity: PPE is launching the Portland Caribbean Basin Impact Fund (the "Fund"), a blended finance aggregation partnership designed to attract private sector investors from Canada, USA, and the Caribbean Basin into impact-driven, gender-smart investment strategies that contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Caribbean Basin. They are the main private sector partners that will manage the Inspire Capital Fund.

How did the JP facilitate collaboration with diverse stakeholders

Financial leverage

Financial resources leveraged

2 million USD has been leveraged through blended financing via The Bahamas Development Bank.

Donor and Strategic events attended by JP in 2022

JP steering committee/ programme board meeting	Strategic partners/ donors event
Yes, in 2023	No, but planned in late 2024

Explanation if you have not held any key meeting/events for the above question.

N/A

JP contribution to SDG Financing

Drafted a bill, strategy, and/or approved a law increasing the fiscal space for the policy in focus	Produced financing, costing, diagnostic and feasibility analyses as a basis to invest or increase spending on the SDGs	Improved efficiency (cost savings) in the management of programmes/schemes	Improved effectiveness (value for money; i.e. social impact of \$1 spent) of spending	Drafted policies/regulatory frameworks or developed tools to incentivize private sector investment on the SDGs	Structured new financial instruments (public, private or blended) to leverage additional funding
No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes

Briefly explain how and in which area your JP contributed to enhancing SDG financing

The JP is completing a needs assessment on financing instruments for women-owned MSMEs and a feasibility study on financing mechanisms for gender equality which will contribute towards identifying pathways to invest in gender equality and SDGs 5, 8 and 9. The project also structured 2 new financial instruments using public and private partnerships.

Focus on LNOB cross cutting principles

Human Rights	Persons with disabilities	Youth	Environmental and social standards
No	No	Yes	No

Provide any other comments or descriptions on how your JP contributed to cross-cutting issues and principles.

This joint proposal is based on the principle that promoting gender equality and driving women's empowerment forward which is at the heart of the human rights agenda, and key to meeting human rights obligations and guaranteeing that along the development pathway no one is left behind, in keeping with the LNOB principle.

The project will support governments to deliver on the Beijing Platform of Action. The Bahamas and Bermuda are both parties to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The project aligns with the CEDAW Committee General Recommendation 35(b), to intensify its efforts to create an enabling environment for women to become economically independent, by raising awareness among employers and trade unions in the public and private sectors about the prohibition of discrimination against women in employment and promote the entry of women into the formal economy, including through the provision of vocational and technical training.

Beneficiaries

Number of beneficiaries

55

Percentage (%) of women benefited among the total number	Percentage (%) of children & youth (0-24 years of age) benefited among the total number	Percentage (%) of older persons (age 60 and above) benefited among the total number	Percentage (%) of persons with disabilities benefited among the total number
85	20	0	0

Please briefly explain how people benefited from the joint programme

As implementation has been delayed, 34 people at the government/systems or service provider levels are the primary direct beneficiaries of the program at the moment. Women remain the key target audience, while the project also engages with men to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. 21 youth and youth actors have been engaged in youth action research training programs. This figure is anticipated to rise to 310 women, youth and PWD improving their access to finance and 175 people receiving training.

Did your JP support the localization of SDGs by moving SDG actions to the local level and enhancing abilities of local and regional governments to promote the SDGs?

Conducted diagnostics and studies to contextualize SDGs at the local level;Enhanced capacities of staff in the local and regional governments;

Provide information of how your JP supported localization of the SDGs as outlined above:

The JP has developed studies on the impact of COVID, financing mechanisms, and needs of women-owned MSMEs in The Bahamas and Bermuda, all of which contribute to contextualize the SDGs at the local level. Training of government officials on Gender Lens Investing has enhanced their capacity for the consideration of gender-based factors across the investment process to advance gender equality and better inform investment decisions.

Communications

Voices from the field

Partner at Portland Private Equity, Toni-Tanille Kerr, said during the 2022 launch of the project: “Our work with the UN Joint SDG Fund will allow us to be a source of innovative financing to women-owned [and] led businesses and youth entrepreneurs in the region, enabling a more holistic approach to helping these businesses scale and grow. Through our upcoming Fund, Portland Private Equity will support a more inclusive rebuilding of Caribbean economies post covid, whilst also delivering on our mandate of providing superior risk adjusted returns to investors.”

One of the beneficiaries of the capacity building trainings, Erica Smith, Executive Director, Bermuda Economic Development Corporation (BEDC), said: “The exposure we have had to the knowledge and experience of the UN Women and UNDP teams has been incredible and will bode well for growing Bermuda's entrepreneurial eco-system - especially those demographic sectors - women, youth, and persons with disabilities - who need bespoke policies, programmes, and products to level the playing field.

Ms Smith further stated: “Thus far the learnings from the various trainings we've been exposed to have been shared across our entire organisation. In addition, through the Building Back Equal programme, BEDC has been able to expose some of our entrepreneurs to training and opportunities overseas. BEDC has also had exposure to global experts in both financing/investing and incubators/accelerators and we are excited about the eventual outcomes of that exposure.”

Trinity McIntosh a Youth Researcher participating in Youth as Researchers reflected on the value of the initiative, “I am grateful to UNESCO for providing me with the opportunity to collaborate with incredible individuals and delve into the vital topics of gender equality, youth, and entrepreneurship in The Bahamas. By identifying the root causes of these issues and potential solutions, I believe we can enhance the prospects of success for women and youth in the field of entrepreneurship.”

Declaration

We hereby confirm that the information provided in this update is duly reviewed and approved by the RC and all PUNOs involved in the Joint Programme.