Strengthening national capacities of producer organizations

Oman

SYNTHESIS REPORT
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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
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Acknowledgements

This synthesis report is the result of the collaborative effort between the Oman office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAFWR) of Oman.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

**AFDF:** Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund

**CA:** collective action

**CWC:** Coastal Women Committee

**DACC:** Department of Associations and Community Clubs

**fed:** feddan

**FAORNE:** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Regional Office for Near East and North Africa

**ILO:** International Labor Organization

**IDRC:** International Development Research Centre

**IADB:** Inter-American Development Bank

**MAF:** Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

**MAFWR:** Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

**MARA:** Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs

**MD:** ministerial decision

**MOLA:** Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs

**MONE:** Ministry of National Economy

**MOSD:** Ministry of Social Development

**MRMWR:** Ministry of Regional Municipality and Water Resources

**NGO:** non-governmental organization

**NENA:** Near East and North Africa

**OAA:** Omani Agriculture Association

**OAFP:** Omani Association for Farmers of Pomegranate

**OES:** Omani Environmental Society

**ODB:** Oman Development Bank

**OFIC:** Omani Food and Investment Holding

**OGLG:** Oman Global Logistics Group

**OWA:** Omani Women’s Association

**OWS:** Oman Water Society

**PAMAP:** Public Authority for the Marketing of Agricultural Products

**PO:** producer organizations

**OMR:** Omani Riyal

**RD:** royal decree

**SARDS:** Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy

**SQU:** Sultan Qaboos University

**SSFF:** small-scale family farming

**SWOT:** strength, weakness, opportunities, threats

**TCP:** technical cooperation program

**UPA:** Union des Producteurs Agricoles du Quebec

**WTO:** World Trade Organization
A government official inspecting the standards and conditions of a farm in AlDakhiliyya Governorate
A group of coastal women fishing for oysters in Masirah Island

©MAFWR/Khalfan Al-Rashdi
1. Introduction

Small-scale family farming accounts for more than 80 percent of the agricultural production in the Near East and North Africa region and plays an important role in achieving food security, alleviating poverty and managing natural resources in a sustainable manner.

However, small-scale family farmers are faced with a number of barriers, including high transaction costs and access to productive services and assets, such as financial services and social protection.

Strengthened producer organizations can help family farmers overcome the barriers they face and develop innovative organizational arrangements that broaden their capabilities. Given the wide range of services that inclusive and efficient producer organizations can provide to their members, these organizations are essential for a thriving agriculture sector and for boosting rural economies. In this regard, governments have a critical role to play in creating conducive conditions by enabling collective action of producers to form and thrive. These conditions include developing transparent and sound regulatory frameworks and a conducive investment climate, as well as facilitating the creation of frameworks and policy dialogue spaces between governments and various stakeholders.

Upon request from the Governments of Lebanon, Oman and Sudan, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) provided technical assistance for the implementation of a Regional Technical Cooperation Project TCP/RAB/3606, Strengthening Producer Organizations in the Near East and North Africa Region, with a focus on the three above-mentioned countries.

This document presents the main finding of this project in Oman to support the strengthening of producer organizations in agriculture and fisheries. The results of this work provide a basis for the formulation of a national plan of action that reflects the needs of smallholder farmers and fishers to ultimately contribute to their empowerment.

This report is divided into two parts. Part 1 provides an overview of the various forms of collective action that exist in Oman and the institutional framework regulating them. Part 2 describes the objectives, methodology and components of the project implemented by FAO between 2017 and 2019, highlighting the results obtained for the three target groups of the project: the Omani Agricultural Association, the aflaj and the Coastal Women. It also provides major conclusions and ways forward.
2. Collective action in Oman

2.1. Context

Oman has made remarkable progress towards achieving food security. In the World Food Index 2018, Oman ranks third in the Arab world and 29th worldwide.

The agriculture sector plays an important socio-economic role for the sustainable development of Oman. To keep the country on track towards achieving national food security, the Government, with the assistance of FAO, developed the “Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy towards 2040” (SARDS) along with a detailed investment plan. Strengths, weaknesses and opportunities in relation to agricultural and rural development in Oman have been identified along with measures needed to ensure that these sectors are economically viable, environmentally sustainable, and socially sound to ultimately contribute to the overall well-being of the Omani people.

The strategy is based on four priorities:

» enhancing economic efficiency, profitability and competitiveness of agriculture and rural activities;

» improving environmental sustainability and resilience to natural disasters;

» reducing regional imbalances between rural and urban areas and promoting social inclusion by empowering local communities and providing livelihood opportunities in rural areas; and

» an overarching priority which encompasses the three previous ones through strengthening the enabling institutional environment for agriculture, fisheries, and rural development.

Omani agriculture is characterized by a structural dualism: 89 percent of farmers are small family farmers (farm size less than 5 feddans) and own 25 percent of the land; while 0.2 percent of farmers (farm size more than 50 feddans) own 21 percent of the land (Kotagama, 2014). Given the prevalence of small farms in Oman, producer organizations could be a tool to benefit farmers in collectively accessing inputs at lower prices, and obtaining better market prices, extension services, collective storage and so forth to ultimately increase their bargaining power and better manage their risks. Such producer organizations can act as drivers for agricultural and rural development. They can become a form of inter-professional organization (bringing together different actors along the same commodity chain), enterprises with the necessary scale for production and marketing (SARDS, 2016).

SARDS emphasizes the need to promote the establishment of producer organizations as a way to professionalize the sector and overcome the barriers facing small and family farmers in Oman.

As first steps towards this direction, the Omani government, through Omani Food and Investment Holding (OFIC), has recently invested in several commodity companies, including large-scale milk collection operations in Dhofar, foreseeing milk collection from traditional animal breeders. These initiatives provide an opportunity for organized milk collection from small- to medium-sized producers, which can have a catalytic effect on animal productivity and collective rangeland management.

In addition, OFIC established two companies: the first is specialized in the production and packaging of dates; and the other for the production and marketing of vegetables and fruits. Both companies will focus heavily on small producers and agricultural associations.
2.2. Forms of collective action in Oman

Collective action in agriculture is not new to the Oman. Its roots have been formed by the people’s beliefs, faith, traditions and culture. Omani civil society in the modern sense was born and raised within the state. The state took upon itself the leadership of the development process of society and of state institutions from the early 1970s. In this context, the first non-governmental organization (NGO) was founded in Oman in 1972. With the issuance of the Royal Decree on the organization of clubs and associations in 1973, the number of associations has grown and diversified in terms of areas of application.

The Government of Oman has been promoting the establishment of agricultural associations that could assist in fostering and enhancing small-scale farmers’ development and other communities (MONE, 2009 quoted by Al-Anbari, 2016).

The main forms of collective action organizations that currently exist in Oman encompass agriculture, water resource management, fisheries resource management, the environment, and women.

Agricultural associations

The history of the development of agricultural associations in Oman has gone through three phases as, illustrated in the box that follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First phase (1973–1980)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural associations were approved after the issuance of the Royal Decree on the organization of clubs and associations in 1973. It was expected that these agricultural associations would be able to address the numerous challenges and constraints that Oman was experiencing in agriculture. These challenges facing farmers include inadequate information about market competitive conditions, the continuation of the Government’s presence as the main provider of services to the farmers, poor marketing and distribution systems, and, above all, the high cost of agricultural inputs, particularly technology (FAO, 2009 quoted by Al-Anbari, 2016). In total there were 20 agricultural associations until the early 1980s: 13 in Ad Dakhiliyah; four in Al Batinah, (three in South Al Batinah and one in North Al Batinah), two in Ad Dhahirah, and one in Ash Sharqeyah. It is possible that some regions may have had more associations due to greater agricultural potential or commercial activity, or it may have been that this spatial distribution reflects an absence of studies or planning by the Government, which could be one main reason for the decline of these associations. However, this situation is the result of conjectures since documented evidence or studies that have examined the causes of failure of these associations do not exist.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| In 1982, the Government moved to set up the Public Authority for the Marketing of Agricultural Products (PAMAP). In the 1980s and 1990s, PAMAP played an active role in agricultural marketing in Oman, where it was distributing a quarter of the total production of vegetables and fruits (e.g. dates, lemon, banana and papaya). During this period, PAMAP provided ceiling prices for farmers as well as support towards production costs. Unfortunately, this public initiative faced difficulties due to lack of a sufficient financial subsidy from the Government, low prices of local crops, and competition from imported agricultural products (WTO, 2008). The most negatively affected group were the small farmers, who had little bargaining power with traders and faced low prices. Due to its continuing deterioration, the Government abolished PAMAP in 1999. Since the abolition of PAMAP, the reestablishment of agricultural associations has been initiated to support farmers, particularly with respect to enhancing the use of new technology and improving marketing, considered two of the most important issues faced by farmers (FAO, 2008). |

| **Third phase (after 2000)** |
| As a result of the efforts of some farmers in the province of Al Batinah to embrace the idea of creating an agricultural organization, in 2005, the Al Batinah Farmers’ Association based in Suwayq (Al Batinah region) was established, which received legal recognition in October 2009. It represented the first of a new wave of agricultural associations. |

2 Al Batinah is a major region that grows a wide variety of agricultural crops because of good soil fertility and larger than average farm sizes. According to the agricultural censuses of 2004 and 2013, it represented around 28 percent of the number of agricultural holdings, and around 44 percent of the total agricultural area in Oman in 2004, compared to 38 percent in 2013 (MOAF, 2013).
At present, there are five active agricultural associations, one in each region: Ad Dakhiliyah, Al Batinah, Ad Dhahirah, Dhofar and Ash Sharqeyah (Figure 3).

Table 1 summarizes the numbers, locations and types of associations that are still operating, as well as those which have ceased to function.

Figure 1. Distribution of agricultural associations in regions in Oman in 2016

Note: Numbers in green refer to the number of agricultural associations in each area in 2016

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2008 quoted by Al-Anbari, 2016)
Table 1. Type and number of associations in Oman

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type of Association</th>
<th>Closed</th>
<th>Operating</th>
<th>Name of operational Association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ad Dakhiliyah (Nizwa Al Jabal Al Akhdar)</td>
<td>Agricultural and marketing</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pomegranates Farmer Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Batinah (As Suwaiq)</td>
<td>Agricultural and marketing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Al Batinah Farmers’ Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ash Sharqiyyah (Ibra)</td>
<td>Agricultural and marketing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ash Sharqiyyah Farmers’ Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adh Dhahirah (Ibri)</td>
<td>Agricultural and marketing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adh Dhahirah Farmers’ Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhofar</td>
<td>Agricultural and marketing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dhofar Farmer’s association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Al-Anbari, 2016

Al Batinah Farmers’ Association

Participation in the association is voluntary. In 2013 it had 68 members and the membership fees were RO 100, RO 200 and RO 300 for small, medium and large farms, respectively, to cover its administrative costs. It provides its members with access to a number of services, including information and markets inside and outside Oman, expert advice, credit from banks, inputs, and capacity development training. The association has a reputation for using and adopting modern agricultural technology, finding solutions to barriers and constraints that farmers face, and educating farmers on appropriate use of agrochemicals (MOSD, 2010).

In February 2017, the decision from the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) to change the name of Al Batinah Farmers’ Association was issued. The name was changed to “Omani Agriculture Association”, and its scope has expanded to an apex association operating at the national level and bringing together all the regional associations under its umbrella. The newly named body is now representing farmers from across the country. The shift will give the farming community a stronger collective voice to put forward their demands and provide a common platform to share experiences and services with a view to developing the sector in a coordinated manner.

Agricultural Association of Al Dhahirah

The association was established in 2012. Its overall goal is to overcome obstacles facing its farmer members. It was established in the year 2012. The objectives of the association are similar to those of the Al Batinah Farmers’ Association.

Omani Association of Pomegranate Farmers in Jabal Al Akhdar

The Omani Association of Pomegranate Farmers in Jabal Al Akhdar (Agricultural Association of Alramman Farmers in Al-jabal Al’akhdar) was established in 2014 to address the obstacles facing pomegranate farmers. The objectives of the association are to: respond to the needs of its membership; instruct farmers to follow the best agricultural practices and organize the cultivation of pomegranate orchards; use modern technologies, irrigation systems and environmentally friendly pesticides; and participate in agricultural research exhibitions and seminars held inside and outside Oman.

Attempts were also made by the Sultan Qaboos University and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries to upgrade processing and marketing of rose water among a collective of young farmers; rose water is a unique product from Jabal Al Akhdar (Mbaga, 2013).
Experiences of these “commodity”-specific producer organizations could guide the development of other organizations in the country such as farmers organized around Omani honey and bee-related products.

**Collective action for managing water resources**

*» Aflaj system*

The aflaj system was born out of the collective need to manage the scarcity of water in arid environments. Village people organized themselves into associations for the extraction of groundwater through the construction of horizontal wells, known as aflaj or falaj. The horizontal wells were placed to such an elevation that water could be extracted and prioritized for the community needs, and water below the extraction level was left for ecological sustainability. Such an ingenious irrigation system dates back over 2,000 years and farmers exercised the main role in managing the system. Today there are about 3,000 falaj in Oman, totally managed by farmers except for few interventions by the Ministry of Regional Municipality and Water Resources (MRMWR). In fact, MRMWR has reported that more than 1,000 aflaj out of 4,112 have dried up, leaving 3,017 of them active.

The aflaj system enables the extraction of ground water to sustainably use it for irrigation and household purposes. It is an effective method of water distribution in which the water of each falaj is allocated on an equitable basis to all users, in accordance with certain fixed and recognized rules passed down through several generations. It is worth highlighting that the sustainability of this system stems from the two important considerations: lowering financial costs and avoiding the use of mechanical tools to carry water.

Ancient Omani populations had already integrated the food, water energy nexus through such innovation as the aflaj system.

Water, in its channel flow, is used in priority for drinking and then for mosques and forts, irrigating perennial crops (e.g. date palm) as well as seasonal crops, and drinking water for animals. Thus, water use is harmonized with need and sociocultural prioritization. The perennial palm trees have always been a source of long-term food security and multiple other uses. Water use decisions are taken collectively by village organizations with strong and cohesive social leadership institutions. Each farmer has a share of water depending on the size of his farming plot(s) and on his contribution to the falaj construction. Most Aflaj are fully owned by farmers, and some water shares are owned by the local communities or by charity organizations. The aflaj constitute an integrated ecosystem where thousands of people live, produce, consume and trade healthy fresh products. They provide a range of goods services ranging from food and livelihood security, housing, energy and health, social and cultural services as well as environmental services such as biodiversity and ecosystem, water conservation and restoration, climate regulation and carbon dioxide sequestration.

Thus, the falaj is more than a simple irrigation system. It also includes economic, social and management considerations. Beyond the technical engineering marvel, one has to recognize the sophistication of social organization to manage water in a sustainable and equitable way.

Life in the rural areas in Oman relies on these aflaj, and their maintenance is consequently a matter of life or death for the populations living around these traditional irrigation systems. This has encouraged farmers to depend on themselves to protect their water resources through the development of water management-based collective action. Currently the hierarchy of aflaj management is much simpler than it was in the past and is represented in Figure 2.

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1. Aflaj is the plural of “falaj”, which means “split into parts” in classical Arabic. It refers to an irrigation system which catches mountain water and controls its movements down man-made subterranean channels, found in Oman.
Any water-right holder has the right to attend the General Assembly and participate in the decisions, which are not taken based on “one man, one vote” but rather according to the number of water rights. The audit committee is usually formed by three to six members from the general assembly of water rights’ holders and has a mandate for one or two years. The audit committee members serve as volunteers and are not paid for their services. In their auditing they compare the falaj financial report produced by the manager with the documents provided by the cashier and the water distribution agent.

The falaj manager is the chief executive officer and makes all decisions related to management and maintenance of the falaj according to the rules and regulations established by the general assembly. The manager is also the first person in charge of resolving conflicts among water rights holders. The functions of the falaj manager (Zekri and Al-Marshudi, 2008) are to:

- lease out common water rights;
- make decisions regarding operation and maintenance of the falaj;
- decide on the extra amounts to be paid by rights holders for any exceptional maintenance expenses;
- report to water rights holders on expenses and returns on a yearly basis; and
- resolve water conflicts between farmers.

The cashier, technician and water distribution agent all work under the responsibility of the manager.

One of the major limitations of this aflaj system is the lack of evolution of the traditional organizational management and the social changes that the country has been experiencing in the last decades. The aflaj organization did not evolve to encompass new activities and roles such as marketing and equipment-sharing. Historically, farmers have had no difficulties in marketing their products derived from the aflaj production. However, international trade exchanges due to globalization have been flooding the Omani markets with agricultural products from all over the world. This led to an excess of production of the main aflaj products (e.g. dates). Thus, the import of subsidized dates from neighbouring countries as well as the substitution of dates by other fruits decreased the market demand for such products. Regarding social change, the rural migration of the elite to the cities for better-paid jobs and the flow of unskilled expatriate workers have replaced the Omani labour force in rural areas. These limitations have caused the institutional evolution of the falaj producer organization to come to a halt. To revive the falaj producer organization and modernize its functioning, there is a need for a number of social and economic innovations to occur. Among others, it is important to envisage a land consolidation programme and attract young farmers who will be able to generate a satisfactory income and help the farmers organize themselves in the supply of inputs and marketing of agricultural products.

**Oman Water Association**

The Oman Water Association was established in Muscat Governorate in 2010 in accordance with Ministerial Resolution No. 40/2010. It is a charitable, voluntary,
non-profit organization, and its membership consists of professionals working in the Government and private sector who are involved in the water management, water supply and water projects. The broad objective of the association is to create a platform for professionals with an interest in water to enhance their knowledge by exchanging ideas and research, discussing challenges, and being apprised of the latest technology.

The organizational structure of the Oman Water Association is presented in the Figure 3.

**Figure 3. Organizational chart of the Oman Water Association**

![Organizational Chart](http://www.omanws.org.om/en/page/organizational_structure)


**Fisheries resource management**

**Evolution**

Fisheries management in Oman evolved from community management to state management and then settled to the current co-management by community and state. Al-Oufi (1999) has documented the evolutionary process of fisheries management in Oman in three phases, as follows.

1. Before 1970: Community-based management (Senate Al-Bahar) of fisheries
3. 1997-present: State-controlled and government-sponsored co-management
The box that follows describes this evolution.

### Box 2

**Phase 1 (before 1970): Community-based management (Senate Al-Bahar)**

Coastal fisheries in Oman were managed by an indigenous management institution known as Senate Al-Bahar (code of the sea) which has evolved over centuries. This institution had mechanisms to manage/restrain fish catch and other fisheries-related activities both at sea and on land.

Senate Al-Bahar has been chaired by a charismatic leader with good credibility and experience. The responsibilities of the institution were to:

» devise rules to conserve fisheries and prevent depletion;
» address technological externalities and assignment problems; and
» devise local accords to address common problems.

This community management institution on fisheries management in Oman was sustainable, as the boundaries of resource extraction were well identified, access to the fisheries was controlled by users, and the institution’s role and rights were recognized by the political and legal systems (Al Oufi, 1999).

**Phase 2 (1970-1997): State control of the fisheries**

With the radical changes in the socio-economic and political spheres that were associated with the abundant exploitation of oil since 1970, the community-based resource management institutions, including fisheries resource management, were subject to erosion and change. Thus, community authority and rights were superseded by government control over fisheries resources. In the 1970s, a Fisheries Development Program was initiated, and by the 1980s the Royal Decree RDS3/1981 and Ministerial Decision, MD3/1982 (known as the Fisheries Act of 1981) were instituted. Fisheries management was the responsibility of the Government both nationally and regionally.

By the early 1990s, inshore resources of Oman were witnessing the symptoms of overfishing for kingfish, lobster, abalone and other demersal species. During the late 1990s, the problem of fisheries resources continued to grow, and alternative methods of resource use and management were explored, leading to phase 3: co-management of fisheries resources.

**Phase 3 (1997 to present): State control and state-sponsored co-management institutions**

Co-management is a collaborative and participatory process of regulatory decision-making between representatives of user-groups, government, research institutions and other stakeholders. In Oman, the Government retains the final authority for decisions related to the co-management institution of fisheries, but consults with Senate community-based committees for decisions to be made and on management issues.

### Senate Al-Bahar co-management system

Senate Al-Bahar is organized as a co-managed committee chaired by the Wali (local governor) and has as its members: Shura (Oman council) member (1); fishers’ representative (500:1); and ministry representative (1). The committees meet four times a year.

**The committees’ responsibilities are to:**

» monitor compliance with management regulations;
» resolve conflicts arising from fisheries-related issues;
» review fisheries regulations; and
» work toward improved fishery management decisions.

Since its establishment in 1997, a number of fisheries regulations have been reviewed. Al-Oufi (1999) observes that the co-management system of government-sponsored institutions, although officially recognized, had been ineffective since it did not represent fishers and that little progress was achieved in the way coastal fisheries were managed. However, it is noted that only few years had passed since the initiation of the co-management approach and it may be too early to conclude on the performance of the institution. Further, according to Al-Oufi (1999), local management committees have been faced with difficulties due to: the chairmanship of the committee being assigned to
the Wali who, in most cases, has no interest in fisheries; members having been selected by local political elites; fishers’ representation being limited; lack of power of its members; and irregularity or absence of holding meetings.

The environment — Omani Environmental Society

The Omani Environmental Society was established in Darsait, Muscat Governorate, in accordance with Ministerial Decision No. 2004/42 of 2004/3/9. The society is a non-profit voluntary charity organization. Its objectives are to:

» raise awareness among the public in all fields related to the environment;

» enable citizens to play an active role and volunteer to work on projects related to nature conservation and environmental protection;

» provide a space for exchanging views and information on environmental protection in Oman;

» cooperate with local, regional and global bodies and scientific and research organizations in issues of common interest related to the environment in Oman; and

» propose projects for field scientific research and participate in such projects where appropriate.

Livestock and rangeland resources

The rangelands of Oman occupy nearly 41 million feddans and are an important environmental asset and a source of the biodiversity and forage reserves. They provide around 4 percent of the animal feed needed for red meat livestock in Northern Oman and as much as 63 percent of the feed requirements in Dhofar in the south.

According to Royal Decree 8/2013 in its article (6), the “natural and improved grazing lands are state property for public interest benefits. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) shall define their physical limits; monitor its uses and its supervision in collaboration with the governmental entities responsible for livestock and population.” Article (7) of the same decree further defines the role of the governmental entities.

This decree has thus centralized decisions regarding the management and monitoring of the pasture land or grazing lands. Historically, all the decisions related to the uses and management of the grazing lands were in the hands of the local communities. In the nomadic system, grazing lands are the main source of livestock feed, and groups adopt a mobile strategy following availability of grazing within national borders. It prevails in the Nejd (desert) where Bedouin groups move with their livestock within their traditional tribal boundaries as well as to other sites within their region or governorate. These nomadic groups depend on camels and goats for subsistence and income. The transhumance system is formed by pastoralists, and agropastoralists’ herds and flocks depend fully or partially on grazing lands. This system is adopted by semi-sedentary groups that have permanent houses but practice seasonal movement from one area to another within their homelands. The diminishing role of traditional institutions and the abolition of their role in regulating and controlling the utilization of local resources (water, range and forests) has had a negative impact resulting in their open use and increased grazing pressure, and has accelerated the rate of resources degradation and desertification (Al-Mashakhi and Koll, 2007).

Collective associations empowering women

Only 10 percent of farms and less than 3 percent of land are held by women. The share of farmland held by women in 2013 decreased dramatically compared to the previous Agricultural Census when it represented 16 percent of total farmland. There are generally no women-only farmers’ associations. The MAF’s Rural Department undertakes the development programmes targeting women in rural areas.

The Ministry of Social Development supports and promotes the integration of Omani women in developmental processes and seeks to broaden the base for women’s voluntary work in terms of number and geographical locations.

Omani Women’s Associations are active in motivating the participation of women in voluntary social work. The first Omani National Women’s Association was established in Muscat in 1971. Since then, the number of associations has spread to various areas and wilayats (provinces) in Oman.

The total number of registered associations by the end of 2016 was 62, with a total membership of 10,441 (see table 2). The concerned governmental directorates and departments supervise these associations and assist their boards of directors to carry out their activities. These associations undertake many programmes and activities such as lectures, seminars and workshops, training courses, marketing exhibitions and other initiatives related to family aspects.
Table 2. Number of Omani women’s associations by Governorate in 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governorate</th>
<th>Muscat</th>
<th>Dhofar</th>
<th>Musandam</th>
<th>Albarimi</th>
<th>Aldakhilia</th>
<th>Shamal Albatina</th>
<th>Janub Albatina</th>
<th>Janub Alsharqia</th>
<th>Shamal Alsharqia</th>
<th>Alizzahira</th>
<th>Alwustaa</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of associations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), 2016

2.3 Institutional framework for collective action in Oman

Producer organizations in agriculture and fisheries

In Oman, the Constitution lays the groundwork for the creation of a favourable legal environment for producer organizations, as Article 33 guarantees “the freedom to form societies and associations”. It states that “the freedom of forming societies on national basis, for legitimate objectives, by peaceful means, and in a manner that does not conflict with the provisions and objectives of this Basic Statute, is guaranteed in accordance with the terms and conditions prescribed by the Law. It is prohibited to form societies, the activity of which is adverse to the order of society, secretive, or of a military nature. It is not permissible to force anyone to join any society.” In addition, Article 11 provides that “the national economy is based on justice and the principles of free economy”. Its essence is the constructive and fruitful cooperation between public and private entities.

However, apart from such provisions, there is no specific law that regulates producer organizations. These organizations fall under the Public Associations Law, promulgated by Royal Decree 14/2000 (the “Law”). This is a framework designed for charities and NGOs and completely leaves out the economic objectives that producer organizations should seek together with the social ones.

According to the Law, the Ministry of Social Development is the competent authority responsible for its implementation and for monitoring compliance with its provisions. Royal Decree 32/2003 determines the competencies of the Ministry of Social Development. It defines its organizational structure, mandates the Ministry to oversee the formation, registration and activities of public associations, as well as encourages public participation and cooperation with the Government in developmental projects.

The Ministry of Social Development is primarily responsible for permitting, guiding and monitoring associations in Oman. The Ministry, through such Law, and operationalized by the Department of Associations and Community Clubs, supervises NGOs, Omani women’s associations, charitable institutions, professional associations and social clubs of foreign communities. It ensures compliance with the provisions of the Law and the resolutions and regulations that it issues. It is important to underline that associations are not allowed to make profits. Thus, for-profit producer organizations cannot be formed under the current legislation. An association is defined by law as:

...any permanent group of natural persons organized to achieve purposes other than profit making and aiming at performing social, cultural or charitable activities. This includes associations, social and cultural clubs established by private institutions, companies or organizations, regardless of name given to them ...

The current legal framework does not have any provisions related to profit-making, business development, accumulation of capital, formation of joint ventures and partnerships, or access to technical knowledge and to national and international markets. Moreover, it does not address gender considerations to eliminate the obstacles faced by women and to promote their active participation in these organizations. The current restrictions imposed by the Law reveal an inability to accommodate producer organizations as a model of enterprise for the economic and social development of the country.

It is important to note that the MAF is also mandated by Royal Decree 68/2012 to encourage investment and private sector participation in the agricultural and fisheries sectors. However, there is no specific mandate
to support producer organizations in particular, or to facilitate their growth and development.

**Water resource management around Aflaj**

Other important legal provisions are the Omani Royal Decree 29/2000 concerning the protection of water wealth in Oman, Ministerial Decision 3/2019 concerning water wells, channels and Aflaj, and Royal Decree 39/2017 on organizing and protecting the Aflaj sites.

These decrees make a number of relevant points. The national water wealth is owned by the Government, protected and maintained to serve the national economy. Investing in the resources is only permitted as per the law for a specified timeframe, serving the national interest. There are definitions of Aflaj or falaj and of the personnel required for their management, and on the standards for water distribution. It is mentioned that falaj management and organization are practiced as per the national norms. The decrees indicate the need to obtain a license from MRMWR prior to any construction or maintenance work (e.g. for channels, Aflaj). Penalties are imposed if procedures are not followed. It is also mentioned that MRMWR is responsible for protecting and maintaining the falaj. Other legal articles point out the prohibition of transporting or selling water except for drinking water.

It is the responsibility of MRMWR and the Ministry of Legal Affairs to find a legal starting point to form a decree for Aflaj. However, the existing articles under the decrees for protecting water wealth would constitute the frame for forming the ministerial decision for Aflaj. In addition, article number 4 under the Royal Decree for Aflaj mentions that they are listed under International Heritage sites.

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4 At the time of the development of this document the Ministry of Regional Municipality and Water Resources (MRMWR) was in charge of the water resources. The water sector, is presently covered by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.
Coastal women cleaning freshly caught oysters in Masirah Island
3. A project for technical cooperation in Oman

3.1 Project objective, methodology and activities

The regional project TCP/RAB/3603 aimed to support the strengthening of producer organizations by promoting inclusive policies and programmes that reflect the needs of small-scale family farmers and contribute to their empowerment. The project had a duration of two years (from January 2017 to December 2018). However, due to delays in its inception the project was extended until December 2019. It focused on three countries from the Near East Region – Lebanon, Oman and Sudan – and was implemented under the umbrella of the Regional Initiative on Small-scale Family Farming, within the framework of the FAO Strategic Programme 3 “Reducing Rural Poverty”. Oman hosted the multistakeholder inception workshop in May 2017, where project objectives and potentialities of rural organizations were discussed.

The objective of the project was “to provide a basis for the formulation of plans of action for developing the capacities of producer organizations and to improve their performance and their linkages with markets.”

The project was conceived around three major areas of implementation:

1. Analysis of the existing legal framework for producer organizations in Oman and participatory discussion;

2. Knowledge generation through literature review on the role of collective action and participatory mapping and profiling of producer organizations, followed by national-level discussions for building a vision and common plan of action for the development of producer organizations; and

3. Organizational development through pilot activities with target groups and implementation of two study tours.

The project methodology was driven by a participatory approach and adult learning theories. According to these approaches, adults can learn and change when individuals engage in practical activities (DO), look back at that activity (ANALYSE, REFLECT), abstract some useful information (GENERALIZE), and puts the results to work (PLAN). Through its implementation steps, the project encompassed concrete activities ranging from pilots and study tours, to critical analysis conducted by experts (e.g. legal expert, Sultan Qaboos University researchers), to self-evaluation by the target groups on organizational performance, to planning during the national dialogue to build a common vision.

Such activities supported the participants to take ownership of their own learning and change process and to maximize exchanges among them. The project placed great emphasis on sharing experiences and good practices and in the exploration of innovative and practical solutions to challenges that producer organizations face. The study tours to Lebanon and Italy represented dedicated moments for analysis, reflection and planning related to the experience of collective action through cooperatives in different contexts.

A detailed description of the project activities is provided in Annex 1.

3.2 Project findings

The findings are a combination of the findings from the mapping and profiling study undertaken by Sultan Qaboos University as well as the findings gathered during the participatory pilot events carried out with the three target groups: the Omani Agricultural Association; the Aflaj; and the Coastal Women of Masirah island.
Omani Agricultural Association

Among the three agricultural associations that were surveyed in the participatory profiling, the oldest is the Farmers’ Association in Al Batinah, registered in 2009 with the Ministry of Social Development. As previously highlighted in section 1, the associations registered with the Ministry of Social Development are not expected to pursue profit or commercial objectives. This was identified by all the presidents of the farmers’ associations as a constraining factor to promoting commercial activities and accessing formal financial sources, through farmers’ associations. Therefore, in order for farmers to perform any commercial activity, they have to create a commercial business separated from the association. This is what some members of Omani Agricultural Association have been doing.

In addition, the process of registering as an association was mentioned to be a time-consuming effort. Having witnessed the success of the Omani Agricultural Association in Al Batinah and the government’s recognition of farmers’ association, new farmers’ associations were initiated in the other regions, such as in Adhahira and North Asharqiyah. The membership numbers in these associations range from 42 to about 200, indicating that the associations have substantial potential to grow.

The membership fees per year are based on farm/land size. It is noteworthy that Adhahira farmers’ association offers free membership to women to encourage their participation. Thus, Adhahira farmers’ association has women members whereas the other two associations do not include any women members. However, the Al Batinah Farmer Association has recently opened its membership to women as a result of the different workshops that were held as part of the FAO-funded project. As a result, one woman farmer joined the association. Table 3 summarizes the key features of the farmers’ associations.

Table 3. Characteristics of farmers’ associations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farmers’ Associations</th>
<th>Year of registration</th>
<th># of members</th>
<th># of women members</th>
<th>Annual membership fee (OR)</th>
<th>Formed by</th>
<th>Initial Funding by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Batinah</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100 if &lt; than 10 feddans 200 if &lt; than 25 feddans 300 if &gt; than 25 feddans</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adhahira</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50 for men; Free for women</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Asharqiyah</td>
<td>Not yet</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100 entrance &amp; 40/year</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pomegranates Farmer Association</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Omani Agricultural Association, 2018

Farming is the main income-generating activity (full time farming) of most members of the Al Batinah Farmers’ Association while in Dhahirah and Asharqiyah farmers’ associations, only 50 percent and 70 percent of members, respectively are in full-time farming.

The farm size of members ranges from 1-100 feddans in Batinah, 3-40 feddans in Dhahirah and 6-80 feddans in Asharqiyah. This indicates that the sizes of farm of members of the farmers’ association are generally large as compared to the national average farm size in Oman.

The Al Batinah Farmers’ Association has conducted programmes on extension, input procurement and output marketing on behalf of its members. Training has been conducted on the use of safe and environmentally friendly pesticides and on best practices for open land and greenhouse crop cultivation. Through a competitive bidding process, the farmers’ association has arranged for its members to purchase agricultural inputs at relatively cheap prices, compared to individual purchase prices. The farmers’ association has engaged in contract farming with its members, with pre-agreed quantities, qualities and prices of crops, and has undertaken sorting, packing and selling of their produce to local and export markets.

The Dhahirah Farmers’ Association has conducted extension programmes on best crop practices and has organized the supply of agrochemicals and packages/
boxes. The association has undertaken collective transportation/marketing of vegetables to the Mawaleh wholesale vegetable market. It has also initiated a “WhatsApp” group to share market information on crops and to coordinate collective marketing of crop products.

Asharqiyah Farmers’ Association has conducted collective marketing of crop products. It has also engaged in contractual farming with the Al Batinah Farmers’ Association. Farmer members of the association have been consolidating land mainly by a process of formal rent, given their success in management. Most of them started with medium-size farms and were able to expand thanks to economies of scale and the marketing services offered by the association.

The major crops cultivated by the members of the farmers’ associations are shown in the Table 4 by order of importance (from left to right). Individual farmers cultivate a mix of crops. Al Batinah Farmers’ Association cultivates produce mostly for export. This has raised the standards and quality of vegetable products supplied to the local market. Wheat produced by the Dhahirah Farmers’ Association has a niche market that fetches relatively high prices (0.800 OR/kg). The Pomegranates Farmer Association produces pomegranates mainly, with very marginal production of other fruits.

Table 4. Crops cultivated by farmers’ associations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Association</th>
<th>Crops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Batinah</td>
<td>Tomato, Capsicum/chili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eggplant, Pumpkin, Cabbage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legumes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhahirah</td>
<td>Alfalfa, Dates, Wheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Garlic, Onion, Tomato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cucumber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asharqiyah</td>
<td>Cucumber, Watermelon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tomato, Sweet melon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pomegranates</td>
<td>Pomegranate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer Association</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Omani Agricultural Association, 2018

Al Batinah Farmers’ Association has received land from the Government on which it has built an office complex and vegetable sorting, packaging and chilling storage facilities. The MAF has promised to grant land to the Dhahirah Farmers’ Association. The association has received a 10-ton refrigerated truck as a donation from the Oman India Fertilizer Company. On the date of the participatory profiling, the association had a running balance of OR 5,100 in its bank account. The Asharqiyah Farmers’ Association did not have any assets to declare. Based on the survey results, a farmers’ association owns on average about 28.5 feddans of land. The presidents of all these associations mentioned the lack of sufficient infrastructure, land, office space and storage as constraints faced by farmers’ associations. Currently the office bearers of the associations work on a voluntary base.

The pilot event organized by the project with the Al Batinah Farmers’ Association offered an important space for dialogue among the association’s leadership, its members, some women producers who could become future members, and the representatives of MAF. The four-day pilot workshop allowed exchanges at on value chain management, organic production and marketing strategies as well as on various organizational development aspects.

On the topic of organic farming, an exercise was given to the participants to express their interest, their goal and how to reach it within the coming five years, and on their ambitions on the intended market (local or international). Most of the working groups underlined:

» the importance of building awareness among schools and the general public, especially on the health benefits of organic products;

» the importance of working on local legislations and certification approved by the Omani Government;

» the desire that organic Omani products could compete locally and be exported as well, and

» the desire to have more organic farms in Oman, building partnerships between the Government and the farmer organizations.
Regarding organizational development and change, the president of the association (Sheikh Saed Al Kharousi) explained the history of its establishment. The organizational structure was formed in coordination with MAF. At government level, Omani Agricultural Association is referred to as the “mother” organization. Each branch of the association in each governorate has independent management and a financial board. Board members from the mother organization represent all the branches of the governorates. In each governorate, there is an elected board with an organizational structure matching that of the mother organization. All agricultural sectors are present under the umbrella of the mother organization. In each governorate there are units covering all agricultural sectors. The mother organization is working to establish an executive management and is seeking ways to finance its functioning. In this way, the association will be able to develop income-generating projects that would enable it to provide a range of services for its member farmers.

Major issues underlined during the pilot included the following: the improvement of a unified leadership in the Omani Agricultural Association, including women. It was proposed that a woman representative be included in the Executive Committee as she could better reflect the interests and needs of women producers; the idea of establishing a women’s factory cooperative for processing dried tomatoes; the importance of undertaking an awareness-raising campaign for schools and the general public on organic farming; the importance of advocating for local legislation and certification for organic farming approved by the Government; and the importance of improving internal communication within the association, as its structure is not clear to many members.

**Aflaj**

Aflaj are an ancient institutions that primarily manage water allocation and maintenance of falaj irrigation systems (see section 1 for detailed description). The number of members around a falaj depends on the irrigated land area (25–570 feddans) and its ownership. It is evident that the membership number ranges between 50 and 3,000 among the surveyed aflaj. Considering the total land area under a falaj and the membership in a falaj, it could be deduced that farms are very small (about 0.5 feddans or less). This is in contrast to the large farm sizes of the members of newly formed farmers’ associations. Women’s membership and participation are also prevalent in the life of aflaj.

### Table 5. General characteristics of a sample of Aflaj associations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Falaj</th>
<th># of members</th>
<th># of women members</th>
<th>Registered with</th>
<th>Size in feddans</th>
<th>Sources of income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Misfat Al- Abryeen</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>MRMWR</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Philanthropy/Waqaf rent OR 150/year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanouf</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>MRMWR</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Water lease once a year OR 2400-4165/year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daris</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>Few</td>
<td>Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MARA) 2010</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>Water lease once a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accounting control by Ministry every 2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Khatmayen</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>MRMWR</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Agricultural land lease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Real estate 16 shops rented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirshaa</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>MRMWR</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Water/land lease OR 1000/ year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Ghantaq</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>MRMWR &amp; MARA</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Water/land lease OR 1000/ year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Ministry Of Regional Municipal And Water Resources, 2018*
The aflaj are generally registered under the MRMWR as they are primarily viewed as water management institutions. Two of them are registered with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MARA) besides being registered with the MRMWR. In fact, the MARA owns significant proportions of aflaj land and water and has a say in the nomination of the falaj manager proposed by the community as well as in the auditing of the financial reports in several cases. Thus, it is noted that some aflaj are registered under both ministries.

The main source of income is drawn from water and/or land leases. A few aflaj receive income from other sources such as renting property and contributions from philanthropists. It was mentioned that the MARA oversees the accounts of those falaj registered under their umbrella. The income collected is spent on maintenance of the primary and secondary channels. In several cases, the maintenance of aflaj is undertaken with the support of expatriate labour due to the aging Omani farming population and the reluctance of the young Omani generations to learn about and contribute to their maintenance. In the past, all the village population contributed to the maintenance of a falaj if any serious problem occurred that would stop the flow of water from the falaj. Today, most houses in the villages are connected to a potable water network and hence no longer depend on the falaj for their domestic water. This has caused voluntarism to shrink. However, villagers are still contributing to their maintenance; as an example, the Kirshaa falaj organizes an annual summer camp for its maintenance. The aflaj have not undertaken any activities other than water allocation and falaj maintenance.

Aflaj-based farms mostly cultivate dates and other fruit trees and grass for animals. Only about 10-15 percent of farmers depend solely on earnings from farming for their livelihood.

Regarding assets owned by the aflaj, at the time of the survey, Falaj Daris and Falaj Al Ghantaq had received monetary compensation for expropriation of falaj land used by the municipality for road expansion. Falaj Daris has OR 350,000 in a bank account; Falaj Tanuf received OR 360 from rent earned from three land parcels (each 500m2); Falaj Misfat Al Abryeen possessed 1 feddan of land; and Falaj Al Khatmayen owns 16 shops and agricultural land that is rented.

Aflaj are non-governmental institutions similar to water user associations. Some of them do receive support from the Government for heavy maintenance work, but this is not guaranteed and depends on the very limited funds available at MRMWR. They have always depended on their own resources. Out of the six Aflaj considered in the mapping, only two have benefited from government financial support: Falaj Daris in 2014 and Misfaat Al Abryeen in 2015. Aflaj do not have access to any formal sources of funding or credit from banks because they cannot provide collateral and are not farm producer organizations that generate profit to repay debt. However, financial support from villagers and philanthropists has in many cases rescued the aflaj financial situation.

One additional major constraint in the financial management of the aflaj, at least for those registered under MARA, is the stranglehold of MARA on the financial assets owned by aflaj and located in banks. Falaj managers require prior authorization from MARA for any use of these liquid assets even though the Ministry is a minor shareholder of the aflaj. In addition, there is the issue of the speed and lack of response of MARA to requests made by aflaj managers. In principle, the liquid assets do not contribute any income to the falaj. Consequently, there is often an urgent need to use these liquid assets to buy properties, such as commercial buildings, to avoid devaluation of the liquid assets as a consequence of inflation. Rent from properties would help pay for proper maintenance. Aflaj managers are requesting the activation of the written traditional laws, called “Nizwa Paper on Aflaj”, regarding assets management, which is available at MARA for the interest of all stakeholders and the sustainability of the aflaj in Oman. Managers agree on the role of MARA to supervise and control the assets but propose to revise the system to make it less interventionist for running current operations.

During the participatory profiling, five out of six falaj managers affirmed that several members are willing to take over the position of falaj manager in the future, despite the lack of financial incentives. Many do take this responsibility very seriously and consider that preserving the falaj is part of the inheritance and tradition that need to be protected and sustained. Most of the current aflaj managers are young to middle-age. This shows that leadership and management of the aflaj is still part of the life of the villages. In the past, aflaj survived due to the proper remuneration of the managers and committees. Such a tradition needs to be recognized and strengthened for a better future. Voluntarism might work for a period but is often not sufficient to motivate young new managers to take on the job and thus ensure the sustainability of the aflaj system. On the other hand, the size of the farms is becoming too small to ensure a sustainable production of agricultural products. For example, some properties barely reach a few square meters in Misfaat Al Abryeen, where people own one or two palm trees. In order for owners to maintain their interest in the falaj, there is an
urgent need to look into the issue of land tenure, based on the interests of those farmers for whom farming is a main source of income.

In terms of policies, most managers insisted on the need for a strict implementation of the laws regarding aflaj protection. These laws are partially issued by MRMWR and some of them are traditional laws that need to be revived. MARA should also contribute financially to the cost of maintenance of the aflaj proportionally to the water/land rights it owns.

The pilot event offered the space for an important dialogue among relevant stakeholders on:

- the current situation of the aflaj;
- the benefits of collective action to advance their effectiveness;
- the legal framework;
- main ideas for future activities.

The current situation was analysed by the participants through a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, which revealed several important points for reflection and discussion, which are summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6. Major issues from the SWOT analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>» Aflaj are the basic irrigation source for 30% of agriculture in Oman</td>
<td><strong>Legal level</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» Aflaj are capable of transferring water to large areas without the need to invest in expensive machineries</td>
<td>» Ineffectiveness of the regulatory norms in Oman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» There is a need for continuity of water provision until time of water pulling</td>
<td>» Lack of aflaj associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» The aflaj form a real foundation for social cohesion</td>
<td>» Legal definitions of personnel, management and assets of aflaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» The falaj provides an economic benefit to the village</td>
<td><strong>Managerial level</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» the falaj is a tourist attraction</td>
<td>» Keeping specific records for aflaj and everything related to it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Lack of official designs for aflaj “mother stream: or sources and channels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Unclear terms for falaj management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Lack of involvement of falaj managers in the planning for improvement, maintenance and investment of aflaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Organizational level</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Confusion in the falaj management hierarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Lack of cooperation among concerned stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Financial level</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Limitation in returns from investments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Lack of financial liability for the falaj manager (Wakil)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» High maintenance cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Lack of accountability from the side of beneficiaries and some governmental entities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Human resources level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Lack of qualified labourers, and lack of interest of Omani youth in aflaj</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Opportunities

- Founding of organization specialized in Aflaj matters, with divisions in various governorates of Oman; establishment of an organization for Aflaj, with branches in various Governorates of Oman
- Identification of innovative advanced techniques for irrigation and its management
- Establishment of research centres specialized in aflaj
- Diversification in economic sources (new and innovative)
- Provision of work opportunities in aflaj sector
- Provision of organic food products
- Promotion of and contribution to touristic investment
- Motivation for reviving the non-functional aflaj
- Establishment of dams for water elevation and water feeding for aflaj

### Threats

#### Infrastructural
- Development of wells on the same spot of falaj mother
- Deterioration of underground water channels, deterioration of aflaj infrastructure
- Lack of specialized maintenance companies and skilled labour for aflaj maintenance
- Lack of advanced and efficient techniques for aflaj maintenance
- Lack of detailed designs for aflaj underground channels

#### Environmental
- Establishment of industrial areas polluting aflaj area
- Sewage water affecting the aflaj
- No efforts to protect the aflaj
- Water recession, pollution and lack of sustainability

#### Social
- Irresponsible overuse of aflaj water
- No maintenance for aflaj establishments
- Lack of awareness on the importance of aflaj and lack of involvement of Omani youth
- Lack of responsible entity to keep records and documentation related to management and ownership
- Absence of specialized organization in aflaj asset management
- Establishment of industrial or commercial project on pathways of aflaj

#### Economic
- Agriculture production is affected by the aflaj functionality
- Absence of economic fund for aflaj

### Source: Author’s own elaboration

An important part of the pilot was devoted to the discussion on the existing legal framework for the aflaj and the level of awareness existing around it. The national legal expert facilitated an open discussion session using a participatory approach to share and discuss the current situation of aflaj in Oman from a legal point view. The major findings are discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

**Legal texts.** The falaj is an institution privately managed according to norms. It has owners, entitles rights to its stakeholders, generates income and incurs costs. It is an established institution going back hundreds of years and several laws exist, including customary laws, that are well known to aflaj managers. However, participants recommended that one legal text could encompass all the provisions for aflaj.

**Management and stakeholders.** The management personnel and stakeholders of the falaj are the following: the families or owners of lands irrigated by the falaj, Sheikhs and leaders of tribes, Al Wakil, Al Aarif, Al Beydar, and Al Dallal. Sheikhs of the tribes are legitimate to supervise the falaj management. They are considered as decision-makers and the link between aflaj (village) and the government. Al Wali / al Hakem / Al Kadi are known to be the legislative figures for the falaj. Wakil is the manager of falaj responsible for maintenance, supervision of ownership, management of lands and farms, and record-keeping. He is the representative of owners. Hence, the falaj could be compared to any other institution with a management board and designated committee members. In this case, the owners are part of the board members and the Wakil is the general manager. Al Wakil must consult
the owners on any decision regarding investment opportunities. The box below summarizes also the different tasks.

» **Arif** is responsible for calculating the shares of water and its distribution.

» **Baydar** is the person who is responsible for channeling the water to the lands

» **Al Dallal** manages the auctions for renting the waters.

» **Amin al Noskha** who keeps the book where ownerships and owners are registered

» **Kateb Al Noskha** who transfers the ownerships

**Financial assets.** The financial assets of the falaj are lands, buildings and falaj shares. It is a complex system; ownership titles are issued under the name of Awkaf (endowments). Aflaj assets can be bought and sold based on norms; they can also be leased or put in auction. The families/landowners are the direct beneficiaries of the aflaj and are directly affected by their performance and water quotas.

**Legal framework.** After an intensive debate, the workshop participants agreed on the advantage of establishing a clear legal framework for the falaj as it would allow responsibilities and assignments to be defined. It would also provide a clear legal structure for aflaj and give liability and protection to serve future generations. A total of 1,200 falaj have ceased to function. Efforts should go towards protecting and developing the functioning ones. The Ministry of Heritage and Culture issued certain norms for aflaj. These norms could be used as supporting and background documents for the development of a future legislation related to aflaj.

The participants identified a number of important points to be considered in the formulation of one single updated legal text that includes all the relevant provisions for aflaj:

» Legislation should always be formulated in a way to maintain the historic property of aflaj. It should also consider the specificity of each falaj, allowing for flexibility.

» The law must specify who regulates and is directly responsible for designing the channels of the falaj.

» Legislation should be clear regarding endowments and the proper registration methods for ownership.

» The law should define the terms of falaj personnel and beneficiaries, such as the definition of the falaj owners, the difference between the falaj families and the falaj owners, and endowments.

» The text should define the entity to refer to in case of conflict (the judiciary body or Wakil?).

» The text should define the relation between the government and the owners.

» The text should define the accountability of Wakil and other personnel.

The national legal expert directed the discussion to the importance of having a collaborative entity for aflaj to enhance collective work, improve revenue and better serve its members and the community.

The participants suggested that Ministry of Social Affairs could work on the issuance of executive regulations specific to aflaj organizations, such as formulating the legal procedure for the establishment of the organization, its role, governance, and financial management, in addition to detailing the supervision role of the Ministry. They also suggested that all relevant government ministries could collaborate as a Drafting Committee to issue the legal framework for Aflaj. Falaj technical staff and stakeholders should be consulted and contribute with their technical expertise in developing the framework.

An initial discussion also started among the participants on the next steps after the pilot. A strong desire was expressed to establish an **apex falaj association bringing together all the falaj that could represent their voice and interest**. In addition, some projects relating to the development of initiatives combining tourism and agriculture around aflaj were also mentioned. The need for technical support in introducing technologies to keep up with the modernization that encounters the aflaj was also clearly expressed.

**Coastal Women of Masirah island**

The mapping and profiling concerned the surveyed women’s association of the Masira Wilayah and part of Wusta Wilayah in Mahoot, with a membership of 60 handicraft trainee women and 242 professional handicraft women. The major economic activities of this association are fisheries (50 percent), handicrafts...
(45 percent), and producing fisheries accessories (5 percent).

This association does not have a constitution which organizes and guides its activities. In addition, it does not have clear vision, mission and goal statements, nor does it have membership, gender, business or operational policies.

The association has a good network of relationships with a number of large private sector companies. Table 7 summarizes the main features of coastal women’s associations.

**Table 7. Characteristics of coastal women’s associations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Association</th>
<th>Number of members</th>
<th>Registered with</th>
<th>Assets</th>
<th>Source of income</th>
<th>Source of financial funding</th>
<th>Annual membership fees (OR/year)</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masirah Sahelian Women Association</td>
<td>35 female 30 male</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fishery products (20% of members) Handcrafts (30% of members) Other products (5% of members)</td>
<td>Individuals + Government grants (OR 1000 for one year)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fisheries Accessories Handcrafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omani Women Association in Masirah</td>
<td>110 female 15 male</td>
<td>Ministry of Social Development</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fishery products (80% of the members). Handcrafts (20% of the members). Other products (90% of the members).</td>
<td>Ministry of Social Development (OR 10,000 for one year) MAF</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fisheries Accessories Handcrafts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Author’s own elaboration*

The pilot activity was carried out in Masirah island, where the main economic activities are related to the fisheries sector. However, the way in which activities are organized and carried out reveal their fragility, considering also that this is an area isolated from the mainland and its population has a number of needs. Oyster production is in the hands of elderly women belonging to the coastal communities and there is no hand-over to, or involvement of, youth in this activity, making it very vulnerable for the future. The pilot event was an opportunity for the women producers to be exposed to a capacity development activity that will help them reflect on the path they wish to take for their future development. The pilot also offered the space to re-establish a dialogue among the leadership of the Omani Women Association and some of its membership.

The participants of the pilot event developed a common vision for their future:

**In five years time, a coastal’s women association is created to produce quality production with a good global reputation and capable of an efficient use of resources.**

The event also revealed the difficulties and tensions existing among the selected fishery women producers. An important gap appeared to exist among the President of the Omani Women Association, operating in Masirah, and the membership of that association (women producers, among others). For instance, one of the action areas of the work plan was about the creation of a Coastal Women Committee under the umbrella of the Omani Women Association to
support the development and growth of coastal women’s activities. The President of the Omani Women Association explained that such a committee exists but is not fulfilling its role due to a lack of motivation of its members. This topic was particularly sensitive among the participants, and consensus was not reached on the action plan. It was agreed that a follow-up discussion between the President of the Association and the membership would be needed and would be facilitated by FAO to achieve the vision developed by the participants.

The major recommendations emerging from the pilot were:

» the creation of a renewed Coastal Women Committee under the Omani Women Association;

» the need to rethink the working process that responds better to the needs of the coastal women (e.g. working hours, income);

» the need for financial support to create the committee, including setting up governance and managerial structures, purchasing equipment, enhancing marketing skills of coastal women, among others; and

» the implementation of trainings and a coaching programme for coastal women in different areas such as management, leadership, accounting, marketing, production and packaging.
3. A project for technical cooperation in Oman

3. GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL SECTOR/RURAL LIVELIHOODS

Farmers sharing knowledge with one another in Al Batinah South Governorate
3. GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL SECTOR/RURAL LIVELIHOODS

2 local women walking by a falaj in Misfat Al Abreen, Al Dakhiliyya Governorate

©MAFWR
4. Conclusions and next steps

The major conclusions that may be drawn from the activities and findings of the project are related to two main areas: the enabling environment for producer organizations; and the performance of collective action in Oman.

4.1 On the enabling environment for producer organizations

For the development priorities of Oman, there is a strong potential and need to support the formation of well-functioning producer organizations in the agriculture sector. The forming and functioning of associations in Oman have been allowed by a legal setting stipulating the possibility to establish non-profit organizations by the Ministry of Social Development. This remains to be a constraint to forming profit-oriented commercial farmers’, fisheries’ and other types of member-based organizations (e.g. cooperatives). There is no legal framework to establish cooperatives in Oman. The legislation only allows for the establishment of either associations (non-profit) or for-profit companies (with limited responsibility). A cooperative would aim at both commercial and social activities. A cooperative is owned and managed by its members to serve the interests of the community. However such a socially oriented business model is not yet regulated in Oman.

The introduction of new legislation is a relevant need for the country. A new law is needed that recognizes agricultural and fisheries producer organizations as a distinct form of economic enterprise, to reflect their specific character with both social and economic features and objectives, and allow them sufficient flexibility and independence to act as autonomous institutions. The law should also contain gender-sensitive measures that ensure that women have equal access to such organizations and are represented at the leadership level.

Should the process of creating new legislation become protracted and complex, intermediary options could be evaluated, such as an amendment to the existing legislation.

The effort to introduce a specific producer organization law for agriculture and fisheries or to amend the existing law will need to be initiated and coordinated by the MAF, since it is the Ministry responsible for the development of the agricultural and fisheries sector.

4.2 On collective action

Collective action takes place when the balance between the gains from the associative effort and the costs related to initiating the process from its creation to its development is positive. The gains from cooperative action in farmer organizations, based on international experience, enable small producers to:

- enhance their access to and management of natural resources;
- access input and output markets;
- improve their access to information and knowledge; and
- facilitate their participation in policy-making.

Several studies and reviews on the agriculture sector in Oman have revealed that these aspects are operating weakly but that there is potential to improve and thus provide benefits to farmers. In the past, the existence of community associations in the country indicated that the transactions costs to initiate collective action were absorbed by the community associations. However, the important socio-economic-political changes that have occurred since the 1970s may have had negative implications on transaction costs for initiating collective associations. If such transaction costs are high, state support may be needed to initiate
the formation of such associations.

In Oman, fisheries collective resources management is undermined by the existence of different interests, most notably between full-time and part-time fishers, and between small-scale traditional fisher groups and industrial fishing. Part-time fisher groups, having secured another source of income, may feel much less concerned about conservation of fish resources than full-time fishers, whose subsistence crucially depends upon the state of these resources since they lack alternative income opportunities.

The more homogeneous the community is in terms of resource ownership, income generation, access to credit, and assets, the better its potential will be to cooperate in forming and engaging in collective action organizations.

In the case of farming, one scenario has been widely noted (Kotagama, 2014, SARDS, 2016): the prevalence of part-time farming, where Omani owners of farms are rarely involved in direct farming and expatriate labour is largely used. The prevalence of many very small and scattered subsistence “farms” and the existence at the same time of some larger commercial farms could pose a challenge in forming farmer organizations that are inclusive of all farmers (small and large). At the same time, the growth of Al Batinah Farmers’ Association as a national apex organization may benefit and influence the formation of producer organizations among small farmers, too, and/or their joining with the existing structures.

Heterogeneity in collective action among farming communities may arise not only in the form of resource ownership and income generation but also from differences in skills, assets, technology and access to credit, as well as cultural divisions. The factors characterizing heterogeneity need to be carefully considered.

The results of the project mapping, participatory profiling and pilots suggests that new commercially oriented farmers’ associations are evolving and striving for efficient performance, despite the legal limitations preventing them from functioning as profit-seeking associations. There is the clear possibility to improve the existing associations and organizations (aflaj, coastal women, farmer organizations) through the development of a national programme and based on lessons learned from better-performing associations in Oman and by reshaping and contextualizing international experiences.

4.3 Next steps

For the three target groups of the project, FAO is engaging with the relevant stakeholders in the country to develop follow-up targeted projects to address some important needs that emerged during the current project. These projects, to be implemented in 2020, 2021, 2022 and beyond, will target each of the three forms of collective action that have been piloted and profiled and include:

- strengthening the capacities of the Omani Agricultural Association producer organizations through a peer-to-peer farmer partnership;
- developing an action research project focusing on the Aflaj to document their performance, develop recommendations for improvement, and develop the capacities of one of them in order to increase their agro-touristic potential; and
- developing the capacity of Coastal Women Associations on small-scale invertebrate fishery in Al Wusta Governorate.
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Annex 1:

Project TCP/RAB/3603 – Description of Activities

1. **Analysis of the legal and institutional framework for collective action**

A national legal expert was hired to undertake a comprehensive review of the national legislation related to producer organizations in the country, along with a comparison with the international standards and guidelines for regulating cooperatives. The legal expert consulted with relevant stakeholders to complete the information collected, benchmarked the national legislation with international regulations, including the ILO Recommendation 193 on the Promotion of Co-operatives, to identify existing gaps in the national framework, and formulated recommendations to fill these gaps.

The findings from the legal review were presented and critically discussed during the national dialogue on “Policy and Programmes for Strengthening Producer Organizations in Oman” that was held in March 2018. Initial recommendations were also identified with the relevant stakeholders to be carried forward for a future potential legal reform.

Three target groups were selected to be included in the project activities: farmer organizations, “water user associations” (aflaj) and women’s fishery associations. The first key activities of the project were undertaken by researchers from the Sultan Qaboos University and adopted three techniques to explore and assess the performance of the target groups.

1. **Literature review:** to situate the associations in the context of their operation; to present an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) regarding the functioning of the associations.

2. **Mapping:** to collect detailed organizational information from a number of relevant associations, in selected sectors (e.g. agriculture, fisheries, women); the information included in the box below was collected using a designed schedule and interviewing the president/secretary/ treasurer of the organizations.

Information collected for the mapping

- Name of the producer organization
- Location
- Domain and types of activities
- Mission, vision and presence of a strategic plan
- Main services delivered to members and received (financial advice, extension, any governmental support)

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5 A full report is available upon request at FAO OMAN: [FAO-OMAN@fao.org](mailto:FAO-OMAN@fao.org)
» Number of employees

» Number of members (and related historical trends)

» Number of women members (and related historical trends)

» Number of youth members (and related historical trends)

» Board of director and committees: composition, number of officials, ratio of men versus women, etc.

» Total turnover (and related historical trends)

» Turnover by service (if possible)

» Degree of financial autonomy – i.e. specification of whether the financial sources of the organization are generated by the organization or whether they are received by the government, donors, private sector

**Dimensions of organizational performance**

» The concept of performance is associated with the idea of achievement and success. The organizational performance of producer organizations is assessed against three main dimensions:

» Relevance: the ability to set and pursue a purpose that meets the real needs and aspirations of members while continuing to contribute to the improvement of their living conditions.

» Effectiveness: the degree to which an organization is fulfilling its mission, and remains true to its purpose and its objectives.

» Financial viability: the ability of a producer organizations to find the funds (and generate revenue) for its operations in the short, medium and long terms.

**Factors influencing organizational performance**

» The factors influencing organizational performance are internal factors. They include:

» Motivation of members of the organization. This can refer to the following features: members identify with the values of the organization; the objectives of the organization are regularly defined/renewed in order to respond to changes in local and global situations/plans; members actively participate in the life of the organization; and members fully commit to their organization because they identify with its concerns and interests.

» Human and material resources available or accessible by the organization. Every organization has human, material and financial resources that enable it to carry out its activities in a successful manner so as to reach its stated goals and objectives. As regards human resources and their management, the following aspects may have an impact on the performance of the organization: planning and allocation of human resources; and rewards of human capital and skills development. Skills development includes the technical capacities (e.g. agricultural, marketing) and functional capacities (e.g. administrative and financial management, planning, advocacy, negotiation, leadership) of leaders and members. Skills may relate to knowledge, know-how or particular competencies. Shortages of one or more of these skills can appear in the various bodies of the

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6 Available upon request to FAO Oman: fao-oman@fao.org
organization (general assembly, board of directors, executive board, supervisory body, committee/marketing boards or other types of boards, management) and negatively affect its performance. Regarding material resources, this term mainly refers to the management of infrastructure and technology. Financial resources and their management have been addressed in the component on performance relating to financial viability.

» **Governance, management and leadership.** This includes: the formation of management structures and the way they function; and the decision-making processes linked to access to services, distribution of benefits, communication flows and internal and external relations, as well as performance evaluation processes. The principles of good governance are participation, consensus-building, equity, accountability, respect for rules, transparency and information, as well as equality between women and men. These principles should form the basis for the management of the organization. They should guide its processes for decision-making, implementation of decisions, management of financial and material resources, as well as the provision of services and the distribution of benefits.

» **External environment.** This can be defined as the conditions that are external to the organization and that determine its establishment and its development as well as its capacity to carry out its role in society. It includes the policy and legal frameworks, consultation mechanisms between the organization and policy makers, economic incentives, and information and communication.

**3. National dialogue to build a common vision**

A four-day national workshop was held in Muscat in 2018 on "Policy and Programmes for Strengthening Producer Organizations in Oman: Building a common vision and an action plan". The event was attended by 37 participants, with representatives from directorates from the MAF, several aflaj managers (Wakil), representatives from the Omani Agricultural Association, fishery groups, Oman Food Investment Holding Company, Association of Pomegranate Farmers, Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund, Oman Development Bank and Sultan Qaboos University, and organic farmers.

Participants were invited to the national workshop to undertake a collective reflection on the existing situation, and formulate a common vision and an action plan for the development of producer organizations.

During the first three days, a participatory analysis was carried by the participants to validate the results of the mapping and profiling undertaken by the Sultan Qaboos University team. A visioning exercise and continual dialogue enabled participants to highlight several issues affecting producer organizations in the country and identify some areas of action.

The national dialogue also opened up an extensive debate about women’s weak participation and the reasons that contribute to the absence of women’s roles.
in producer organizations. The participants agreed that women have always played an active role in agriculture, such as collecting and manufacturing dates. There are no obstacles in the legislation of organizations that restrict their contribution. The general conditions apply equally to men and women, namely the existence of agriculture as an occupation and leading their own agricultural work. Some participants also pointed out that the male-owned property system may be a cause of the weak emergence of women in producer organizations.

The participatory analysis underlined the following important issues: weaknesses in post-harvest operations; existence of expatriate labour and lack of motivation; weak technology; limited capacities in mobilizing resources; duplication of administrative powers and cumbersome procedures; and weak organizational capacities among the various associations.

Participants suggested specific measures to address the identified weaknesses (as shown in the photo below) and included them in the Action Plan. Annex 2 provides the agreed Action Plan.

The fourth day focused on increasing awareness on the Omani legal framework for producer organizations, reviewing the national legislation and comparing it with the international legal framework for cooperatives.

Three major options were discussed by the participants as a way forward: the development of a new legislation recognizing producer organizations as a distinct form of economic enterprise; an amendment to the current legislation regarding the possibility of creating for-profit producer organizations or cooperatives; and a ministerial decision easing procedures for these associations to carry economic activities.

During the workshop, the Undersecretary for Agriculture, Dr Ahmed Bin Nasser Al Bakri, intervened and suggested the organization of a follow-up high-level bilateral meeting including the undersecretaries of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Ministry of Social Development, and FAO, in order to further discuss the various options to improve the legislative framework for producer organizations in agriculture and fisheries.

4. Pilots

Three pilot activities were chosen to be implemented as a result of the national dialogue and were conceived as capacity development events for the three target groups: the Coastal Women of Masirah island; the Omani Farmer Association; and the Aflaj.

**Pilot 1 – Coastal Women of Masirah island**

The two-day training was carried out on 4 and 5 September 2018 and targeted women fishery producers involved in oyster collection and selling, and representatives of the Women’s Association active in Masirah island, the largest island of Oman, located in the East coast. The training was attended by about 20 women involved in various coastal-related activities.
**Agenda of the training**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09:00</td>
<td>Welcome and opening and introduction of the workshop objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09:10</td>
<td>Introduction of participants and expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09:40</td>
<td>The importance of relations for activity, business, livelihood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(10’ individual reflection, 20’ group work, 20’ reporting, 10’ plenary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:40</td>
<td>Tea break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Benefits of collective action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(10’ presentation of a story, 20’ group work, 20’ reporting, 10’ plenary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Constraints faced in their activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(40’ group work, 20’ reporting, 10’ plenary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:10</td>
<td>Exercise on cooperatives’ principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(10’ introduction, 20’ group work, 20’ reporting, 10’ plenary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:00</td>
<td>Closure and Lunch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DAY 2: Performance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09:00</td>
<td>Highlights day 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09:15</td>
<td>Recap of previous day’s activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creating a common vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(30’ group exercise, 20’ reporting, 15’ plenary common statement, 10’ presentation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30</td>
<td>Tea break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45</td>
<td>Analysis of organizational performance: dimensions and factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(25’ presentation of the framework, 20’ drawing exercise on strengths and weaknesses by group,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40’ reporting and clustering by dimension/factor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:20</td>
<td>Preparing the Action Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5’ introducing the matrix, 60’ group work, 60’ plenary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:30</td>
<td>Closure and lunch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Day 1** engaged the participants in an analysis and reflection on the benefits of collective action and in a discussion on the existing constraints for coastal women to grow and become organized. Collective action is about actions taken together by a group of people whose goal is to enhance their status and achieve a common objective. Collective action is a critical issue for Oman and an important reflection/sensitization that the project can bring, given the lack of producer organization structures in the country. To this end, for this pilot training, three specific training sessions were introduced concerning the importance of relations, the benefits of collective action, and the cooperative principles. The sessions were designed to gradually introduce the participants to the topic and to allow them to make their own analysis in the identification of group opportunities and in comparing the benefits of individual and group activity through a story tailored to the fisheries sector.
Day 2 trained the participants on the importance of creating a vision for the future, encouraged a self-assessment of the strengths and weaknesses in carrying out activities, and supported the participants to create an initial work plan to support change in the future.

**Pilot 2 – Omani Agricultural Association**

The four-day training was carried out from 17 to 21 December 2018 and targeted around 30 people, including representatives of the Omani Agricultural Association, women producers, and representatives of MAF.

**Agenda of the training**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DAY 1: Principles and Value Chain Management</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09:00</td>
<td>Welcome and introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09:15</td>
<td>Cooperative principles (plenary discussion) – Dr Kanj Hamade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30</td>
<td>Coffee break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45</td>
<td>Presentation of the importance of value chain management and value chain strategies – Dr Kanj Hamade (plenary discussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:15</td>
<td>Group work – Value chain scenarios exercise (bottleneck challenges and adaptation to clients’ needs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:45</td>
<td>Presentation of group work results – discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:45</td>
<td>Presentation of the 5Ps Marketing Mix Plan - Dr Kanj Hamade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:10</td>
<td>Group work: Marketing mix exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:40</td>
<td>Presentation of working groups – discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:15</td>
<td>Closure and lunch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **DAY 2: Organic Farming and Vision** |
| 09:00 | Debriefing from Day 1                                                     |
| 09:15 | Organic farming presentation and plenary discussion – Dr Rhonda R. Janke (SQU) |
| 10:30 | Coffee break                                                              |
| 10:50 | Group work: Organic farming – Next steps and alternative labelling       |
| 11:20 | Presentation of working groups – discussion                               |
| 12:30 | The process of construction of a common vision within our organization and the role of a leader (debate and plenary) |
| 14:00 | Closure and lunch                                                         |

| **DAY 3: Leadership and Equity** |
| 09:00 | Debriefing from Day 2                                                     |
| 09:15 | Myths and realities of leadership                                         |
| 09:30 | ROLE PLAY ON LEADERSHIP STYLES – part 1                                  |
| 10:30 | Coffee break                                                              |
| 11:00 | ROLE PLAY ON LEADERSHIP STYLES – part 2                                  |
| 12:30 | The concept of shared leadership and the role of a leader                |
| 13:30 | Inclusion of women and youth                                              |
| 14:30 | Closure and lunch                                                         |
Day 1 of the training saw the participation of Dr Kanj Hamade, Assistant Professor of Agricultural Economics at the Lebanese University in Beirut. He engaged the participants in a critical discussion on the concepts and principles of agriculture cooperatives and how this business model could contribute to the improvement of existing organizations in Oman.

The second area of focus was related to supply chain management and competition, as agriculture producers can produce locally and internationally; emphasis was also placed on the importance of developing a marketing plan and on how to add value to products. Examples were provided in relation to the cooperative model – for instance, value addition is possible by establishing packaging factories within cooperatives. Discussions were held on increasing competitiveness, concerning the importance of concentrating on niche products that add value and quality. When members sell together through a marketing cooperative, they generate better profit and bypass intermediaries.

Day 2 benefited from a presentation on Organic Farming by Dr Rhonda R. Janke, Associate Professor, Department of Crop Sciences, College of Agriculture and Marine Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University. The presentation covered the organic farming philosophy, farming practices and certification issues. The topic was extremely timely, as a representative from MAF explained that recently an organic farming team was established at MAF. Day 2 continued with a debate on the process of building a common vision in the organization. Different views were expressed between the leadership and the membership of the organization.

Day 3 allowed for reflection on leadership styles, shared leadership and opportunities for women to take on lead roles in the organization.

Day 4 created a framework for discussing the structure of the Omani Agricultural Association and its business model. At the end of the day, participants were asked to share some relevant actions, linked to the training topics they would like to see implemented in the following year.

**Pilot 3 – Aflaj**

A two-day workshop was held on 25 and 26 March 2019 in the Technical College of Nizwa and hosted 38 participants, including leaders or managers of Aflaj from different regions in Oman, farmers using Aflaj for irrigation, and selected law experts from relevant ministries as well as relevant local stakeholders who could help the development of the Aflaj producer organizations.
**Agenda of the training**

### Day 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 1: Values &amp; principles</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:15 – 11:30</td>
<td></td>
<td>Working group and discussion working Presentation on values &amp; principles, Chedrawi FAO Oman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 2: Current situation (building a vision)</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11:30 – 12:45</td>
<td></td>
<td>SWOT analysis from different perspectives: technical, economic, social, management level (working group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:45 – 13:00</td>
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<td>Prayer Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:00 – 14:30</td>
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<td>Discussion in plenary</td>
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<td>Presentation of a common vision - Ghady Chedrawi FAO Oman</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:30</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Day 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 1: Building a common vision and a structure proposition</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00 – 10:00</td>
<td></td>
<td>Working group on building a common vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 – 10:00</td>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation of the current legal situation of aflaj</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Basma Al Kiyumi- FAO Legal consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:15 – 11:00</td>
<td></td>
<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:15 – 12:30</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion on the structure of an organization of aflaj</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:30 – 12:45</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prayer Break</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 2: Future Project</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13:45 – 12:45</td>
<td></td>
<td>Working group and discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:00-13:45</td>
<td></td>
<td>Closing remarks and certificate distribution</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:00</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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</table>

**Day 1** focused on a discussion around values and principles and on a SWOT analysis. The participants actively engaged in the discussion and reaffirmed the importance of Aflaj as a sacred icon in Oman to be protected by all communities, as its concept reunites all the highest values of humanity, including the idea of sharing, equity and caring for others.

The SWOT analysis followed and prompted participants to assertively identify factors that positively or negatively influence the functioning of the Aflaj system. This provided very useful information for the strategic planning process that leaders and communities should take forward. The day ended with a debate on the process for construction of a shared vision and the role of the leader.

**Day 2** started with a visioning exercise and the participants were divided into four groups: the first two groups reflected on the question, “How would you like to see the Aflaj in five years?”; the other two groups reflected on the question, “How would you like to see the Aflaj in one year?” The exercise enabled participants to compare approaches, perspectives and desires with respect to being part of an important change process affecting their communities and society.

The rest of the day was devoted to an extensive reflection and discussion on the legal framework for Aflaj. No clear framework has been developed during its long evolution. The session was led by the national legal expert, Ms Basma Mubarak, who undertook the legal review for the project and involved participants in several exercises to identify the interests and needs to protect the falaj in Oman and to highlight important points that should be addressed in the formulation of an appropriate legal framework for such an institution.

### 5. Study tours

Two study tours were organized by the project: one in Lebanon and the other in Italy. They were an essential part of the project, with the aim of strengthening the capacities of the producer organizations and the
Institutions involved in the project and to stimulate learning and critical thinking from existing successful cases of collective action in Italy and Lebanon.

In total, 10 production cooperatives were visited in Italy and Lebanon during the two study tours. They were chosen for the diversity of the businesses they handle, and their operational, governance and management practices in relevant sectors. Annex 2 gives a description of the 10 cooperatives visited.

Both study tours demonstrated that there is no “one size fits all” solution. Markets are the main critical point of any business-based initiative. Different approaches were observed and identified for being successful. However, all solutions emerged from the need to address a common problem and depended on shared efforts, and in some cases the need to use “out of the box” solutions to induce change and transformation in mind sets and sector approaches.

Some cooperatives were born out of an ideal, while others were created to serve communities or to represent the interests of a specific and strategic economic sector. However, the majority of them successfully compete in the market like any other company, making investments, diversifying their products and services, as well as training and growing their staff.

Still, main divergences were noticed in terms of existing legal frameworks, but what was clear was that once the motivation of the cooperative members is strong, a supportive legal framework, such as the one existing in Italy, can help boost the business orientation of such organizations and better meet the members’ aspirations for development and growth.

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A group photo of FAO team and beneficiaries of the pilot project with the aflaj producer organizations
Annex 2: Visit to Cooperatives in Italy and Lebanon

1. “Agricoltura Nuova” Cooperative, Italy: This agricultural cooperative was founded in 1977. It produces healthy and organic food based on traditional recipes. The mission of the cooperative is to create employment in agriculture and prevent urban expansion at the expense of the productive land.

   The business operates on the concept of “from seed to fork”. It provides all the necessary resources, activities and practices to cover the production cycle, employ its members, and provide income for them and for the cooperative.

   Various production workshops were visited – beekeeping, the bakery, dairy production, fruit and vegetable production – all within the framework of organic production.

2. “Caseificio Sociale Manciano” Cooperative, Italy: The cooperative is dedicated to the production of high-value dairy cheese. Thirty types of cheese are produced from specific breeds while quality and exclusivity are ensured by the producers. Today, the dairy farm groups 250 members of dairy producers of all sizes distributed between Manciano and neighbouring villages for a total number of 60,000 sheep and a production of about 8 million litres of milk per year.

   The cooperative has a special DOP certification (for quality and authenticity), which supports its competitive advantage with regard to other commercial cheese makers. This eventually attracted the small producers to adhere to the cooperative based on exclusive terms of reference that cover their production practices.

3. “Cittadella Della Pesca OP” Cooperative, Italy: This cooperative was established with the aim to increase the value and shelf-life of local fish through their transformation to different products of higher added value. “We are now producing all year round. We can conserve the fish for longer times when its price is higher and its value is optimized,” explained one member.

   The cooperative includes 16 fishing enterprises, almost 60 fishing boats and a processing plant that brings in fresh and local fish products from six villages in Tuscany. A partnership with the local authorities has supported the introduction of fish to school canteens in the region, amounting to 29,000 yearly produced rations.

   The cooperative is a consortium of cooperatives and enterprises and has received funds from European Union, mainly for establishing the processing unit.

4. “AgriAmbiente Mugello” Cooperative, Italy: This cooperative takes up the production of milk and dairy products together with the main inputs for the whole supply chain. This includes animal husbandry, animal feed rations, processing and production. The cooperative produces organic animal feed representing 99 percent of the demand of its livestock. Its services are extended to other sectors, responding to the market needs in terms of businesses and the members’ expertise, such as green management services, landscape engineering, forestry and housing. Engineering and forestry represent 50 percent of the cooperative’s businesses.

5. “La Ginestra” Cooperative, Italy: The cooperative was founded in 1978 on abandoned lands. Since then, the cooperative has been revived and a new board of nine members started the business of producing honey and wine, among other products.

   Today the cooperative produces wine and honey. Its products are certified organic and are being sold in many countries. Additional related services have been developed, such as agritourism dining services, attracting tourists from all over the world.

6. “Le Bon Lait” Cooperative for Dairy Production, Meghraka-Akkar, Lebanon: This family-based cooperative produces natural milk and dairy products. It started as a small farm of 20 cows producing 800 litres of milk per week and reached an average of 1 ton of milk per day. Today, the cooperative produces a wide range of products and sells them in different areas through door-to-door marketing.

   The cooperative has maintained a positive impact on the villagers by buying their locally produced milk, producing healthy and natural dairy products free from any additives, and creating jobs for 25 families of dairy farmers. Le Bon Lait has channeled the selling of milk and its dairy products through...
more than 300 door-to-door points, reaching Beirut through three additional suppliers. The cooperative has worked on improving the marketing of its products by developing new packaging complemented by marketing strategies through social media.

7. **Beekeepers Cooperative in Qayteh- Koura, Lebanon**: The cooperative supports more than 50 beekeepers (500 beehives) in improving the quality and increasing the quantity of the honey produced in the region, providing them with training, coaching, equipment and resources. The cooperative products are marketed locally level with the aim to establish a local brand to improve on the marketing aspects and support export to the international markets. The cooperative is also trying to increase the number of beehives for each beekeeper and, consequently, the income generated.

8. **“Mawasem Al Dayaa” Ras el Ain, Lebanon**: This women’s processing cooperative produces natural authentic Lebanese food known as “Mouneh.” The cooperative is formed of 23 women and specializes in the production of a wide range of products free from any additives and using local ingredients from the village of Deir Qanoun Ras El Ain (89 km from Beirut). The cooperative developed a sustainable and successful business model using alternative sources of energy such as solar energy in cooking.

9. **“Lands Coop”, the Cooperative for Sustainable Development, Lebanon**: This cooperative supports more than 100 farmers of different crops, providing them with the necessary know-how, training, coaching and equipment to produce larger volumes and with improved quality of their products. The main product is certified organic olive oil. The cooperative eventually aims to: provide oil storage tanks; develop a marketing strategy for organic olive oil complemented with the design of a local brand and the establishment of a store to sell this and other products.

10. **Atayib Al Rif “Rural Delights” Cooperative, Lebanon**: This cooperative produces and markets natural authentic Lebanese food using traditional recipes. The cooperative is the hub of a network of 42 women-owned agricultural and food transformation cooperatives that aim to provide their products to local and international markets. The board of the cooperative is formed of women producers representing their own cooperative. The cooperative secures markets for the products following one brand name: “Rural Delights.” Over the years, Atayeb Al Rif has been able to gain a good reputation in the market by promoting its products and activities. Recently, the cooperative inaugurated its own boutique that serves as a local sales point and supports the access of rural producers to the market and as a restaurant serving local food.

In addition, the cooperative provides specialized training services in food conservation and transformation as well as in the establishment of women-based businesses.
## Annex 3:

### Project Workshop Formulation of an Action Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance criteria</th>
<th>Actual situation</th>
<th>Expected results</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Responsibilities/Partnerships</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relevance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>The existence of an awareness strategy on the objectives of the association prior to its creation</td>
<td>Prepare an Annual plan</td>
<td>Omani Agricultural Association and support by specialists</td>
<td>2018-2019</td>
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<td><strong>Effectiveness</strong></td>
<td>Post-harvest operations are weak</td>
<td>Investments in infrastructure development for pre- and post-harvest services and investments in assets</td>
<td>Introduce an investment opportunity to establish pre- and post-harvest service centres</td>
<td>Producer organizations</td>
<td>Five-year timeframe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Existence of expatriate labour</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mobilize the private sector</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Weak technology</td>
<td></td>
<td>Carry out feasibility study</td>
<td>Oman Logistics Group</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Financial viability</strong></td>
<td>Lack of awareness on financial resources</td>
<td>The existence of marketing outlets</td>
<td>Encourage farmers to join associations</td>
<td>Mobilization of relevant stakeholders</td>
<td>Five-year timeframe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouraging farmers to join associations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide financing and borrowing opportunities for associations</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong></td>
<td>Lack of incentives</td>
<td>Propose supportive investment legislation</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries</td>
<td>Five-year timeframe</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Establish contractual farming system</td>
<td>Ministry of Legal Affairs</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide training programmes between universities and schools to engage young people</td>
<td>Producer organizations</td>
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<td>Legislative councils</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance criteria</td>
<td>Actual situation</td>
<td>Expected results</td>
<td>Activities</td>
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<td>Timeframe</td>
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<td>Human, financial and material resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Governance/management</td>
<td>Rules and Regulations</td>
<td>20% female representation</td>
<td>Simplify the procedures and oblige the competent authorities to use the latest technologies so that they do not exceed 30 days to clear the transaction</td>
<td>Competent government agencies</td>
<td>Within five years</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Duplication of administrative powers</td>
<td>Regulations for each organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance criteria</td>
<td>Actual situation</td>
<td>Expected results</td>
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<tr>
<td>External Environment</td>
<td>Urbanization</td>
<td>Creating legislation that encourages investment and contract farming</td>
<td>Revise the existing Legislation</td>
<td>Ministry of Social Development</td>
<td>2018</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maintenance of water resources</td>
<td>Amend the current associations’ law</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Issue an independent law for cooperatives</td>
<td>Undertake amendment to Ministerial decree</td>
<td>Regional municipalities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loss of cultural heritage</td>
<td>Amend the current associations’ law</td>
<td>Assign a higher legislative mandate for the law reform</td>
<td>Ministry of housing</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Undertake amendment to Ministerial decree</td>
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<td>Consulting engineering offices</td>
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</table>

*Source: Author’s own elaboration*