



# A LEAP TO GOLD FOR JIHAN!

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Jihan in the middle after receiving her Award.

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Jihan explains how she makes *feteer*.

“I never imagined that I would be honored and celebrated in this way. How I perceive myself, my family, my community and the environment in which I was born, and my life, changed drastically.”

“In a moment, my life switched from one extreme to the other. I turned from a rural woman who did not have any means to help her in facing life, to an entrepreneur. Now I have my business in the field of food processing. I even hired girls to help me to meet the demands of my clients.”

Jihan Magdy, who is 49 years old, grew up in a village in Abu Qurqas District in Minya Governorate, Egypt, where job opportunities are scarce, especially for women. Local customs and traditions do not allow women to go outside their villages to find work in order to improve their living conditions. But with the changing circumstances, namely escalating prices, low income and lack of jobs, life has become very difficult, especially with the continued negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on life in general.

“We are no longer capable of meeting even the basic needs of our children, especially with the outbreak of COVID-19. Work almost stopped. Also, the unstable climate conditions affected agriculture, which decreased the productivity of our agricultural land. Despite the hard work and high spending, the return from agriculture no longer covers what we spend on it. But we can't give it up, because it is our main craft and a heritage from our forefathers. I can no longer pressure my husband, who works at a low-income job, besides cultivating the land, because the whole situation is out of his hands.”

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Jihan was introduced to the project, “Improving the livelihoods and nutrition of rural women and their families affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in Minya Governorate” when she registered to participate in a traditional/ethnic food competition. The project aims to improve the livelihoods and nutrition habits of community members through a local civil society association.

“I am good at making *feteer* (a traditional pie), butter, *kishk* (a traditional dish made with yogurt) and cheese. When the project team from FAO visited our village, they assessed the needs for the products I made, which they found very tasty. They trained me in marketing, communication, catchy display methods and healthy packaging and helped me participate in the exhibition of heritage food products that was held in Cairo.”

Jihan's traditional food products were very well-liked by the visitors at the Heritage Food Exhibition in Cairo, organized by UNIDO and co-sponsored by FAO. Many visitors bought Jihan's products, which competed with the products of more than 400 companies and associations also participating in the fair. The surprise came when Jihan won the gold medal in the *feteer meshaltet* (traditional pie) category and the bronze medal in the dairy category for her butter. She received the awards before a huge audience. It was a grand celebration!

“I never imagined or even dreamt of such an experience. FAO supported, encouraged and provided me with the opportunity to exhibit my products. They also got a fully equipped mobile kitchen in which I was able to prepare food samples for tasting. They also provided other materials and equipment that facilitated my work for the competition.”

Since the competition, Jihan has had regular customers from Cairo. Some of them send the products abroad as gifts, due to their fascination with their taste and quality.

“The project on improving the livelihoods and nutrition of rural women and their families helped me establish my own business and taught me how to be distinguished in my field. It also taught me the skills of selling, buying, negotiating and marketing. I now have a source of income that helps me and my husband meet the needs of our three sons at different stages of their university education, and face life's escalating expenses.”



Jihan displaying her food products at the Cairo Contest and Exhibition of “Egyptian Typical Food Products”, 25-26 March, 2022 at the Orman Botanical Garden, Giza.