

**PROJECT INFORMATION DOCUMENT (PID)
APPRAISAL STAGE**

Report No.: 84070

Project Name	Masar Ibrahim/ Abraham Path: Economic Development Across Fragile Communities
Region	Middle East and North Africa
Country	West Bank and Gaza
Sector	MNSFP
Lending Instrument	Investment Project Financing
Project ID	P147235
Recipient	Abraham Path Initiative (API)
Implementing Agency	Abraham Path Initiative (API)
Environmental Screening Category	[]A []B [x]C []FI []TBD (to be determined)
Date PID Prepared	December 16, 2013
Estimated Date of Appraisal Completion	January 14, 2014
Estimated Date of Board Approval	NA
Concept Review Decision	August 8, 2013
Other Decision	The grant was approved by the State and Peace Building Fund Committee on November 21, 2013

I. Introduction and Context

A. Country Context

The economy of the West Bank and Gaza has been hampered by years of conflict and instability and remains dependent on foreign aid and the public sector remains the largest employer. The broad economic situation and the PA's fiscal position are showing worrying trends with a financing gap of about USD320 million projected by the end of 2013. Private investment hovering at around 15 percent of GDP for the past seven years is very low by international standards. The overall unemployment rate reached 22 percent in the first half of 2013. Thus, the Palestinian economy has clearly not been able to generate sufficient job opportunities and absorb enough new labor market entrants to improve the unemployment situation. Lack of opportunities in the private sector causes the public sector to be viewed as the employer of last resort as it currently employs 23.6 percent of persons employed in the West Bank and Gaza.¹

B. Sectoral and Institutional Context

The West Bank and Gaza has the necessary infrastructure, facilities and attractions to become a viable and independent destination. However, the Palestinian tourism industry is not developed fully across the value chain resulting in some leakages of tourism revenue. More than 2 million

¹ World Bank report to AHLC meeting, Sept. 2013

foreign tourists visited the West Bank and Gaza in 2010. Total overnight stays in Palestinian hotels increased by 40% in 2010 reaching a record high of 1.4 million (including both foreign and domestic overnight stays and staying in East Jerusalem overnights). The Palestinian hotel industry does not fully benefit from incoming tourism, since on average tourists stay less than a day in Palestinian cities.

In 2010, the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA) released a national strategy defining a vision of “promoting the national image of a safe, hospitable, independent destination, rich in religious, cultural, historical and natural resources”. The objectives of the strategy are to increase the number of visitors, diversify the type of visitors, increase the time and money spent in the host communities, and increase the geographical spread throughout the West Bank. The latter element is of key importance to grow tourism as a sector which lifts the Palestinian economy beyond the traditional hub of the Bethlehem area (which presently attracts the large majority of visitors) and also offers opportunities to rural areas where socio-economic development is lagging behind. While Christian pilgrimage will remain at the core of West Bank and Gaza’s tourism offer, the industry has identified other segments as potential opportunities, including cultural heritage tourism, eco-tourism, and experiential tourism that may attract domestic and foreign independent travelers.²

Experiential Tourism:

Experiential tourism is a combination of adventure and community oriented tourism. Adventure tourism is an activity seeking the challenges and rewards of adventure in natural surroundings. It is frequently done independently but also in organized groups. These tourists are generally medium to high income, seeking respite from the pressures and routine of urban lives. They pay high prices for holidays that may involve risk and will certainly involve some physical hardship. Adventure tourism has greater economic impact across the levels of society, given that supplies and services are provided by smaller local businesses and households. Adventure travelers tend to stay longer and spend more locally. According to Adventure Travel Trade Association, about two-thirds of their holiday costs are spent directly in the destination in stark contrast to just 10-15% of package holiday costs.³ According to the benchmark Adventure Tourism Market Report, The George Washington University in partnership with the Adventure Travel Trade Association and Xola Consulting, adventure travelers spent more than US\$89 billion on worldwide adventure tourism in 2009, excluding airfare and gear/clothing, on which they additionally spent US\$53 billion.⁴

Walking Trails in West Bank and Gaza:

The West Bank is the location of a number of initiatives combining walking with rural community tourism and hospitality. All of these initiatives have been successful in creating community momentum, media attention and additional visitors to rural areas. Between long-distance projects and day walks, the hubs of rural community tourism feature a large degree of overlap in geographical scope as well as cooperation and coordination between operators. There

² National Tourism Strategy of West Bank and Gaza, MOTA 2010

³ ITB World Travel Trends Report 2012/2013, Dec. 2012

⁴ Adventure travel trade association (www.adventuretravelnews.com), August 2010

are five walking trails in the West Bank, which are the Abraham Path and the Nativity Trail (long-distance), the Sufi Trails, Walking Palestinian Trails, and the Ramallah Highland Trail (shorter day walks). With small scale investments, local NGOs have developed and promoted the trails to walkers from around the world. The walking trails have proven to be resilient to political/security upheaval, and managed to bring income and job opportunities to rural communities. Nevertheless, the modest investment in trail development, guides training, and promotion, have limited the economic impact of these trails, and failed to unlock their potential in the West Bank.

The Abraham Path is the longest trail in the West Bank, and integrates three out of the four other trails in its current and future extensions. Starting at a small scale, AP has been growing over the last five years, attracting thousands of travelers, and gaining the support of government, and non-government organizations. Investment in the Abraham Path will support the natural evolution of walking trails in West Bank and Gaza, and will maximize the economic impact of experiential tourism in rural communities.

II. Proposed Development Objective(s)

A. Proposed Development Objective

Contribute to job creation and income generation for marginalized rural communities along the Abraham Path in the West Bank, with a particular focus on women and youth, and to capture lessons from piloting job creation through experiential tourism that could be applied in other Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations (FCS) settings.

III. Preliminary Description

The Masar Ibrahim/ Abraham Path project represents an innovative pilot approach to tackling rural development, employment, and women's empowerment in communities normally excluded from mainstream economic development and investment and often disconnected from one another. The Abraham Path is a long-distance walking trail across the Middle East. The path retraces the cultural memory of the journey of Abraham and his family and celebrates its story of hospitality and kindness to strangers.⁵ The complete Path presently consists of a 270 mile (430 km) route, which crosses 40 communities in 4 countries, but it may eventually cross 3,100 miles (5000 km) and 10 countries in the Middle East.

With local partners, the Abraham Path Initiative (API) is uncovering the footsteps of Abraham as a walking route for local and international visitors. The route presently starts in Urfa (also called Sanliurfa) in Turkey and ends at Abraham's burial site in Hebron in the West Bank. Since 2008, some 4,000 travelers have walked the Path, the majority of them passing 21 rural communities and villages in Jordan and the West Bank. Walkers contribute to the local economy by staying in villages with families in homestays, buying homemade meals, and walking with local guides through attractive natural and archeological spots between rural communities.

⁵ The Initiative is a socio-economic and cultural project connecting East and West and not affiliated with or endorsing any religion or religious message. Along the route, the Initiative and its local partners highlight Abrahamic culture and memory in the widest sense of the term and in particular emphasise the ethos and values of hospitality and kindness to strangers which are present across the Middle East.

Nearly 114 miles (182 km) of trail has been developed in the West Bank, with hospitality, local guiding, and homestay houses in communities along its way. The Palestinian segment of the Path passes 13 communities and villages in areas A, B and C⁶ in the West Bank; starting from Nablus in the North of the West Bank, and ending with Hebron in the south.⁷ The route goes well beyond the traditional hub for tourism (Bethlehem) and helps in diversifying the tourism offering of West Bank and Gaza. In West Bank, the Path presently employs 5 guides, actively involves 28 homestays, and generated US\$218,280 of direct annual revenues (2012), and 63 direct new job opportunities since its inception in 2008.⁸

Project Components

The activities of the project will fall under four main components:

1. Investment in People and Institutions

This component invests in the capacity and institutional sustainability of all local actors across the value chain of the path:

- a. The training of current and new guides (wilderness guides) in guiding techniques, trekking and interpretation (i.e. natural, cultural, and historical), safety, leadership and intercultural skills;
- b. The outreach to current and new communities on the path;
- c. Orientation and training for new and existing homestays;
- d. Capacity building for local NGO partners on funding generation strategies (corporate fundraising/sponsorships), management systems, financial management and procurement;
- e. Local awareness trips for Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA) staff.

2. Path Development

This component invests in the development of the path that is required to raise the quality of visitors' experience on the path and to empower local communities and guides to tap its full potential:

- a. GIS data collection and publication;
- b. Mapping the path online and in print (detailed cartography);
- c. Way-marking research & signage on the path;
- d. Route extension: adding new communities (north of Nablus; south of Hebron);

⁶ The West Bank is divided per Oslo Accords into 3 areas: Area A is under Palestinian security and civilian control and correspond to all major population centers; Area B concerns mostly rural communities and is under Palestinian civilian control and some security control, while overall security remains under Israeli control; and Area C is under Israeli control for both security and civilian affairs related to territory, including land administration and planning.

⁷ The Path communities are located in areas A and B, but the walking segments between the communities are mostly crossing area C. The shortest segment between communities is 4.3 miles (7 km), while the longest one is 14.3 miles (23 km). Each segment can be covered in a walking day, and there are no requirements for additional physical infrastructure between communities. While the Palestinian use of land and resources in area C is very restricted, walking in area C is allowed for both local and international visitors and groups have been walking through area C unimpeded since the Abraham Path was launched in 2008.

⁸ This number excludes fees for tour operators and direct revenues generated in tourism centers outside the path communities (e.g. Jerusalem and Bethlehem) and it excludes homestays in the community of Beit Sahour/Bethlehem where some 40 homestays are active. The latter homestay network has been in existence before the establishment of the Path and in contrast to other communities on the Path, the hosts receive a mixture of guests through other experiential tourism programs as well.

- e. GIS/hiking gear for wilderness guides.

Existing homes along the path of homeowners willing to participate will be utilized as homestays. The project will not include any physical works to the existing homes or to the existing heritage sites.

3. Marketing, Business Development, and Communication

This component invests in the expansion of private sector engagement on the path (tour guides, tour operators) as a viable experience for multi-day and single day trips including support to:

- a. A virtual information hub that serves as a travel guide application for current and prospective travelers providing info, logistics, videos, photos, blogs, electronic maps, GIS data, home-stay options, tour operator and guide options;
- b. Profiles for archeological, heritage and cultural sites along the route;
- c. Itinerary development for in- and outbound operators;
- d. “Familiarization” trips for media specialists and local tour operators;
- e. Development of marketing and logistical collateral such as the aforementioned online travel guide, a handbook for wilderness guides, and other promotional materials such as experiential tourism overview maps and billboards which promote the variety of experiences/initiatives across the area;
- f. On-line social media presence and promotion to engage potential walkers as well as specific site information;
- g. Participation of local operators and partners in international promotional activities such as trade fairs; and
- h. Communication on the project itself and its impact on local communities (for use both by the World Bank and the implementing agency).

4. Action Research (M&E and Knowledge Dissemination)

This component invests in monitoring and evaluation. As part of the process, capacities of local stakeholders will be expanded, independent and external evaluation and audit will be systematized, and dissemination of lessons and insights within and outside the World Bank shall be enabled through:

- a. Qualification and collection of fundamental indicators (number of walkers, length of travel, facilities and services used, etc); and
- b. Partners and beneficiaries’ assessment (survey work, data collection, and analysis) to measure trends that can be useful both for project monitoring purposes, and to capture lessons from piloting job creation through experiential tourism that could be applied in other FCS settings. Through the project timeframe, the task team will develop ten (10) research notes on experiential tourism in FCS.

IV. FINANCING

Financing Source	Amount (US\$ m)
Recipient	0.00

State and Peace Building Fund	2.32
Total	2.32

V. IMPLEMENTATION

Abraham Path Initiative (API) is the implementing agency, and the grant recipient responsible for the overall project implementation. API is an independent non-profit and non-governmental organization based in Boston, USA. Its regional program staff, who are based in Jerusalem, will manage the implementation of the project activities. API will enter into a service agreement with “Masar Ibrahim Al Khalil” a local NGO in the West Bank, to implement part of the activities through the time frame of the project.

VI. Safeguard Policies that might apply

Safeguard Policies Triggered by the Project	Yes	No
Environmental Assessment (OP/BP 4.01)		No
Natural Habitats (OP/BP 4.04)		No
Pest Management (OP 4.09)		No
Physical Cultural Resources (OP/BP 4.11)		No
Involuntary Resettlement (OP/BP 4.12)		No
Indigenous Peoples (OP/BP 4.10)		No
Forests (OP/BP 4.36)		No
Safety of Dams (OP/BP 4.37)		No
Projects in Disputed Areas (OP/BP 7.60)*		No
Projects on International Waterways (OP/BP 7.50)		No

VII. Contact point

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* By supporting the proposed project, the Bank does not intend to prejudice the final determination of the parties' claims on the disputed areas

Implementing Agencies

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