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وكالة تنمية المنشآت الصغيرة و الأصغر
Small&Micro Enterprise Promotion Service

UNDP

Sustainable Value Chains

Emergency Social Protection Enhancement and COVID-19 Response Project (ESPECRP)

Abdullah Mashhoor

The Engineer Who Planted Hope in the Soil of Al-Fanah

In the quiet village of Al-Fanah, located in Khanfar District (Abyan Governorate), Abdullah Mashhoor—an agricultural engineer with a degree in Biology and Chemistry—stood reflecting on a land that had long been burdened by waste and in need of someone to bring it back to life.

Since his college days, Abdullah believed that "Knowledge blooms when planted." In 2014, he established a small educational nursery in Tarim, Hadramout, essentially a living laboratory where he trained students in grafting seedlings and understanding plant behavior. But his heart remained tied to his hometown. Upon returning to Abyan, he set up a small experimental nursery beside his home, no more than nine square meters in size, where he nurtured seedlings and took notes, preparing for the day he would expand this green cradle.

That day arraived when the Yemen Social Protection Enhancement & Covid19 Response Project (ESPECRP) was announced. The project that is funded by the World Bank and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with SMEPS supports small businesses in several sectors including agriculture. , including agriculture. Abdullah participated in a workshop, registered as a beneficiary, and presented a forward-looking idea: a fully integrated production nursery that would multiply seedling capacity and convert livestock waste—often burned or discarded—into clean organic compost that would restore the soil and protect the environment.

Among the assets support, Abdullah recived ...spaces, seed propagation beds, and ventilation systems that kept the plants healthy. Producing organic compost soon became one of the nursery's key activities, rather than a side project. Layers of green plant waste, moist and dry animal manure, are stacked up to 1.5 meters high and turned seven times over three weeks. The heat generated is enough to destroy weed seeds like "Mareemrah", resulting in nutrient-rich compost packed with macro and micronutrients—its quality verified in labs in both Abyan and Aden.

Abdullah says:

"The difference between chemical fertilizer and compost is like the difference between feeding your land with something foreign versus feeding it with it's own blood. It is a full circle of life that provides us with living soil and healthier crops"

Today, many farmers in Abyan no longer rely on importing seedlings, as Abdullah's nursery now provides dozens of local farmers with high-quality, improved varieties. His compost enriches the soil, restoring it like a child recovering its strength. Across recent farming seasons, many local farmers have replaced chemical fertilizers with the organic ones produced locally inside Abdullah's nursery.

As Abdullah stands among the vibrant rows of seedlings, he reflects:

"When we restore value to waste, we restore life back to the soil. Here in the nursery, the story begins—and in every handful of earth, it ends with a new hope."

Ali Mahfoodh

The Neem Production Center and the and the Green Shield of Ja'ar

On the other side of the fertile plains of Abyan, in the town of Ja'ar, and as one of the beneficiaries of the same project, agricultural advisor Ali Mahfoodh diligently runs a nursery filled with the fragrance of mango, papaya, and lemon trees. The nursery is his core world—where he plants, prunes, grafts, and watches life grow. Yet one persistent challenge loomed over him and every farmer in the area: pests that relentlessly attacked leafy vegetables.

In the early days, Ali crafted a homemade pesticide using Mareemrah leaves, but the labor-intensive process and inconsistent results led him to seek a smarter solution. With support from SMEPS throgh the ESPECRP, he proposed a plan to convert part of his nursery workshop into an organic neem oil extraction unit—a natural pesticide that disrupts insect feeding and reproduction without harming the environment.

He acquired a modern extractor, moving from simple pots and manual mixing to a controlled small-scale production line. Ali began extracting neem oil with precise concentrations, targeting whiteflies, blackflies, thrips, and destructive citrus pests. Most importantly, this oil—now a core product of his nursery—is safe for bees and birds and leaves no toxic residue on crops.

Ali says:

"Neem oil isn't just a pesticide—it's a green weapon. We fight earth's pests without harming the earth itself."

The impact of this development was immediate. In just one year, Ali sold more than 100 liters of neem oil to farmers and agricultural associations. Within the nursery, he created eight permanent jobs for young men and women, with five additional female workers brought in during peak seasons—turning his green plot into a space of economic and social empowerment.

As he smiles and holds up a bottle of amber neem oil, Ali reflects:

"A nursery isn't just a place to sell seedlings—it's a factory of ideas. And neem oil is its faithful guardian: it protects the crops and preserves the life of those who care for them."

When Nurseries Bear Fruit as Awareness and Growth

From Al-Fanah to Ja'ar, the stories of Abdullah and Ali prove that a nursery can be a seed of profound change. It produces seedlings, nurtures ideas, and creates solutions that allow the land to heal—and communities to rise. Thanks to the synergy between visionary farmers and the support of SMEPS, the World Bank, and the UNDP, Yemen's rural areas now speak with a new voice—one that says:

"Development begins wherever you place your foot to work hard and seek a sustainable future, and that starts by protecting natural resources and allowing your field to produce organically".

Constructive Partnership, Development and Impact

From the heart of the fields that have regained their vitality, the numbers speak the language of achievement. Since the project's launch, the supported nurseries have produceshas produced 43,350 seedlings covering a wide variety of crops and trees: 18,150 papaya seedlings, including 13,100 hybrid varieties and 5,050 local varieties to preserve genetic diversity, 17,000 tomato seedlings, and 7,500 pepper and "Bafteem" onion seedlings, in addition to perennial trees such as neem with 300 seedlings, Pithecellobium dulce with 200, and jujube with 200. Not only that, but the project has also yielded sustainable development impact—and here are some facts in the language of numbers.

Indicator	Figure/percentage
Total seedlings produced	43,350 Seedling
Seedlings actually distributed	39,130 Seedling
Direct beneficiaries	43 farmers
Farmland planted with local seedlings	30%
Crop yield increase from organic compost	25 - 40%
Organic waste converted to compost	15 tones
Permanent jobs created	5 jops
Soil fertilitv improvement	30 - 70 % in first tow seasons

A Wider Horizon and Green Sustainability

These numbers are not mere statistics—they are stories of lives transformed. Today, farmers plant strong, locally adapted seedlings and nourish their soil with organic compost that has increased fertility by up to %70. Greenhouses have become hubs of production and knowledge. In the markets, chemical-free products are making their mark, and locally produced neem oil is finding its way into orders from beyond the region. With each passing season, the green footprint widens, and the impact grows to embrace a cleaner environment and a stronger local economy.

Sustainability here is not a promise deferred. The nursery now operates on a gradual commercial basis, expanding its distribution reach, introducing improved varieties suited to the environment, enhancing staff skills through continuous training, and safeguarding seedlings with locally produced neem oil and compost that improves soil fertility season after season. It is a self-sustaining cycle: 1.5 tons of waste converted into compost to feed the land; the land yields stronger seeds; and those seeds feed back into a more resilient local economy.

Green Hope

And so, between the farmer's hands and the seed of life, the story becomes a whole, a tale of ... land that regained its greenery and a community that redrew its own contours with hard work and hope for tomorrow. The project is no longer just greenhouses or machines in motion; it has become a living promise that renews with every season, taking root in the soil, flowing into people's hearts, and leaving its mark in cleaner air, richer dining tables, and generations who understand that farming is not only about harvest, but an inheritance nurtured with knowledge, work, and love.

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