

Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC)

Annual Report

2002

During 2002, the political situation in Palestine deteriorated seriously, affecting the ability of WATC to carry out programs, projects and activities. Some projects were delayed, and because of restrictions on movement follow-up often depended on fax, email, or DHL. However, most activities continued as planned. WATC continued its media programs: the biweekly newspaper supplement *Sawt An-Nissa (Voice of Women)* and the weekly radio program. We also ran four campaigns: Campaigning with Rural Women: Sanabel Project, Empowering Women through Internet Centers: Women of the Future Project, Empowering Young Women Leaders, and Campaigning through Education: The Sponsorship Program. The Advocacy for Women's Rights program continued into its second phase. During 2002 WATC also focused on evaluation of our performance and development of our staff.

I. Media Programs

A. Print Media Project:

Sawt An-Nissa / Voice of Women biweekly newspaper supplement
Supported by Konrad Eibert Stiftung

Achievements

- WATC published 22 issues (no. 136-157) of *Voice of Women* during 2002.
- Al-Ayyam newspaper indicates that it distributed 10,000 - 18,000 copies. In addition, WATC coordinators distributed 2000 supplements and 300 copies were sent to other organizations addressing women's issues.
- WATC conducted a three day training course on *Gender Mainstreaming in Journalism* for 13 male and female journalists from governmental and non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations.

Constraints

- Between March 29 and 1 May 2002 WATC could not publish *Voice of Women* due to Israel invading and reoccupying Palestinian cities, freezing all aspects of Palestinian life and work.
- Al-Ayyam's distribution was also affected by the Israeli invasion. After May 1st, WATC worked overtime and succeeded in publishing an issue within two weeks. Since then, *Voice of Women* has continued to be published biweekly.

Impact

Voice of Women had a significant impact on women and Palestinian society during 2002:

- *Voice of Women* fostered a more positive relationship between women and decision makers
- *Voice of Women* served as a reliable source of information about the realities facing Palestinian women for government, the media and women's organizations

Voice of Women is the only periodical maintaining a very high artistic, journalistic, editorial and linguistic standard. It is concise, professional, and plays a unique role in expressing liberal thought and calling for equality and freedom.
Aref Hijawi, evaluator

- *Voice of Women* helped women to access WATC's legal, psychological, economic and cultural services
- *Voice of Women* encouraged open dialogue by tackling controversial topics. As a result, WATC received a large number of phone calls and faxes requesting information on various issues and asking that particular topics be addressed.

The topics covered by Voice of Women express clearly the suffering of Palestinian women; for example, being forced to deliver a baby at an Israeli checkpoint, being held as a political prisoner, or having a child martyred. Voice of Women also addresses legislation, rights, cultural and health issues and the status of women in neighboring countries. It is balanced in its representation of rural, refugee and urban women, and of women from all socio-economic levels.

In'am Al Obeidi, evaluator

B: Audio Media Project: Radio Program

Supported by Diakonia

Achievements

- WATC broadcast 22 live radio episodes from Ajyal Radio Station every Tuesday from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m.
- WATC ran two training courses, in Gaza and in the West Bank, on gender issues in the media. Twenty male and female journalists participated.
- WATC introduced CEDAW's articles to women by facilitating live radio discussion of cases. For instance, after featuring an elderly woman who was pursuing her education, we received requests from many women for an episode dedicated to adult learning, which we did in cooperation with the Ministry of Education.
- The program not only featured women professionals and decision makers, but with the encouragement of WATC's field coordinators, it hosted women from many different local communities.

Constraints

- In March, Israel invaded Ramallah and destroyed Ajyal Radio Station, interrupting programming. As a result, only half of the planned episodes were broadcasted.

Impact

- The program gave women from various backgrounds the chance to speak on the air, share their experiences and participate in discussions.
- The live presentations and discussions stimulated many suggestions and initiatives, such as dedicating an episode to adult education in cooperation with the Ministry of Education.
- The stories of successful women presented in the program encouraged and inspired other women to pursue their goals.
- The radio program educated the public about legislation and its practical implications, bringing it from the chambers of the legislators into the community.

II: Campaigns

A. Campaigning with Rural Women: Sanabel Project

*Supported by Ford Foundation, Westminster Foundations
and the National Endowment for Democracy*

Achievements

- WATC established committees of 5 to 9 members in 28 villages in the Hebron, Nablus, Gaza, and Jenin areas and provided training on gender issues, women's rights, communication skills and participatory rapid appraisal (PRA).
- The Sanabel committees in 21 villages conducted PRAs to identify the needs of their communities and to network with other organizations to address these needs.
- A community awareness campaign was conducted in each village to address the needs of the community which were determined by the PRA. The campaign included courses on first aid, food preservation, household management, and health issues.
- In some areas, such as Jenin, Sanabel women took a lead role as members of the emergency committees in their villages and helped women and children to cope with the disaster in Jenin. This helped the women build their self-confidence and restore their faith in what they have to offer their communities.

Constraints

- Sanabel was unable to establish all the centers it had planned to because in some villages it was difficult to find space to rent, as in the cases of Oreef, Zwata, Dair Sharaf, Bait Wazan, Tel, Askar Elbalad, Joret Elloot.
- Some aspects of the project were delayed due to Israel imposing ongoing curfews and closure and attacking some of the targeted villages, making it impossible for coordinators to conduct regular follow-up visits.
- In one village, the Sanabel project was opposed by some men and religious people because they misunderstood the objectives of the project, making it difficult for women to participate in the beginning.
- At some times of the year, for example during the olive harvest in October, women were unable to participate regularly and meetings had to be rescheduled.

Impact

- The Sanabel groups took on an important role in their communities and took part in most of the social and political activities. They played a major role in crisis management during curfews and military attacks on the villages. They paid visits to the injured in the hospitals,

Feedback from participants:

"I used to be very shy and inhibited but now I can clearly express myself."

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"Now I am able to speak up and strongly defend my ideas."

•

"I had no idea that I was entitled to an inheritance, but now I know and I am going to demand my rights."

•

"After going through the Sanabel training, I decided to go to college after sitting around for so many years."

•

"It's wonderful that it's women like us who are encouraging us to develop."

•

"I used to be reluctant to speak to strangers, but now I am even negotiating with municipalities. When we first approached the head of the Village Council to suggest to him a voluntary cleaning day for the streets, he responded very sarcastically: "Do you think we have no men to clean the streets anymore!?" Now this same man is very cooperative and having seen the results of our work, he approaches us with ideas."

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"I was able to do a needs assessment for the village without getting myself or them angry."

supported their families, participated in the demonstrations against the occupation of the Palestinian territories and visited those who had lost family members.

- The Sanabel groups in various communities met with local leaders to address their needs and issues and work together on solutions. They persistently followed up after these meetings and were assertive in their approach to problem-solving.
- Having been equipped with the necessary skills, some Sanabel members started small projects such as producing pastries and food at home for sale, which has helped them to support their families financially.
- A literacy course was offered in Zawata/Nablus in addition to a summer club for children. There has been a noticeable change in the behavior and personalities of the women who received training. At the beginning they lacked the confidence to express their points of view, but by the end of the course they had begun to express their opinions fearlessly. In addition, their participation in public activities increased. Women are now more aware of their rights and are better able to assess their needs. They are also more motivated to work to meet their needs. Many of them have become members of associations, committees and councils in their villages.
- A major achievement is the willingness of participants to work together regardless of their political affiliation, which used to be uncommon.
- Sanabel groups worked on networking with other institutions such as government ministries and agricultural and medical committees in order to access information and support.

Lessons learned

- Networking and coordinating with NGOs and other institutions is essential in order to address more needs and empower women with more skills for problem-solving.
- Networking and coordinating with NGOs and other institutions proved helpful in finding solutions for problems that WATC could not solve alone, for example securing a facility for training that was safe and accessible to most participants.
- Tackling the women's practical needs after equipping them with the strategic skills built their trust in Sanabel and their interest in working together on more projects.
- It is important for women to share their experiences with each other on a more regular basis to build their trust in themselves and strengthen their self-confidence.
- It is essential for women to be equipped with the skills to be able to sustain their projects.

“I trust myself more and I can discuss things with confidence.”

“I am more capable of making decisions now.”

“I learned how to do project planning and feasibility studies. We do home economics projects based on share capital. We now have a small income which we created ourselves and we are always trying to improve the project.”

“I'm proud to be running for the position of director of my organization.”

“After feeling like a prisoner in my own home for so long, now I have moved ahead and finished college.”

“I used to look at myself as a burden to others, but now I know I am very valuable to myself and many others.”

“I have built new friendships; before I used to feel so alone.”

“I learned that rights have to be seized; they aren't given to you on a silver plate.”

Recommendations

- Target groups in the villages need to be consulted as partners during the planning phase of projects.
- Training on practical skills should not be at the expense of training on strategy but should be addressed within the same context.
- Networking should be done to meet needs which cannot be addressed by Sanabel training, such as loans and credit management.
- Sanabel groups should network with each other both within the same area and between different regions so as to exchange experiences and lessons learnt that can be of benefit in future planning.
- Because of the ongoing closure of towns by Israel, telephone lines and computers with internet access should be provided to each village.
- The sustainability of Sanabel groups can be strengthened by the groups involving themselves in local women's organizations.
- Intensive training should be offered to two members from each Sanabel group in preparation for initiating new Sanabel groups in nearby villages.

B: Empowering Women through Internet Centers: Women of the Future Project *Supported by Friedrich Eibert Stiftung*

Achievements

- Five computer centers were opened in Salfet, Qalqilia, Hebron, Gaza City and Khan Younis
- The computer centers were provided with computers, scanners, and other equipment
- 12, 739 women visited the centers
- Three female coordinators at each center were trained in computer skills and how to teach their new skills to others. Training topics included basic software and hardware maintenance, Excel, accessing information on the internet, education, political campaigning and advocacy. Training in website design was given at 3 centers.
- Training was provided to 441 women at the different centers.
- The centers played a role in bringing women together for social activities as well as for training. The centers were also made available to the community for training and activities.

Constraints

- The political situation had a negative impact on implementation of the project.
- The training courses did not generate enough revenue to cover the centers' expenses, making it impossible for the centers to be self-sufficient by the end of 2002 as planned.
- Project coordinators' visits were hindered by closures and curfews.
- The difficulties that coordinators experienced in visiting centers due to the restrictions on movement imposed by Israel resulted in bills, reports, and other documentation being submitted late.

Impact

- Hundreds of women and young girls from marginalized areas visited the centers, received training and developed their computer and internet skills, making them better qualified for job opportunities and university entrance.
- Several organizations contacted the centers, partnered with the centers on activities, and recruited new employees from among the women who participated in the trainings or other activities at the center.
- Dozens of women visiting the centers got involved in additional activities at the centers.
- Many girls who visited the centers with a relative decided to get involved in the activities of the centers.
- Members of the village council participated in many of the activities of the centers, and became more supportive of the activities of the centers in these villages.
- Many women were able to make contact with relatives overseas through the internet services provided at the centers.
- Many women who were living isolated lives at home took advantage of the chance the centers provided to get out of the house, get to know other women and learn new skills.

Lessons learned

- Center coordinators need to be educated in human and women's rights, self-reliant, motivated, and have enough initiative to be able to overcome the delays in reporting and conducting activities.
- Coordinators should be hired for an initial three month probationary period before assuming permanent positions.
- Financial and administrative management of the centers needs to be studied to ensure their sustainability after WATC and FES withdraw from the project.
- Coordinators of different centers need to communicate more regularly with each other and share information via email.
- The computer centers must be located in areas which are easily accessible to women.
- The administration of Salfit and Qalqilia centers needs closer supervision by WATC.
- Participants and staff in projects in all communities need to network more effectively to facilitate sharing of resources, combining activities, and more efficient partnership between these projects and other WATC projects.

C: Empowering Young Women Leaders

Supported by Diakonia, Ireland Aid and

Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development and Peace/WLP

Achievements

- The project reached 404 young women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Ramallah Governorate: 30; Nablus Governorate: 28; Qalqilia Governorate: 30; Bethlehem Governorate: 29; Jenin Governorate: 80; Hebron Governorate: 62; Tulkarem Governorate: 50; Gaza Strip: 95.

- Two trainings were held in Ramallah and Gaza for 30 young women using the *Leading to Choices* manual that was developed in partnership with the Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development and Peace, the South Africa Representative Office in Ramallah and other organizations.
- Young women leaders were trained in news skills in the areas of gender, leadership, communication, lobbying and advocacy, human rights, democracy and community intervention.
- Young women leaders joined various women's committees and participated in their activities.
- All the training courses were conducted free of charge.
- Some training courses were hosted free of charge.
- Political committees offered their office space free of charge wherever possible.

Constraints

- **Political:** Israel's bombing, invasions and sieges of communities delayed the action plan of the project, particularly since travel between towns and village was restricted, making it difficult to conduct training for staff.
- **Economic:** The Palestinian economy deteriorated as a result of the political situation. This triggered an increase in the rate of early marriage among young women, especially in Hebron.
- As a reaction to the occupation, attitudes have become dramatically more conservative. One of the forms this takes is that young women are often expected to stay at home.
- **Funding:** Limited funding of the project affected activities in some areas of the West Bank and Gaza. WATC was not able to hire more field coordinators to follow up on all the project activities due to budget limitations.

Recommendations

- Closer contact between the project coordinator and the field coordinators
- Increased communication between the field coordinators, leaders and the various women's political committees
- Equipping the leaders with new skills
- Facilitating meetings between leaders, activists and the board members of WATC

D. Campaigning through Education: The Sponsorship Program

Sponsored by NORAD

The Women's Affairs Technical Committee has been conducting a Girls' Education Campaign program since 1996. The project assists young women by paying their travel costs to commute from their villages to the nearest secondary school to reduce school dropout among girls which usually leads to early marriage. This Project was funded by Norad and the South African Representative Office in 2002, as well as by individual donations. The Women's Affairs Technical Committee covered the travel costs of 25 young women from the southern and middle regions of the West Bank and Gaza until December 2002.

After Israel reinvaded the West Bank and Gaza Strip in March 2002, the Palestinian community responded with determination to continue normal life as much as possible. Education became the primary goal of most students, who saw it as the most effective weapon with which to fight the occupation. From the Ministry of Education, to principals, teachers, and students, all became more committed to education – particularly young women, despite the serious obstacles and risks. Schools continued, and the young women who participated in the Sponsorship Program successfully completed their first semester of the current school year.

Achievements

- Twenty-five young women from various villages in the West Bank and Gaza were empowered to continue their secondary education.
- By continuing their education, these young women were protected from early marriage and its consequences.

Impact

- Since the young women were selected from deprived and marginalized areas, this project increased these communities' awareness of WATC, with the result that the community became more invested in the importance of education for women.
- Young women in these areas participated in other WATC activities, including advocacy work.
- Families with limited financial resources usually give priority to male children to pursue their education; this project prevented girls in such families from being excluded due to their families' financial constraints.
- The concept of education for all was introduced to the communities, which was of particular significance in impoverished areas.
- The scholarship enabled girls to travel to other villages or cities to continue their education, which exposed them to new ideas and practices that they had not encountered in their own villages. In particular, they became more receptive to new ideas about gender.

WATC's contribution comes within the framework of the Convention on Children's Rights: the right to equality in education, the right to protection, the right to development and the right to not face discrimination.

*Rose Shomali,
WATC Director General*

III: Advocacy for Women's Rights - Phase 2

Sponsored by the Norwegian Agency for Development (NORAD)

Achievements

- WATC organized several meetings with the members of the Palestinian Legislative Council to discuss cases and laws related to women's rights and to propose amendments drafted by WATC and its partners. The Civil Status Law, the Family Law and the Civil Service Law were discussed, and an amended version of the draft Social Security Law was proposed.
- WATC sent a letter to President Arafat requesting that women be represented in the committee that he had appointed in August 2001 to work on the Civil Status Law.

Women who are affected by the law should be represented in the committee that is drafting the law.

WATC executive member

- Most of the amendments proposed by WATC were accepted and approved by the PLC during the first reading of the law.
- The legislation passed by the PLC following the efforts of the advocacy team and volunteers showed greater sensitivity to women's rights.
- The Civil Status Law was amended to allow a mother to register the birth of her child, which had not been allowed before.
- Women's and human rights organizations agreed on a media strategy to address the key issues surrounding the Civil Law. WATC's bi-weekly newsletter, Sawt An-Nissa (*Voice of Women*), and WATC's TV and radio programs served as venues for women and journalists supportive of women's rights to speak out. Many issues were discussed publicly for the first time.
- WATC helped to develop networks of NGOs and activists for coordinated advocacy efforts and for efficient distribution of tasks. These networks pressured decision-makers to amend legislation and regulations for greater sensitivity to gender.
- Networking also facilitated effective responses to emergency needs arising from the economic crisis in Palestine.
- A number of training courses on management, communication skills, conflict resolution, gender and women rights, and dealing with the media during elections were offered in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
- The project coordinators attended a number of workshops and training courses offered by other organizations that were relevant to their work.
- Many public activities were organized for International Women's Day. WATC mobilized thousands of women throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to participate in these activities.
- WATC organized activities in support of Palestinian women prisoners, including issuing press releases and hold marches throughout the West Bank and Gaza.
- Many women were offered technical assistance for finding employment or income-generating work from home.

Pressure groups are good examples of voluntary and professional work that can lead to a real change in the attitude of other professionals toward women's issues.

*Nadia Abu Nahla
WATC Gaza Director*

For the first time during the current Intifada, women were able to cross through the three checkpoints between Ramallah and Jerusalem holding Palestinian flags and banners with slogans promoting women's rights and emphasizing the right to a Palestinian state. Women were beaten, arrested and brutalized by the Israeli military and police.

WATC executive member

Constraints

- The political situation affected planning. Coordinators worked under constant pressure because of the need to reschedule activities and find alternative ways to pursue their objectives.
- The deterioration in the political situation, closures, curfews and restrictions on movement between cities and villages affected follow-up, training and monitoring. Inability to travel between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank due to the border closure and Israel's refusal to issue permits impeded communication, coordinating, and joint activities.
- Some legislation could not be addressed by the Palestinian Legislative Council because of political developments taking precedence on the agenda.

- Some decision-makers demonstrated little concern for gender issues or women's rights and needs.

Lessons learned

- Networking has the potential to achieve a high degree of efficiency and effectiveness in developing amended draft of laws and getting these approved by the PLC.
- The General Union of Palestinian Women played an import role in advocacy for legislation.
- The valuable role that pressure groups played in Gaza indicates the importance of forming similar groups in the West Bank.

Recommendations

- Continue to hold trainings and meetings to raise the awareness and sensitivity of decision makers to women's needs and human rights.
- Continue training women candidates and decision makers to be effective and influential leaders.
- Encourage PLC members to overcome the political barriers they face.
- Work with international and regional networks to pressure Israel to allow the Palestinian government and people to function normally.
- Encourage and empower more women to be involved in the political arena.
- Finalize a draft of a unified law.

WATC has found that women are liable to become more empowered and independent if economic projects and social projects are combined.
Mariam Ismail

IV. Vitalization Rural Program (VRP)

Supported by USAID and implemented in partnership with the CRS, Palestinian Hydrology Group, and Union of Agricultural Workers Committees

Achievements

- WATC delivered services to 27 villages in the West Bank (15 in Hebron district and 12 in Jenin district) which improved the living conditions in these rural areas by increasing services and rehabilitating infrastructure in multiple sectors through active community participation.
- WATC established 33 women's and youth committees in the targeted villages which were empowered to take the lead in planning, implementation and monitoring of the project and in networking to increase community awareness.
- WATC conducted 86 training sessions and workshops in which 2137 women participated.
- A women's center in Hebron district was rehabilitated to serve 560 women.
- Five women's centers were set up in five villages in Jenin district and used to host women's activities as well as other community activities.
- 6210 beneficiaries from neighboring villages benefited from these services.
- A cleaning campaign was organized with a group of volunteers to improve the health conditions in the villages.
- Small projects were carried out in schools to improve the educational environment of the students.

- The communities played an important role in supporting the project activities. The communities took initiatives to:
 1. Construct a sanitary facility at its own expense, as well as developing a playground for children near the market in the Hebron area.
 2. Collect fees for each activity despite the increase in the unemployment rate and the decrease in families' income.
 3. Improve the agricultural roads for the benefit of the community.
 4. Facilitate activities if staff were prevented from traveling to the sites.

The communities' sense of ownership and commitment to the project has become so strong that even under extremely difficult economic conditions they generally maintain their contribution to the ongoing activities at the same rate.

CRS report

Constraints

- As the situation continued to deteriorate dramatically, the staff spent considerable time trying to get to their offices and reach project sites. In extreme cases, staff had to reschedule visits and move on to another area, in order to use their time more efficiently.
- The staff sometimes had to walk on dirt roads in order to reach their destinations. Sometimes it was extremely difficult to get to the desired location.
- Continuous closure to the locations hindered the arrival of construction materials to the sites. Yatta block has been closed for more than two months, resulting in the delay of all activities in these villages.
- The closure prevents vehicles from entering the village to reload the construction materials at the project sites.
- From January onwards, the Jenin and Hebron areas were tightly closed and movement in and out of them was strictly forbidden. The road closure did not only affect the main roads, but also the agricultural access roads and dirt roads, thus hindering the planning of day-to-day activities
- The increase of unemployment sometimes made it impossible for the village councils to collect contributions for the proposed activities.
- The ongoing siege and restrictions on movement led to increased poverty, particularly among those living in rural areas or dependent upon work in Israel.

External evaluation of projects

- The two media projects received positive evaluations by external evaluators.
- The Sanabel projects in Jenin, Nablus, Hebron and Gaza were evaluated by an external evaluator. Results showed a change in women's attitudes about themselves and their communities.
- The Women of the Future project was evaluated by an external evaluator contracted by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. The results showed that WATC and FES should withdraw gradually from the project as the women's organizations take over administration of the project. During the transition period, coordinators of the centers must be trained in the financial and management skills needed to manage the centers.

Staff development

- Most staff in the West Bank and Gaza received training or attended workshops on skills needed for their development and for better work performance.
- Staff participated in workshops locally, regionally and internationally.
- Consideration was given to coordinators in distant districts to be able to attend workshops when possible.

Staff morale

- Due to the temporary absence of an administrator, staff faced uncertainty during 2002 about WATC's future and ability to survive. When a new administrator was hired, it was some time before the trust and confidence of the staff was rebuilt.
- While the morale improved by the end of the year, financial insecurity continues to impact the staff since most donors are not interested in funding the administration of WATC's work. Staff salaries come from projects with no guarantee that they will be renewed by donors.
- Staff morale is also affected by the lack of uniform administrative and financial standards for all staff.
- Despite these factors, the staff are generally cooperative, committed, hard working and willing to learn.