

Programme Activities Annual Report 2003

This report will present the accomplishments of the different projects of the Women's Affairs Technical committee (WATC) in the year 2003 in relation to the objectives of WATC set in its literature.

Objective:

To affect the devising of gender-sensitive policies and legislation in various spheres of life.

Objective:

To advocate decision makers on equal rights for women in the Palestinian society.

Advocacy for Women's Rights Project

For the past seven years, and through the support of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) the Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC) has been working on its Advocacy for Women's Rights project trying to raise awareness of the decision makers and political parties on the different laws. The project was able to accomplish some achievements in the different laws and legislation. Laws drafted at PLC became more gender sensitive.

The project has been also working on forming pressure groups consisting of women and men who believe in women's rights from the perspective of human rights. These pressure groups targeted the members of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) and the political parties, and other decision making bodies to change the draft laws and to play a role in having a more sensitive polices which do not discriminate against women.

In 2003, WATC built on the Advocacy project experience of phase I and II to advocate for reform issues and for equal rights of women in legislation and policies. In addition, The project aimed at a more efficient involvement of women in the reform process in building the state .

During 2003 WATC role in networking had a clear effect on the success and continuity in unifying the understanding among the organizations reaching a harmony with proposed amendments to draft laws. Through coordinating with women organizations and civil society, WATC worked mainly on the following laws:

Family Law:

The technical committee that was formed in previous years from WATC, the General Union of Palestinian Woman (GUPW), and the Women's Centre for Legal and Social Counseling continued to follow up on draft laws related to the family. The draft law that was originally submitted to the PLC by the Chief -Judge Taysir Al-Tamimi was reviewed and appropriate amendments were presented based on human rights and women rights perspectives . These principles were integrated in a draft unified family law that can apply to all families, regardless of religion, and aim at complete equality between women and men in all matters related to civil rights and women's rights. This includes divorce, women's rights and the properties gained during the marital period, taking into consideration the women's work within the household and child rearing as productive work, full partnership concept between husband and wife within the family , and women's right to self determination at the legal age.

Since the Family Law is very important for women in Palestine , the WATC recognized the importance of reviewing women's status in other religions .The WATC legal consultant conducted two studies, one related to Christian women in Clerical law for the three main Christian sects and the other study was related to the status of the Samaritan women in the Samaritan law. Two round tables were conducted to discuss the results of the studies involving civil society institutions represented by human rights and women's institutions, PLC members and Dar Al-Fatwa. The results of these

studies were used in advocacy and lobbying with decision makers and in public awareness meetings to advocate for the necessity of a unified family law.

Penalty or Criminal Law:

The importance of the Penalty Law is in the fact that it constitutes the basis for other laws to come. Therefore the civil society organizations were concerned to ensure having a Penalty Law that is human rights based and gives special attention to the needs and circumstances of the Palestinian society, especially women and children.

Of particular concern to the Civil Society Organizations in the Penalty Law was the issue of capital punishment, the punishment of children below the age of 12, and the equal treatment of women and men in cases of adultery. The Civil Society organizations worked hard to ensure equal treatment in cases of prostitution, moral cases, and the right of women to control their bodies including the case of abortion.

Labour Law and the Penalty Law were reviewed and discriminating items were drafted by a committee consisting of WATC, Arab Thought Forum, Al-Haq Institution, Women's Centre for Legal and Social Counseling, and the legal unit of the PLC. During 2003, 28 meetings held by this committee dealing with the Penalty Law. In addition the committee shared their amendments in a forum, conducted by the Steering Committee for Reform representing the Civil Society in which WATC is a member, to discuss amendments to the Penalty Law. As a result, a complete draft Penalty law was signed and submitted to the PLC in the name of all Civil Society Organizations.

Electoral Law:

The importance of this legislation is the access it affords to women at decision making positions in society. WATC was keen to study the electoral law and the experience of women candidates in the 1996 elections for the PLC to determine whether or not there are

gender gaps in the law. It was found that gender discrimination occurred in the application of the law, rather than in the text of the law. WATC worked within a committee consisting of representatives of political parties, and Civil Society Organizations representing PINGO, and in coordination with MUWATIN Institution to produce proposals to amend the applications of the Electoral Law.

This committee held 16 meetings in 2003 to produce a memorandum that was published in the local newspaper including, "SAWT EL-NISA" the biweekly newspaper of WATC. The memorandum was used as a lobbying document used in the meetings with the President, the Prime Minister, and the majority of the PLC members including Gaza Strip.

The Constitution, and Other draft Laws:

WATC provided a gender reading for the constitution in its third draft, in addition to other draft laws relating to Children, Youth, Workers Union, Civil Service, Public Health , Security Detainees and Social Security Law.

Objective:

To develop the self assertiveness of women using latest methodologies in adult education and training.

Campaigning with Rural women (Sanabel project)

This project has been ongoing since 1997 in different areas (Gaza, Jenin, Nablus, Hebron) with funds from different foundations (National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Ford, Joyce Mertz, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Westminster).

The project aimed at empowering women in remote and rural areas to improve their social conditions thus strengthening their role in the development process, and in the social change.

In the year 2003, and with support provided by Ford Foundation and NED Foundation, WATC could reach 32 remote villages- 18 in the districts of Nablus, Jenin and Hebron, and 14 in Gaza Strip, and about 1000 women were trained on skills needed for leadership and community awareness management.

During implementation of Sanabel projects, (32) committees of active Sanabel women were formed, and got training on gender analysis, communication, advocacy, self-assertiveness, human and women's rights, participatory rapid appraisal (PRA) , management of income generating projects, human development, marketing and management, Psychosocial interventions, and other practical skills.

In addition to the training of the committees in each village, these committees conducted training for groups of women in these villages. These women call themselves Sanabel groups, and they participated in campaigns based on the PRA that was carried out to assess the needs of the community, in particular women's needs. According to these needs, (68) Awareness workshops were conducted by professionals aimed at raising women awareness in issues such as; Ways of Dealing with children in times of conflict, Family violence and the effect of violence mainly on women and children , Environmental and reproductive health, Women's role in the election process and in the process of social change, Children's rights, Human and women's rights, and Psychological intervention in times of conflict. In addition to issues on relative marriage , family violence, Palestinian family law (divorce, inheritance rights), Gender, Adolescent & Teenagers needs, and integration of people with disability.

Sanabel committees succeeded in building on the expertise of available institutions in their communities to be part of the awareness campaigns that address the needs assessed.

Accordingly, a network with (43) cultural institutions, ministries, and non governmental organizations was formed to support the awareness campaigns and to provide for free their expertise when requested. This network showed three things: First, it was a good indicator that coordination is much more effective than duplication; second, it showed that women when given training and responsibility can be efficient and can play an important role in

mobilizing their community. Third, this voluntary contribution of the community and institutions working in the area, decreased the expenses that no one institution can provide alone.

Empowerment of Young Women Leaders

Palestinian women have been very active throughout the struggle for independence, facing Israeli soldiers and aggression, protecting their families and women around them. Many Palestinian women political leaders were created as a result, through their different political factions. Most women leaders, however, are women from the older generation, consisting of both local Palestinian women and women returnees.

WATC considers it of great importance to address younger generations of women as to ensure continuity and to bring as well new visions and perspectives that would support the women's movement on the long run. Therefore, WATC is focusing on Young Palestinian Women (YW), hoping to be able to create new young leaders through which the mission of the older generation can be pursued. Young women will be integrated, trained, educated and enlightened of the importance of their role as young women in changing society and struggling for women's rights.

A seven-year project was implemented by WATC funded by Oxfam Quebec (1997-1998), the Swedish Diakonia (1997-2004), the Irish Representative Office to the Palestinian National Authority (1999-2004), and Women's Learning Partnership for Rights Development and Peace. The Project targeted (320) YW and 60 (YM) 3 districts: Qalquilia, Ramallah and Tulkarem. Young women and men were selected from Palestinian cities, villages and camps focusing on university students, and high school students. Field Coordinators were selected from women's political committees as part of the integration process of young women into the committees' programs once the project ended.

WATC gave serious attention to Young Leaders empowering and capacity building in its strategy, by preparing a group of future women capable of carrying the message of women's rights in order

to build a democratic and civil society in which democracy, equality and human justice prevail. Three hundred and twenty Young Women Leaders were trained on issues related to gender awareness, leadership and communication skills, first aid, lobbying and advocacy, self assertiveness, planning, democracy and human rights, and skills needed to deal with the media and leading to choices.

Activities in 2003 covered training of coordinators and young women leaders in many skills. Sixty eight training courses, 92 presentations, were held by WATC in cooperation with other organizations for providing young women leaders with skills and knowledge such as; Gender Awareness, Leadership and decision making, Communication, Lobbying and Advocacy, Democracy and Human Rights, Good Governance and Social Development, Conflict Resolution, and critical and Logical Thinking, Crisis Management, and Leading to choices manual.

In addition to the training, one hundred and nine regular meetings with the young women leaders were held in the different areas of the West Bank and Gaza. Youth and women issues were discussed in addition to discussing the difficulties leaders face in joining the project whether from their families or from their community and the prevailing patriarchal culture especially under the current political situations.

Young women were encouraged to participate in social activities that were held in cooperation with other organizations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip or in trainings held by other organizations. The participants also visited many organizations to understand their work which encouraged them to join the activities of these organizations and be more involved and active in the Palestinian Society.

In addition, and due to the difficult situation, Young Women took nineteen counseling sessions that were held by professionals to about 400 YW in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to help them express themselves and their feeling of fear and frustration.

Objective:

To enhance the involvement of women and their representation in political life, at all levels, especially the decision-making level.

Women and Elections Project

The participation of women in the formal political life reflected, more than any other sphere, the size of the societal discrimination against women. Developmental plans ignored the role of women in the local councils in terms of decision-making, participation and even in implementation with the assumption that any developmental plans that address the community as a whole reflect positively on women. This misleading position meant that half of the population are left out from the development process. Minimal women's participation at the decision-making level minimized the role of women in the development of policies, legislations and laws that affected them.

WATC organization members realized the importance of raising the level of women's participation in the elections, so they were advocating for a minimum of 30 percent open quota of seats for women in both the local and national councils and had raised this issue with the Ministry of Local Government and the various political parties. For the local councils, the WATC is demanding an accumulative quota system that takes into consideration the number of women nominees in each district and the number of allotted seats.

In 2003, the Women and Elections project aimed at reducing the gender gap in political and social participation and at increasing the efficient representation of women in the elections at national and local level as part of their equal rights set in the Palestinian Basic Law and in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The project promoted gender equality, and the empowerment of women for more efficient participation in social and political development.

Through the support of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, and the Cultural section of the American Consulate in Jerusalem, the project activities mainly focused on training of 50

potential women candidates were trained on how to conduct their electoral campaign, so as to reinforce women's participation in political life; 35 women field workers were trained on how to advocate for women's rights in political participation at the community level. Main issues covered in the training were awareness issues such as Gender, women's rights, gender gaps in the electoral system and in political life in general. Also, the advocacy and lobbying activities carried out in this project were coordinated with the Advocacy for Women's Rights project, and with other WATC projects for more efficient implementation of the project. More than twenty advocacy and lobbying meetings were conducted with decision makers in the West Bank and Gaza and two forums on the electoral system as well. Local councils were given a special focus due to the fact that women's daily life is highly affected by the local councils. Therefore, two central public meetings on the role of women in the local councils were held in the West Bank and Gaza and several meetings were conducted at the community level by the field workers through networking with civil society members and women organizations.

Many manuals were produced to support the training and the community awareness campaign on women's participation at the local and the national level. Manuals produced encourage and help women to register for voting, and to make a wise decision in voting. The manuals for voting were distributed by the field workers when advocating for the right of the women to participate in political life. Three manuals for potential women candidates were produced: One to support the potential women candidates to run their electoral campaign; the other manual aimed at supporting the women candidates or women members of the local councils how to read programmes and development policies from a gender perspective; another manual aimed at assisting PLC members and potential candidates to read the laws from a gender perspective. A documentary film was produced about a woman who could become the Head of the Local Council in her village and could make a difference. This film gains special importance in community awareness especially when we realize that no women members are accepted at the local councils in Gaza even when there was a decision made by the Minister of the Local Government in 1996.

Objective:

To mainstream Palestinian women's issues within the process of constructing a democratic society free of all forms of discrimination.

The Partnership Grants Program

In the last six years, WATC worked on mainstreaming gender and women's issues through partnership with other organizations where each partner provides its value added to the project. WATC used to provide its expertise in the area of gender and women's rights in addition to capacity building of local institutions in the deprived areas.

In 2003, WATC worked in partnership with the Palestinian Hydrology Group and the Welfare Association Consortium in a project that was sponsored by the World Bank. The project aimed at providing services to 14 villages in these areas and to build the capacity of one local institution in each village to follow up the work after the project is over. The villages were selected in the west of Ramallah, south of Hebron areas and in the Gaza Strip.

The aims of the Partnership Program was:

- * To improve the technical capacity of smaller NGOs in delivering quality services;
- * To support access by these NGOs to increased levels of funding;
- * To expand the reach of larger NGOs to marginalized communities through a larger network of field-based NGOs;
- * To promote best practice as a core project strategy.

The PHG/ WATC Partnership program focused on water, gender and environment. The main project implemented by the lead organization, PHG, consists of establishing agricultural roads, gray water units, and rain harvesting systems, rehabilitation of springs, distribution of water tanks as well as the rehabilitation of organizations and club premises. The implementation of the project was accompanied with other activities such as awareness raising, training on various environmental topics such as

composting, as well as raising gender awareness among the targeted communities.

WATC as the partner organization prepared the capacity building plan for the community based organization (CBO) based on a participatory rapid appraisal conducted to identify the needs of the villages and the local institutions that will be sub-partners in the partnership project.

The capacity building program has the following objectives:

- * Build the capacity of CBO to manage project
- * Integrate women within CBO both at the membership and decision making level
 - * Promote CBO role in improving services to local community and in responding to development needs
 - * Facilitate and support CBOs' search for sustainability alternatives for its activities

The capacity building plan was finalized in the year 2003; therefore, the implementation of the plan will take place in 2004. However, through monitoring of work progress, some capacity building activities were needed to ensure good financial reporting, and good procurement. Most of the learning has taken place through experience and on the job training. Two workshops were organized by the financial and accounting managers of WATC and the PHG to guide the CBOs through the various financial procurement procedures.

A committee was formed in every village where two women were selected to be part of the project management . These committees took an important role in identifying the criteria for selection of beneficiaries, and ensuring that the project implementation is gender sensitive either through monitoring the implementation based on the criteria set; or through monitoring the applications approved and the services provided such as building of water cisterns and wells.

Most of the activities achieved during this year were related to the infra structure services; however, women took role in the committees established for tenders. The program concluded the

work of 55% of the construction and rehabilitation work of rainwater harvesting systems. The number of water tanks distributed amounted to 391 which almost exceeded the number planned. Out of the 75 composting units, 25 were implemented. In addition, 65% of the projects to rehabilitate the local institution centers were implemented.

In the year 2003, 260 Gender and Environment awareness meetings and activities were organized for community members.

Objective:

To strengthen the participation of women in Palestinian Civil Society through media activities.

The Voice of Women Newsletter

The Voice of women bimonthly newsletter is considered one of the most powerful media outlet for WATC putting the organization on the lead of most organizations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip through addressing dareful topics such as women's rights. The most important topics tackled by the newsletter were discrimination against women, marriage and heritage , discriminaion in salaries and equal opportunities. At the political level, women's paticipation at the decision making level were discussed including stereotyped roles of women and men . During the Intifada "The Voice of Women" has attempted to transmit its social message through tackling humanitarian issues under a deteriorated political situation and the impact of the aggressions on Palestinian women in particular . In such situations, women have a double burden , not only as housewives ,but also new social roles related to the psychological , social and economic roles.

"The Voice of Women" , thanks to Konrad's support, has continued throughout the year 2003 , much more stronger and with greater impact. During the year 2003 "24" issues of "The Voice of Women" have been issued, and the majority have been focused on the impact of the social and the economic situation on the Palestinian women. It also dealt with the developmental issues and

the role of women in development process .It also included WATC gender reading for the draft Palestinian constitution where gender discrimination was identified, and alternative items were developed. In addition, the newsletter focused on writings of women writers, and the critics that targeted their writings. It also tackled different perceptions of the role of women, and focused on successful stories, and the role of the women's movement was always raised in promoting the participation of women in the elections. The recruitment of Palestinian female judges and their future and the issue of female students inside the Green line and examples of female creativeness are also tackled. The newsletter also included updated events and reports on women's successful experiences in the world. The newsletter also included analysis of cultural and political interpretation of discriminations against women and women experience through field reports of social, cultural and political and new successful achievements of women.

Distribution of "The Voice of Women" has quantitatively progressed in the year 2003 . About 15000 copies were distributed either through Al Ayyam daily newspaper, or through WATC field coordinators. Finally a workshop for evaluation was conducted in coordination with media professionals. "The Voice of Women" is a major component for WATC to disseminate its views regarding women's issues, and rights. Therefore, it is considered a support for all WATC programmes especially in advocacy with decision makers and in community awareness campaigns.

The Radio Program:

WATC was able to continue broadcasting its special radio program in 2003 through the generous support of Konrad. The program "Against Silence" was broadcasted on the official Palestinian Broadcasting Service on Tuesdays on a weekly basis . The Radio Program produced 25 episodes, each for 55 minutes and lively. The program was then re-broadcasted at 3 local radio stations in Nablus, Jenin and Gaza.

The aim of the program was to raise public awareness on the role of women in political participation , and to raise a debate on women's role. Women were encouraged to speak out especially

rural women and young women leaders. The radio program is one of the best means proved effective in reaching women in their houses especially in rural and remote areas where women do not have access to watching TV or difficulties in reading. The radio program aimed at motivating women to participate in public sphere, through giving them the chance to express themselves through the radio program lively.

Radio episodes were advertised on a regular basis in Sawt An-Nissaa' newspaper, and also rewritten to enable the readers to read about them.

“Against Silence” focused on women and elections, and covered a wide range of sub issues including; women issues, elections and women organizations, electoral system and women choices, role of Women's Committees and Civil Society institutions in the elections. In addition to that, it focused on women development in rural regions, Palestinian political women role during Intifada, women's empowerment in lawyers union elections.

Audio-Visual Media:

TV although an expensive means of media, it proved to be effective in presenting messages related to the importance of Women's participation in political life and the role of various institutions in the election process. Thanks to Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, a TV talk show was broadcasted on the quota in addition to several interviews that were carried out. The talk show was live and covered the following:

- The Importance of working through partnership.
- Women's demand for democratic elections (quota and the electoral system)
- Role of women organizations in promoting women's participation in the elections process.

The participants in the talk show were women activists at decision making positions.

in addition, 2 TV spots about women's participation in elections were produced . The TV spots will be used intensively when the

next elections campaign starts.

Objective:

To empower and support existing women's committees and groups on the operational and organizational level.

WATC is a coalition of different women organizations that have common aim which is related to women's rights. These women organizations, together with the women centers participate in developing the policy of the WATC. WATC as a technical body, provides technical expertise to the grass roots of these women organizations either through training, or through exposing these to experiences through the implementation of activities in the different areas of the West Bank and Gaza. Most of the projects are implemented through the grass roots of the women member organizations which means that those who are trained transfer their knowledge and skills to their organizations. This is considered a value added for WATC because it ensures sustainability of projects.

Women organizations participated in different study visits and workshops which helped them gain more knowledge and experience. This of course is reflected in their organizations.

Volunteers of the project come mostly from women organizations where they get skills and knowledge that help them take role in the advocacy and awareness campaigns of the WATC. This applies to many of WATC activities, such as the Young Women Leaders, Advocacy for Women's Rights, and Empowerment of Rural Women where young women not only play an important role in making a change in their organizations but also in taking a good position at WATC. Now many of those who took the training at WATC became very efficient in leading similar projects at their organizations.

When WATC feels that this organization is ready to take over the project, it leaves the administrative and the financial support to the women organizations.