



The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy

MIFTAH

2015 Annual report

1. Executive Summary

MIFTAH Mission: Established in 1998, MIFTAH seeks to promote the principles of democracy and good governance within various components of Palestinian society; it further seeks to engage local and international public opinion and official circles on the Palestinian cause. To that end, MIFTAH adopts the mechanisms of an active and in-depth dialogue, the free flow of information and ideas, as well as local and international networking

MIFTAH Strategic Objectives:

1. Empower effective leadership within all components of Palestinian society in order to enhance democracy, good governance and security, and to raise public awareness concerning the rights and responsibilities of good citizenship.
2. Influence policy and legislation to ensure the safeguarding of civil and social rights for all sectors and their adherence to principles of good governance, especially in the establishment of Palestine as a post-conflict State.

MIFTAH's capacity building activities that were conducted in 2015 are listed in Annex 2. A full list of the researches, studies and manuals developed by MIFTAH during the reporting period are presented in Annex 3

Moreover, Annex 4 includes a selected collection of documented success stories that reflect on the achievements MIFTAH has accomplished during the reporting period.

Respectively, this progress report showcases achievements during the period 1 January – 31 December, 2015. This first section of the report summarizes the remarkable achieved results in respect to the Strategic Objectives, however, a detailed description of outputs and activities are presented in Annex 1 of this report.

In regard to **Strategic Objective 1:** Empower effective leadership within all components of Palestinian society in order to enhance democracy and good governance and raise public awareness concerning the rights and responsibilities of active citizenship.

The remarkable achieved results were:

Enhance women political inclusiveness in reconciliation and peace processes

On June 15th, 2015 More than **900 Palestinian women at both West Bank and Gaza called for immediate achievement of national reconciliation and national unity** through a full and immediate implementation of the Cairo Agreement for National Reconciliation and in accordance with the 'Shati' Agreement. Women stressed on the need for achieving a social contract based on the concept of citizenship and the recognition of women's rights in political participation based on the Palestinian Declaration of Independence and the Palestinian women's rights document ratified by all women's movements in Palestine. The participating women confirmed the necessity for political pluralism in society and the participation of all, first and foremost women, in the building and development process, and for all to live in freedom and dignity according to the law. This was through the **national Conference "Women's Call: One Country, One People, One Flag"** organized by MIFTAH and a group of civil society organizations, it was **held in Ramallah concomitantly with Gaza** through video conferencing and was **attended by hundreds of activists and leaders from various national political factions and Islamic movements.**

(Annex 5 Conference closing statement published including 13 recommendations to enhance women's involvement to end political division and support reconciliation efforts).

Enhance youth political participation

In February 2015, MIFTAH in coordination with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) announced remarkable survey results on the perceptions of students in Palestinian universities and academic institutes on political participation with a focus on the status of young women political participation in both West Bank and Gaza. This survey is considered a **unique statistical profound baseline data in regard to youth political participation, and is considered as a specialized reference for state actors, political factions, civil society organizations, academics and UN agencies and international organizations.** The main findings were published in a press release (both Arabic and English) on: MIFTAH and PCBS websites:

MIFTAH <http://www.miftah.org/Display.cfm?DocId=26277&CategoryId=36>

PCBS <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/DesktopDefault.aspx?lang=ar>

(Annex 6 – Press release on the main findings of the survey).

Political and Social Active Youth Network

“Atwa – Advocacy and Mobilization campaign to end the division” was proposed by 50 members of the Youth Network after these members went through a three-day “Weekend Solutions”; where the youth group were supervised by a facilitation team to widen and deepen their critical situation analysis in relation to the ongoing and continued efforts to end the Palestinian political division reflected in the geographical separation of WB GS. This gathering also helped the youth in highlighting the essential role these Palestinian youth can play in leading recent democratic movements in Palestine, and how youth concerted efforts can lead to an end of the division, with highlights on youth influential participation in leading social and political change in Palestine.

Enhance youth role as Agents of Change and Leaders of Tomorrow

In December 2015, MIFTAH accompanied a youth delegation of 11 young activists (2 males and 9 females) on a study tour in Tunisia **in a purely unique Palestinian initiative**. The study tour aimed at creating opportunities for youth and women to participate in discussions on defending women’s rights and promoting their social and political participation in both Palestine and Tunisia. Furthermore, the study tour aimed at enhancing the networking, learning, and experience exchanging dynamics, especially through meetings with influential women and young women leaders, women parliamentarians, women rights holders/ defenders leading civil society organizations, youth-led-organizations and political parties. **The group was highly influenced by the experience and level of knowledge of the activists they met in Tunisia. The political and social activists in the group expressed their interest in running for the next local and union elections. This learning experience allowed the participants to make comparisons between the women status in Palestine and Tunisia, which highly motivated them to start planning to influence the political and social structures they are affiliated to.**

(Annex 5 – A booklet including presentations of women and young potential leaders on their learning experience, especially the networking and sharing of knowledge with their counterparts in the MENA region, highlighting transformative leadership: Youth as “Agents of Change”.)

During June 2015, another study tour was conducted to Marakesh/Morocco, where three women local council members from Beit Sahour, Al-Bireh and Burqa/ Nablus participated. These three women are motivated nominees to run for upcoming local elections. The overall purpose of the tour was to provide the opportunity for women LGU members to learn more about the experience of Moroccan women in decision-making positions. The visit was aimed at exchanging experiences and networking between the women from both countries.

In regard to achieving **Strategic Objective 2**: Influence policy and legislation to ensure the safeguarding of civil and social rights for all sectors and their adherence to principles of good governance, especially in the establishment of Palestine as a post-conflict State.

The remarkable achieved results were

Advancing Women Peace and Security agenda in Palestine

On the National Level:

A Strategic Advocacy Plan was developed by MIFTAH, the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) and the 1325 National Coalition Members. The Plan identified strategic directions to activate women's movement in utilizing UNCR 1325 in relation to the Palestinian context. The advocacy strategy highlights the main pillars of interventions and activism; Enhance women political participation in peace and security processes, protection of women and girls rights under occupation and in conflict, accountability of Israeli occupation for all the human right violations committed against women and girls, and prevention through enhancing networking and building alliances with international community actors to advocate on the international community to take actions against the Israeli occupation.

On the Regional Level:

On October 2015, MIFTAH and GUPW, in partnership with the General Union of Jordanian Women held a **two-day regional conference "UNSCR 1325 15th Anniversary: Challenges and Prospects", in Amman, Jordan**, on the occasion of the 15th anniversary since the issuance of Security Council Resolution 1325. **The conference shed the light on the good practices of utilizing UN measures in relation to WPS, lessons learned from experiences in the region, as well as existing mechanisms, gaps and barriers to effective implementation of UN measures on WPS. The conference has further engaged the Arab Women Regional Network on Peace and Security (KARAMA), the Arab League representatives, OHCHR, ICHR, and other women organizations and commissions from the Arab region.** Arab women through the conference **recommended strengthening the women's rights networks in the Arab world and for these networks to be a joint platform for regional pressure on refugee issues.** Participants showed commitment to broaden the scope of action on the UNSCR 1325 to include other sectors such as youth, political parties and civil society human rights organizations, as a means of pressure on governments and the international community.

On the international level:

During the period 13-15 October 2015, MIFTAH, represented by Dr. Lily Feidy (CEO), has joined women leaders from the Arab Regional Network on Women, Peace, and Security (ARNWPS) in lobbying efforts for women's participation, inclusion and protection at high-level discussions on the impact of conflict on women worldwide at the United Nations in New York. The participating women concluded that fifteen years after adopting UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security, critical gaps are still preventing the achievement of sustainable peace in the Arab region.

Improve Governments' accountability and transparency in formulating inclusive and fair fiscal policies.

An analytical study on the 2012 Tax Law was produced and policy recommendations for reform of the Tax System were formulated. MIFTAH drafted a study review of the Income Tax law in principle to social justice and good governance including level of implementation, participation and dialogue on its implications, decentralization, transparency and access to information on revenue collection. Furthermore, the study looked into the effectiveness in revenue collection, progressiveness and potential impact on redistribution. The analytical report produced policy recommendations for influencing taxation legislation in principle to social justice and good governance.

MIFTAH supported the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) to adopt participatory and citizen budgeting tools and mechanisms, to enhance budget transparency measures. MIFTAH supported MoSA to print and disseminate a citizen budget for 2016 budget published on the ministry, MIFTAH and AMAN coalition websites.

2. Lessons Learnt and Conclusions

The weak social participation related to financial and economic issues, at both national and sub national levels, is not only due to the unwillingness of national and local formal bodies to cooperate or engage, but mainly because of the lack of the common social awareness regarding these issues, resulted in low internal sense of motivation to participate or influence these sectors. Therefore, raising the awareness of the public and promoting access to information by citizens, along with furnishing monitoring and influential mechanisms lead to creating a strong motivation for citizens to participate effectively and hold authorities accountable to address their needs and priorities in development plans while reflecting these needs in national and local budgets.

Media is one of the most influential advocacy tools that should be utilized to influence public opinion and policy makers. Journalists and people working in media need to acquire additional investigatory media analytical and critical skills and tools to tackle fiscal issues and practice accountability mechanisms based on solid concrete information. Therefore, motivation of media outlets and young journalists would ensure the mobilization of the public to influence upon a change in policies and procedures.

Diversifying the tools used in capacity building such as the study tours and coaching coupled with theoretical training lessens that gap between the practical and the theoretical knowledge the participants acquire. Furthermore, the study tours helped the participants to further network with likeminded women and youth within the region. Similarly, the coaching that followed the theoretical training in creating citizens' budgets proved to be a recipe for success.

MIFTAH's work on women and youth as marginalized groups showed great potential to influence the future of Palestine. If women and youth are empowered they can be catalysts for change. It is essential to activate this unused potential and provide women and youth with the tools to shape the future of Palestinian state. Enabling women and young women potential leaders to participate and exercise leadership at all levels of decision making can only happen if the political system in Palestine becomes more responsive to women's needs and aspirations.

Reaching consensus on WPS agenda among national women actors in WB and GS through conflict analysis processes, assist in developing a unified strategic interventions and achieving a transcend agreement on strategic directions including four main pillars: protection, participation, prevention and accountability. While engaging International Solidarity organizations with the 1325 local coalitions, assist in providing channels and opportunities for both to cooperate in addressing the protection of women and girls rights especially in marginalized areas with special focus on hard to reach areas, to support Palestine women call for protection and to voice their rights at the international forums and platforms.

3. Situation Analysis:

Palestine witnessed a more complicated political situation during the year 2015 pushing the Palestinian population into profound insecurity. Israel's violation of international human rights (IHR) and humanitarian law (IHL) continued under the reality of continued impunity supported by international ignorance of Palestinian rights to live in a free and dependent state since 1948.

During the second half of 2015 and until today, the Israeli military occupation has escalated violence against Palestinians in Gaza, West Bank including east Jerusalem and in areas that are under its own control including Area C. Israel's escalated violence has resulted in killing and imprisonment of Palestinian citizens; majorities are youth and children including girls. However, despite tens of evidence-based stories and reports, the international community remains silent before Palestinians. Palestine is also losing traditional alliances as the international community is being busy with humanitarian support due to the complicated situation in the region. Palestinians are left alone to fight for justice.

On the other hand, efforts for reconciliation between the two largest Palestinian political parties Fateh and Hamas have failed. Disagreements have resulted in the split of authorities since 2007 between Gaza Strip and the West Bank. However, Gaza remains more vulnerable to the split that is coupled with the imposition of the Israeli military siege which created a gap between women activists in Gaza and the West Bank. On-going Israeli violations of human rights in Gaza and three large-scale military operations have destroyed the social fabric and undermined political development in Gaza. Like the dominant political factions, smaller political factions tend to be gender-blind on the policy and implementation levels. This is problematic because participation in a political faction is the only way for Palestinians, including women and youth, to participate in political life. The consequences of patriarchal dominance in the internal organizational structures of all political factions, and their misrepresentation of women have resulted in multiple forms of exclusion.

The economic situation in Palestine has witnessed further deterioration. Israel has regulated the movement of Palestinians and restricted goods to and from Gaza. The situation in Gaza has become even worse especially after a so-called "TAKAFOL tax law" was imposed in Gaza by Hamas in May 2015. The law imposes a high tax percentage of up to 10% on certain kinds of commodities entering the Gaza Strip which has left Palestinian merchants at risk. On the other hand, Israeli policies and practices subordinated the Palestinian economy: the PNA faced financial crisis in late 2014 after funds were withheld by the occupying power in punishment over the Palestinian Authority's decision to join the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague and to submit claims against war crimes committed by the Israeli military forces, especially in Gaza in summer 2014.

Furthermore, The Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and private sector were deprived from monitoring the performance of the government. For example,

consultations with regards to the draft budget law remained very narrow, ratifying and publishing the amended budget law were delayed, and the Transparency International standards related to the public budget tracking system were not taken into consideration mainly when it comes to ratifying the draft budget law by the Palestinian Authority. For instance, only two documents out of the eight major budget documents were published by the government during the year 2015. In addition, general budget gap exists between the national development plan 2014-2016 and the general budget allocated for the years. As a result, financial policies did not meet the national plan objectives aiming at long term development processes, while maintaining focus on the health and education sectors.

Annex 1: Detailed Description of Outputs and Activities (please find in a separate file)

Annex 2: MIFTAH's Capacity Building Activities that were Conducted in 2015

Leadership skills

- 23 LGU members of 8 LGUs in Tubas and Qalqiliya districts are acquainted with technical and legal information related to municipal work; planning, laws and bylaws of local council all taken from gender perspective.
- 27 potential young leaders and community activists (12 females and 15 males) in Gaza Strip were targeted in a 3-day training workshop held in Gaza that deepens their knowledge in local elections laws and bylaws, code of conduct, gender charter, and build their facilitation skills in leading town hall meetings and awareness sessions to local communities
- 25 potential young female candidates from Gaza strip were targeted through a 3-day training workshop aimed to enhance their readiness for upcoming elections
- 34 local council members (28 Females and 6 Males) from different districts in the West Bank including east Jerusalem, as well as 4 mayors and one deputy mayor participated in a 2-day training workshop on "Decision Making Mechanisms from a Gender Perspective" with focus on taking decisions inside the local council taking into consideration the different community needs and priorities.
- 23 women local council members from Ramallah and Al Bireh districts were targeted through a 3- day training workshop on " Developing women LGUs members Leadership Skills" to enhance their self-esteem and confidence as influential members.

Enhance women and youth skills in networking and building alliances (study tours)

For the purpose of strengthening women political leadership role at the national and subnational and local levels, MIFTAH organized two study tours to two countries in the Arab Region: Morocco and Tunisia.

- The first study tour was conducted in June to Marakesh/Morocco, where three women local council members from Beit Sahour, Al-Bireh and Burqa/ Nablus participated. These three women are motivated nominees to run for upcoming local elections. The overall purpose of the tour was to provide the opportunity for women LGU members to learn more about the experience of Moroccan women in decision-

making positions. The visit was aimed at exchanging experiences and networking between the women from both countries.

- The second study tour was conducted in December to Tunisia. MIFTAH accompanied a youth delegation of 11 young activists (2 males and 9 females), including MIFTAH's team. The study tour aimed at creating opportunities for youth and women to participate in discussions on defending women's rights and promoting their social and political participation both in Palestine and Tunisia. Furthermore, the study aimed at enhancing the networking, learning, and experience exchanging dynamics, especially through meeting with influential women and young women leaders, women parliamentarians, women right holders/ defenders, leading civil society organizations, youth-led-organizations and political parties.

Conflict analysis and social transformation

- 28 youth activists (65% females) went through a 6-day training workshop in principle to KUMI methodology process. The process included an intensive training on conflict transformation methods, including exposing participants to the deep culture and deep structure of societies in conflict, deeply understanding violence as a type of behavior and as a result of deeper levels of social and structural violence, the links between conflicts, violence and negative social values.

Technical skills in investigative journalism and social accountability

- 22 young activists (10 males and 12 females) were able to develop a set of tools and skills after receiving a 3-day training on "Using Media Outlets to Enhance Social Accountability in oPt"
- 15 young journalists of different locations in West Bank including young journalists from east Jerusalem were targeted through a specialized: 4-day training with focused areas on media monitoring tools of the public budgets, tax law, in addition to some specialized information on the economic press.

Enhancing good governance at national and local authorities

- Budget team at both Ministry of Social Affairs and Dura Municipality were targeted separately through 3 day training workshops that covered the measures of participatory and citizens budgeting in terms of transparency and integrity. The training workshops were followed by a 14 coaching days for Dura municipality

budget team, and 28 coaching days for MoSA budget team in order to follow up and mentor the utilization of acquired tools in relation to applying measures related to budget transparency, integrity and enhance the level of citizen participation in formulating and monitoring the general and local budgets. Level of participation registered as follows: 24 participants of MoSA (9 women and 15 men), while 19 participants were engaged in Dura municipality (5 women and 14 men).

Reproductive and Health Rights - GBV

- 45 Imams and preachers were targeted through a three-day training at both Tulkarm and Jenin districts on Male Involvement Tools and Methods in Reproductive Health and GBV. As a complementary phase; 23 preachers and imams successfully conducted 96 awareness sessions in Tulkarem and Jenin districts.
- 28 (18 females and 10 Males) of human rights organizations representatives participated in a four-day training workshops held in both West Bank and Gaza strip. The training aimed to support and promote efforts of human rights organizations to follow up and monitor sexual and reproductive health and rights in Palestine, thereby helping to devise mechanisms for accountability and follow-up and improving services in this sector.

UNSCR 1325 tools

- A two-day training sessions in Ramallah for 21 (17 females and 4 males) community leaders to train them on utilizing the new updated training manual of UNSCR1325.
- MIFTAH trained GUPW members in 11 districts through a two days training on utilizing the Data base system established for keeping data at the GUPW on violations practiced against women and girls based on the documentation tools developed earlier in 2014. Around 34 GUPW representatives participated in the training.

Human rights measures (documentation of violations)

- A total of 65 participants took place in three seminars at districts levels on UN and EU Human rights measures to increase human rights defender and community activists of these measures and channels of reporting on Human rights violations.

- 24 GUPW remembers participated in the training MIFTAH in coordination with the OHCHR organized for three days in 8 districts including Gaza, on monitoring and documentation of Human Rights violations.

Annex 3: Studies and Manuals Developed by MIFTAH

- A guidebook on Urban planning for LGU members
- A survey on " the perceptions of students in Palestinian universities and academic institutes on Youth and Women political participation"
- An analytical study on " Youth perception on youth and women political participation"
- A training manual for Youth Leaders: Political Participation, Democracy and Good governance, Transformative Leadership
- A booklet " Documenting Youth and Women Experiences through Exchange Visits to Tunisia and Morocco"
- Two editions of MIFTAH's Rayon Akhar annexed to Al Ayyam Newspaper
- An analytical study on the 2011 Tax Law is produced and policy recommendations for reform of the Tax system are formulated
- A Country Assessment towards Monitoring and Reporting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights SPHR in Palestine.
- A Booklet on GBV Lexicon "Institutions Providing Emergency Protection Services to Battered Women".
- An update GBV lexicon - List of organizations providing services for battered women in both West Bank and Gaza.
- An updated specialized Training Manual of UNSCR 1325.
- An opinion poll on "Palestinian public opinion on women's political participation in efforts to achieve civic peace"
- Two base-line studies on "The major indicative impact of violations and discriminations against women in the Agricultural and Small-Businesses sectors"
- Policy papers on Enhancing the Implementation of the National Referral System

Annex 4: selected collection of documented Success Stories

Organized by MIFTAH as part of 'AMAL' programme, three local council members give their impressions on a study tour to the experiences of Moroccan women pioneers

Date posted: July 30, 2015

By MIFTAH

Ramallah – It was a unique experience for all. For the three women and members of Palestinian local councils who participated in the study tour to Morocco to learn more about the experience of Moroccan women in decision-making positions, it was beneficial and exciting. For MIFTAH, it was a pioneer initiative, necessary to complement the training workshops and discussion sessions it organizes for Palestinian female local council members. The visit was aimed at exchanging experiences and networking between the women from both countries.

Elections are the way

Jehad Zhou, member of Al-Bireh Municipality gave her impressions on the visit, saying: “We were introduced to Jamileh Afif, elected head of the Conseil Préfectoral de Marrakech and a member of parliament in addition to being a university professor. She is the only woman among 34 male members”, Zhou says, adding that when elected, Afif focused on Moroccan villages and the countryside. “She paved the way for marginalized areas; she built archways to prevent floods and was able to deliver water, electricity and a sewage system to these areas. She took advantage of International Women’s Day to launch a project to follow up with poor village schoolgirls.”

Zhou also said they met with the deputy mayor of Marrakesh, another woman named Hayat Al Mashfou’. “She is a lawyer, a legal advisor and is also a special-needs person.” Zhou goes on about Al Mashfou’s accomplishments. “Today she is the head of the Bar Association and is in charge of the file for conflict resolutions between individuals.” She says Mashfou’ ran in the elections on a list to complete the quorum and won along with head of the Guéliz district in Marrakesh Ms. Zakiyeh Marini. “They were the only two women to win out of 17 others who ran.”

Zhou continues Mashfou’s story: “It wasn’t easy for her to win the confidence of the people, especially with her disability. That is why she refused for the parties to consider her as just a means of completing the list. She worked hard over three years until she became deputy mayor in 2012.”

As for Mashfou’s advice to her Palestinian counterparts, Zhou says: “She told us that in order to succeed, and win the trust of the society, you need patience, diligence and determination. And you cannot succeed without the close participation of civil society.”

Zhour says Moroccan women are facing similar challenges like other Arab societies in terms of patriarchal domination and the marginalization of women. They also must deal with family and tribe rejection of their political participation, and with high levels of ignorance and illiteracy, especially in Morocco's villages and countryside, not to mention the social prejudices against people with special needs.

Zhour said the Moroccan experience had made her even more determined to rise to the challenge of defying society's perception of women, "especially when they are in decision-making positions". She also said she would definitely run in the upcoming elections, either at the local or national level.

Overcoming obstacles

Member of the Burqa Local Council Reem Haji said the visit had a major impact on her. "It gave me that push and motivation to reach positions that will help me achieve my goals and aspirations," she says. "What I realized is that women are capable of action and of giving wherever they are placed, it is inevitable that they can overcome challenges and obstacles that face them."

New horizons for new ways of thinking

Yolla Khair from the Beit Sahour Municipality was also very positive about the study tour, saying it showed her new ways of thinking. "I learned that perseverance, determination and willpower are the paths to success and to reaching decision making positions," Khair maintained. "But this only comes through facing challenges, regardless of how insurmountable they may seem."

Khair met with several leading Moroccan women and with official and civil Moroccan organizations. "Each one has a success story which Palestinian women and local council members can benefit from. The beginnings of the Moroccan experience were very close to the Palestinian one, which means we can build on the experience of these women," says Khair, adding this could be achieved through unifying women's discourse, raising awareness on their political participation and understanding the true role of women in society. "This study tour has deepened my belief in my role as a woman and as a member of the Beit Sahour municipality, and in the need to raise political awareness among women, especially among youth."

Zaghari: the goal was to exchange experiences

MIFTAH coordinator Abeer Zaghari said the organization carried out the study visit to Marrakesh and Casablanca in Morocco between May 31 and June 6, 2015 with the participation of three local council members from the West Bank areas of Al-Bireh, Burqa/Nablus and Beit Sahour. The study tour was part of the "AMAL" programme which MIFTAH implements in coordination with SIDA, OXFAM and civil society organizations. Zaghari said the one-week visit was aimed at exchanging experiences and learning about the political participation of women in Morocco and the nature of women's political action, in particular the role of women in leadership and in decision-making.

Zaghari said MIFTAH, in cooperation with Al Nakheel Association in Marrakesh, which is a regional partner in the "AMAL" programme, held a series of meetings in which the participants met with elected Moroccan women leaders in high-ranking positions. The visit also included field trips to AMAL's partners in Morocco, including Ennakhil Association for Women and Children in Marrakech and the Democratic Association for Moroccan Women in Casablanca. Meetings with the Moroccan press were also organized to discuss the visit and the reality of political participation of women in both Palestine and Morocco.

MIFTAH aims at promoting democracy, gender-responsive governance and gender-sensitive leadership among female and male local council members.

MIFTAH Makes a Difference

Success Story

Date posted: June 22, 2015

By MIFTAH

Abla Froukh: The law grants me my rights: why would I not demand them?

Perhaps she is not the only female member in Saeer local council, but she is the most active, participating in almost every village council committee there is. Abla Froukh attributes her active presence to the training she received from MIFTAH along with other women social activists as part of the organization's "Enhancing the Role of Local Council Members in Local Government Issues", implemented in partnership and close coordination with The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

Some of the council committees Froukh is currently involved in include: the land appraisal, women and youth, financial, and the educational committees, all of which she says have enriched her experience and knowledge. Back when she became a member in Saeer local council in Hebron in 2013, Froukh admits that, she had no idea about the nature of the work involved; "Today I am more confident in myself and my abilities, largely because of the support I received from MIFTAH and GIZ."

This support is reflected in the series of activities, which Froukh is now more capable of organizing and managing, focusing on promoting social accountability between citizens and representatives of institutions in the village. This was clear during the recent two-day training session organized by MIFTAH in coordination with Froukh, entitled: "Decision Making and Policy Formulation from a Gender Perspective", for around 34 local council members (28 Females and 6 Males) from different districts as well as for 4 mayors and one deputy mayor from the district. The training aimed at influencing their leadership roles to take gender-responsive decisions to advance their municipal work based on solid understanding of decision making processes and mechanisms

inside the local council. To build problem solving skills, the trainer employed case-study based training throughout the process. Additionally, the training provided a highlight on important local council's by-laws, especially article 15 of the LGU's internal system which includes 27 items that reaffirm the power authority and roles and responsibilities within different functions in the local councils.

Froukh says she could feel the sense of responsibility among the attendees and their support for her as a woman: "The citizens were introduced to their basic rights for services provided by local councils and then put forth their demands to decision-makers," she said. "This session and what it achieved gave me a lot of confidence and proved that we, as women can play a bigger role in our communities."

Froukh says this entire experience has shown her ability to give back to her community and to play an active role alongside her male counterparts. Today, Froukh has put in a request with the Ministry of Local Government to renovate the kindergarten in Saeer. While she has not yet been granted the request – a similar one went to Bani Naim, a nearby village – Froukh is not giving up, adding that this is not the only project Saeer is in need of. Froukh has been able to get official approval for the building of a sports field in Saeer and is working to grant laborers more honorary incentives.

Because of her many endeavors, Froukh says it was important for her to learn more about municipality laws and citizens' rights, something which she had no knowledge of in the past. Today, she says, she knows about her rights and her duties as well, adding that she now urges citizens to demand their rights for themselves by going directly to institutions or ministries or through activities on the ground such as signing petitions.

"The law grants me my rights to services, so why should I fail to demand them?" She also says the latest training workshop not only introduced her to these rights but motivated other members to raise their voices in demanding them.

Froukh is a female member among 11 male members of council and one female council. "This means I must be their equal. I do not stay quiet," she says.

Her learning experience is not over though. Froukh says she would like more training in information technology. "We always need to learn more. We never stop learning."

Promoting Palestinian national and local budgets to be responsive to the needs of poor and marginalized while supporting autonomy and transparency in revenue generation".

A pioneer experience: Dura Municipality involves the local community in participatory budgeting

Ramallah – The Dura Municipality in the Hebron district is unique. It stands apart from the other municipalities and local councils in Palestine because it has achieved something the others have

not. It is involving Dura citizens in the preparation of the local council's budget, therefore ensuring that the budget allocations covered the most important priorities and needs of the citizens. According to engineer Maher Qazzaz, director of the municipality's water and sanitation department and coordinator for the participatory budgeting process, approximately 40,000 people currently lie inside the Dura municipal boundaries. This number increases to 100,000 when the dozens of nearby hamlets are included, which are also within the municipality's jurisdiction.

A true success story

Qazzaz described the project "Tax Justice, Budget Monitoring and Citizens' Participation" implemented by MIFTAH, funded by OXFAM and in partnership with the Dura municipality, as a huge success. He said the citizens of Dura were proud that their voices could now be heard regarding their priorities and needs. A training process took place leading up to this, from September 2015 until January, 2016, which included training workshops, coaching and follow up, planning and communication with the community and a review and preparation of the annual budgets, followed by the preparation of the participatory and citizen's budget.

Citizens' interaction

Qazzaz says: Citizens in Dura are now fully informed about the revenues and expenditures of the municipality and are privy to every detail that goes on inside. This was not the only success, he says. The municipality held six community meetings of 15-20 citizens each, to analyze the needs of the different areas within Dura. This was preceded by an introductory meeting at the municipality which was attended by citizens representing all social sectors. In these meetings, the people pinpointed the various needs of the agricultural, education, health and housing sectors after which the municipality met with neighborhood committees – each neighborhood was divided into nine committees – and each committee presented its most pressing priorities and needs.

A quantum leap

Dura mayor, Dr. Samir Namura, said the impact of MIFTAH's training on his hometown was huge. He said the workshops comprised a 'quantum leap' in the relationship between Dura's citizens and the municipality, by promoting the role of citizens through involving them in the preparation of the municipality's annual budget in a way that reflects their demands and needs. "The residents now have a good understanding of the importance of participatory budgeting and also the importance of community participation in general," Namura says. He continues that this has had a very constructive impact on the municipality's approaches, adding that it will allot at least 50% of allocations to citizens in its upcoming participatory budget.

Furthermore, the municipality's plans to work with MIFTAH in designing and publishing a citizen's budget for the 2016 budget and future years, is affirmation that the municipality and its partners are serious about actively involving citizens in its financial policies.

Sustainable relationship with MIFTAH

On MIFTAH's training with the Dura municipality in partnership with the Dura's civil society organizations, Fatima Al Butmeh says: "The process built trust in the relationship between the municipality and the citizens. It also boosted capacities among the municipality's employees in communicating with the local community to reflect their needs, not only in the municipality's

developmental plans but also its financial ones. She said the municipality listening to the concerns and issues of the citizens was a 'huge step forward.'

Butmeh continued that during the period of joint cooperation, some of the plans were put into action. For example, coordination was carried out with the Kareesa girl's secondary school and with a number of neighborhood representatives for certain interventions. She said for the most part, the needs of the residents were referred to the 2016 budget. Furthermore, the municipality's annual plan catered to the needs expressed by the citizens, with a portion of the priorities exclusively included in the participatory budget. "This ensures that the process of follow-up, monitoring and accountability effectively continues," she said, adding that the allocations for participatory budgeting in the 2016 budget consist 30% of the developmental budget and 5% of the overall budget of the municipality.

A transformational and successful process

In her assessment of the process, Butmeh said: "I think it was a transformational and successful process at more than one level. Most importantly, some of the knowledge was translated into action. For example, of the 20 people who participated in the training, 80% of them had no knowledge about budgets. This was transformed into 80% of them having the knowledge and ability to participate in developing budgets including participatory and citizen's budgets."

The success of the endeavor was not only about reading and reviewing budgets but also about passing on knowledge and motivating community groups to participate in determining expenditure priorities. The process promoted commitment to their obligations as citizens and beneficiaries of the municipality services and towards developing the relationship between the municipality and civil society institutions, which played a major role in the process. The civil society also benefited in terms of promoting their role in accountability and participation in local development.

This is the first time a budget is developed in consultation and participation with the local community. The process was carried out with technical support and consultations, which were offered to the municipality budget team leading the process. This will allow the team to carry out the process in the years to come and even develop techniques and tools based on the skills and information acquired in the previous experience.

What did the participants have to say?

Volunteer at the Sawa'id institution, Ayat Sweiti said: "After the local community was divided into sectors and neighborhoods, I felt the meetings were very positive in terms of how people were addressing each other. People felt they were partners in the decision-making process."

Ayat said she also personally gained from the experience, saying she learned how to initiate and persevere no matter how difficult the task at hand is. "I acquired new life skills," she said.

Engineer and municipality employee Ala' Sweiti admits that when she was invited to the workshop she didn't have much of an idea about budgets, including participatory ones. After participating, she said the process elevated her to a new level of thinking. "As a citizen, I learned for the first time that it is my right to ask, to monitor and to follow up and that it is my duty to make my voice heard. It is not enough to criticize and do nothing," she said.

As a municipality employee, Ala' said she also learned how important it is for the municipality to adopt the principle of transparency in terms of opening the door to dialogue, listening to citizens' grievances and rebuilding bridges of mutual trust between the people and the municipality.

Another Dura municipality employee Mohammed Shadid said the participatory budgeting process helped to dismantle nepotism networks through creating groups of citizens with a variety of expertise, active participation, capabilities and competencies. "These new practices meant that all of the municipality's files were open to the groups."

His experience was so positive; Mohammed said he wants to bring others on board. "I am going to promote participatory budgeting as the best experience for good governance in local councils and as the best means of increasing investments in poor and marginalized areas."

MIFTAH Amplifies the Voice of Jerusalemites

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By Courtesy of MIFTAH

In 1998, the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy, MIFTAH was "born" in Jerusalem. Since then, it has carried its message within and beyond the city through its activities with the various sectors in Jerusalem, particularly women and youth, the effects of which are tangible to date.

From the day of its inception, MIFTAH has always raised the banner of democracy and dialogue, taking this message to every corner of the homeland, including Jerusalem. It espouses the principles of democracy and good governance in all of Palestinian society, with Jerusalem as a major demographic and geographic prominence. The organization has always sought to develop its strategy of empowering young leaders to participate in promoting principles of democracy and good governance and to raise social awareness towards the rights and duties of good citizenry. Moreover, MIFTAH has always encouraged participation in influencing policies and legislation insofar as they guarantee the protection of civil, social, and political rights.

In this regard, its role has been manifold in Jerusalem where MIFTAH has worked towards promoting the national identity of young men and women in the city through engaging them in activities, programs, and projects. For example, Jerusalemites were part of the formation of the Palestinian National Coalition for Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and are active members in MIFTAH's Social and Political Active Palestinian Youth Network. Grounded in the vision that economic empowerment can provide the impetus for women to be empowered politically, they have also been involved in areas that focus on women's economic empowerment through modest income-generating activities in towns and villages northwest and south of Jerusalem.

Palestinian women in Jerusalem suffer from the same legal, health, and social issues as other Palestinian women and are the victims of dual violence: violence from the society and violence

perpetrated by the Israeli occupation. The violence against women in Jerusalem takes several forms, including arrest, assault, and harassment of women and their families and the obstacles to women's free movement and travel across checkpoints, especially in areas located outside of Israel's Separation Wall. Thus, MIFTAH involves Jerusalemite women in its awareness activities in conjunction with the General Union of Palestinian Women, while purposely promoting the role of women's organizations from Jerusalem in advocacy efforts applied to amplify the voices of women for peace and security at the national, regional, and international levels, as steps toward holding Israel accountable for its violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the occupied state of Palestine, more specifically in Jerusalem.

MIFTAH's programs have impacted the moral, psychological, and economic empowerment of youth and women's segments in Jerusalem and have strengthened their steadfastness and sense of belonging to the city in spite of Israel's avid targeting of their national identity and attempts to Judaize and "Israelize" the city and its inhabitants. Interventions have helped disseminate the Palestinian narrative in Jerusalem, reflecting the everyday suffering of Jerusalemites and monitoring Israeli violations against them and their institutions, the latter of which are constantly being shut down or their work impeded.

Most recently, MIFTAH conducted several awareness meetings on the importance of the role of youth in political participation. Dozens of youth between the ages of 17 and 37 – including activists from organizations in the old city of Jerusalem – participated and offered their ideas on the political participation of youth and youth initiatives. The Jerusalem participants were offered the opportunity to express their issues through skits, which addressed such topics as the major drug problem and sexual harassment. This year, MIFTAH joined local coalitions to contribute to combatting these problems which are considered forms of gender-based violence.

Furthermore, MIFTAH conducted a survey of youth institutions in Jerusalem, one output of the "Active Youth for Social Change" program. The survey aimed to support the youth sector and NGOs in promoting their role in developing youth leaders active at the grassroots level in the Jerusalem area. The youth have become more aware and better informed of the problems they face and of their own needs and interests, and are more confident in dealing with these problems. MIFTAH has given youth a platform from which to express themselves in light of the critical challenges they face as Palestinian youth in Jerusalem. Cooperation was strengthened among the Jerusalem organizations in terms of empowering and supporting youth in Jerusalem.

This has always been our role and strategy at MIFTAH in working with all Palestinian sectors, including Jerusalemites who have, over the years, received support from MIFTAH and who will continue to get support in the years to come. We want to make their voices heard and bridge the gap between Jerusalem citizens and PA officials. The support that MIFTAH can give them in this regard is through promoting social and political accountability among Jerusalemites and decision-

makers and through raising the awareness of official bodies about their needs through direct meetings or the media.

MIFTAH includes Jerusalem in its programs in order to address the issues of citizens there. Hence, the series of awareness-raising meetings and workshops held by MIFTAH in the city have succeeded in delivering the voices of Jerusalem's residents to Palestinian decision-makers. They have also helped to convey Jerusalem's male and female youth as citizens committed to their social, national, and educational role whether at the level of youth or individual initiatives on the ground, including the embodiment of the concepts of citizenry, social participation, good governance, and participation in decision-making.

MIFTAH will always work according to this broad-based vision and is determined to continuously develop it in order to achieve the goals it has sought to achieve since its establishment in Jerusalem.