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مناقض شؤون المرأة  
Women's Affairs Technical Committee

# MY RIGHT TO MY FUTURE

Case Study on Project Model of “My Right to My Future – Women’s Participation in Peace Building and Conflict Resolution” 2015-2017

## Introduction

“Peace” remains a very controversial term in the Palestinian society. Talking about peace while tensions are again on the rise and divisions are growing seems like a hopeless task for many. In Palestinian context; peace building does not only refer to Israel and Palestine, but also refers to internal conflicts and the political division between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. These internal challenges are a main theme in this project and a high priority among the communities. Both cross-border negotiations as well as talks between national actors

### KEY PROJECT DETAILS

**Project Title:** “My Right to My Future – Women’s Participation in Peace Building and Conflict Resolution”

**Project Locations:** 20 locations in occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) in 5 governorates in Gaza Strip: Beit Hanoun, Rafah, Al- Maghazi, Al- Nusirat, and Khan Yunis; 9 governorates in the West Bank: Jenin, Tulkarem, Qalqilya, Nablus, Salfeet, Ramallah, Jericho and the Jordan valley, Bethlehem, Hebron, and East Jerusalem.

**Implementing Actors:** CARE WBG and Women’s Affairs Technical Committee (WATC)

**Project Duration:** March 2015 to September 2017

share the great absence of female voices and women representatives. A main need for inclusive peace building that can have a real impact is the greater involvement of women in circles of conflict resolution.

Therefore, this project focusses its efforts on laying the building block of inclusive peacemaking in the selected communities and within participating political parties.

This document serves as a summary of the project’s implementation model, main activities and results highlighting the key choices for success. Data for this document came from team’s mid-term reports and the

final evaluation, for which an external consultant collected data through focus groups, questionnaires and research. The Final Evaluation of this project is available for reference upon request. This model also connects to CARE Women Empowerments strategy (formulated in the document Gender Transformative Insights), which can also be requested from the project team for reference.

Project activities took place under the name My Right to My Future – Women’s Participation in Peace Building and Conflict Resolution from March 2015 until September 2017. Funded under the European Union ‘Partnership for Peace’, the project aims to work towards the overall project objective: “to establish conditions for the advancement of the peace process by strengthening the political and societal participation of women leaders for a just and lasting peace”. To work towards this goal in concrete steps, the project worked with both political parties, media and (young) community activists. Two specific objectives were formulated.

**SO1:** Promoting women’s leadership to play an active role within the political parties (specifically through implementing Charter of Honour.)

**SO 2:** Shifting social attitudes towards women’s political participation and empowering youth and specifically young women to play an active role in civil society peace building and reconciliation

Under SO1, the project aims were to raise the representation of women in political parties as well as increase the number of women on influential position in middle and higher management of parties. Under SO2, the activities were contributing to an increase in awareness on women’s political participation and her potential role in peace building, specifically through political parties and the Charter of Honour.



**Figure 1 – Three pillars of project activities taking place in the Gaza Strip and West Bank**

## Background to the Project

The design of the action draws heavily on CARE's Women's Economic Empowerment Framework, which places emphasis on the interplay of changes in a woman's agency: including her own aspirations and capabilities; structure: the economic but also the interrelated social and political environment that surrounds and conditions her choices; and relations: the power relations through which she negotiates her path. It recognizes that women empowerment is based on a holistic process and a gender transformative approach is needed to go beyond merely responding to inequality. A gender transformative approach refers to strategies or activities that seek to build equitable social norms and structures in addition to developing the agency of women. It does not ignore gender inequality, nor does it merely respond to gaps it sees, but it aims to make a difference on the root causes of these inequalities.

Within CARE's Women Economic Empowerment Framework, political participation is recognized as one of the key rights of women that cannot be divided or ignored. Working on one aspect of women's empowerment will also include advancing her other rights, by 1) strengthening agency development that also empowers women socially and politically in addition to economically 2) challenging and shifting cultural perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors to recognize and uphold the rights of women and enable them to participate equally in decision-making processes; and/or 3) advocating for laws and national policies to improve women's political, social, and economic rights as well as improving the implementation of existing national legislation related to discrimination against women.

Some of the earlier learned lessons on Women Empowerment (WE) are applied in this program, like the following;

- In influencing formal and informal decision-making structures, policies, and laws related to empowerment, it is important to consider how an organization can promote continuous listening to 'women's voices', also after project faces out. This can include for example amplifying the voices of grassroots women's organizations in influencing policy making, linking women's cooperatives with women's rights organizations and advocacy institutions, etc.
- Empowering communities (as opposed to individuals only) while also engaging with and targeting them on wider social issues affecting women is a must for sustainable change. This was the basis for some of the community activity plans that were developed during the project.
- Agency development is more than just training! The project included holistic packages that provided coaching, networks, opportunities for practicing and internships, while also focusing on capacities that help women advocate on behalf of themselves and negotiate with other actors in the communities (with men, leaders, CBOs, networks, etc.).
- Engaging men at all levels is needed to create support, alliances and sustainable change.

## Pillar 1: Engaging Political Parties from Bottom to Top

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The first pillar of activities worked with Palestinian political parties as a key component of the envisioned, functioning democracy and a possible platform for peace making. Observations showed that women are seriously underrepresented in the formal structures of political parties, especially the higher ranks of hierarchy (such as the central coordination committees). For party leadership women political participation was a non-issue and received very little attention, as members and leaders did not realize the potential, benefits, and need to include women voices on more levels.

To make sure this issue was placed on the agenda, the experience and well-known position of WATC were made advantages off through engaging with the political parties at many levels and applying a multi-level approach. The approaches taken can be summarized as follows;

- 1) a top down approach in cases where needed, WATC contacted leaders and mid-level cadres of the parties to ask them to support in “opening the door” in the field,
- 2) a down top approach in other cases, it was necessary that the grassroots and basis of the parties contact their leaders and mid-level cadres to be supporting,
- 3) using connections/activists from other projects in some cases to open doors,
- 4) open communication with the focal points of all parties who have been very responsive and positively supporting the project.

Generally, the well-established network of WATC and its ability to work at both grassroots and national level has been very useful to the project. Specifically work was done on the implementation of the Charter of Honour for women participation. In 2010 the WATC had engaged all political parties in the development of a Charter of Honour for women participation. Twelve of the national parties signed and committed to this document, but all faced many challenges on the road to operationalization and implementation of the seven formulated objectives. At the start of the project, new momentum was created to spread awareness of the charter and its objectives and renew the whole party’s commitment to it.

After new importance was given to the Charter of Honour, party management was encouraged to develop mechanisms and action plans to put the Charter into practice. By inviting party members to national conferences where general action plans were presented, the groups received practical tools to build their own strategy and shared learning was encouraged. The media involved in pillar 2 covered the presentation of the action plans in their broadcasts, to create some sense of accountability and stimulate active follow up by the party leaders. Linkages with young activists as well as follow up from the project team ensured that all parties were active working on their action plans during the project duration.

Through the operationalization of the Charter, more women in the middle management feel more supported by the basis and higher management to be active in political affairs, develop their skills and reach positions that are more influential. This should also result in increased representation of women in important bodies like the national negotiation team, ministries and parliament but has not taken place during project duration yet. Increasing representation of women on all level will increase the possibility their voices and perspectives are heard once important topics like conflict resolution, national reconciliation and general reform are on the table.

## Pillar 2: Media as Promoters of Change

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Media is a vital tool of democracy and can contribute to increased social accountability as a watchdog on political parties and politicians, as well as broadcast a wide spectrum of women political engagement influencing social opinions. While the media landscape in Palestine is diverse, it can still grow in capacity and quality of reporting on gender. The project's strategy therefore focused on two sides; building skills and generating commitment among key staff and reports, plus developing campaigns on women's political participation and (absence in) peace building processes for the national audience. Engaging the media is a crucial step in the design of the project, as it will multiply the reach and impact of activities done with political parties and young community activists.

Six Palestinian media outlets and two women media organizations were selected to participate in an intense relation with the project starting with a Memorandum of Understanding for the media coalition. Key staff from these media joined the coalition who benefited from training and one-on-one coaching provided by WATC. The aim was to create more awareness on

how gender roles portrayed in the media can contradict women's right to political participation. Gender sensitive reporting and campaigning skills were made practical for the selected staff and their colleagues. The coalition not only included the key media, but women media organizations were invited as well. In this way, the coalition was a unique collaboration of media around the topic of political rights that was initiated by project partner WATC.

Combining all media's strengths, a media campaign was designed in collaboration with the WATC and the media coalition members. The main item was to broadcast on the activities of the political parties and in the communities in a way that would support the role of women's political participation. This campaign was special as it was designed by a group of nine media organizations from both the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with the participation of policy and decision makers of these media organizations. What stands out here is the special partnership between different organizations who agreed to share and broadcast the campaigns' products on their different platform, which dramatically increased the audience and reach of this campaign. The fact that WATC is the only feminist organization that has a media department working for over 25 years in Palestine was of utmost importance for the coalition and the campaign itself. WATC brought in crucial expertise into this campaign and was successfully able to gather all the different stakeholders and combine all the efforts.

Change was seen among all actors who participated and two important results were reached. First of all women's political participation was promoted and the central role of women in reconciliation and peace building. This was multiplied by show casing the initiatives from the peace activists, bringing real stories from the field to a wider audience across both Gaza and the West Bank. On the other side, the development of a strategic plan for the media coalition in partnership with all members will have impact on the future productions of the coalition. The members are still fully committed to the aims and plans of the coalition and

### Participants of the Media coalition

1. Palestine Satellite Channel
2. Raya FM radio channel
3. Nisa' FM radio channel
4. Maan News Agency
5. Al Shaab Voice radio
6. Watan radio
7. Filistenyat organization
8. Tam Organization
9. WATC

continuous follow up will take place with the partners to continue with the current methodology to promote women's issues. Besides this, the activities greatly increased the skills of key media staff that will be able to influence their media broadcasting for the years to come. Through these steps the action ensured the media also could improve the quality of their reporting.



Figure 1 Media Coalition receiving their training and planning their strategy

## Pillar 3: Young Activists Impact their Communities

Access to communities on topics like peace building is extremely hard, but through training young community activists, many doors open! The project activities from phase I, implemented by CARE and WATC, showed how relevant it is to have access points to community by training grassroots leaders and/or community activists. Bridges are crossed through these activists by gaining access to the community, creating locally appropriate community activities and connecting local young activists with established organizations and networks. In this way, not only are communities reached and exposed to the message of women political participation and peace building, but established women organizations are also opened up to new and upcoming voices from the ground. These are important results from equipping these young leaders.

A holistic program was designed that would offer plenty of learning and practice opportunities for 20 selected young community activists. Besides that, more than 400 local activists and media students were engaged in training activities and implemented community action plans. The 20 leaders were involved in the development of a Training for Trainers toolkit, which equipped them with in depth knowledge and tools on “how to be a successful leader”. Other than that, they made new connections in networks, went on learning trips and exchanges, took part in an internship program with local organizations as well as led the community action plans. This together represented a full cycle of theory, practice, experiences, role models, skills development and mobilization that affected them in a holistic way. Results were seen in their agency, structure and networks, following the women economic empowerment model.



400 local activists and media students benefitted from the training given by the community leaders and all of them were part of implementing Community Action Plans. Most of these community initiatives were greatly successful, were fully adapted to the local needs of the communities, and designed by the trained local activists.

### Community Action in Beit Hanoun

There were several community initiatives that reached much higher results than expected. For example, one initiative in the Gaza Strip organized a stand-up comedy show in the more conservative area of Beit Hanoun. This show addressed topics like equality, women's rights and how we deal with differences between men and women in society. It was unique that the community came together around these topics, which are not often openly talked about. By bringing the message in the fun package of stand-up comedy however, everybody enjoyed himself or herself, heard the message and took it home. The community did show great interest in this initiative as the number of people who attended the show was triple the expected number of visitors!

Overall this pillar caused that many communities have been exposed to the new message of women political participation and have experience the impact of women taking up leadership roles. In the lives of the twenty community activists who were trained intensively, a very large impact was made through the holistic package of activities that build their agency, addressed the surrounding structures and helped them change their relations. 250 other young activists were engaged in community mobilization that helped them learn new skills and become role models for women political participation in public life that will be seen by generations in all communities.



Performance of the play in Gaza

# Key Strategic Choices for Success

What made the project successful?

## Connecting Opportunities across Pillars

1)

Overall, the project was designed in a very complementary way and the activities proved to be a holistic effort on improving the capacity of the actors and reaching the project goals. The project activities all complemented each other and no activity was standing by itself. By connecting the activities across the pillars and target groups, impact was higher.

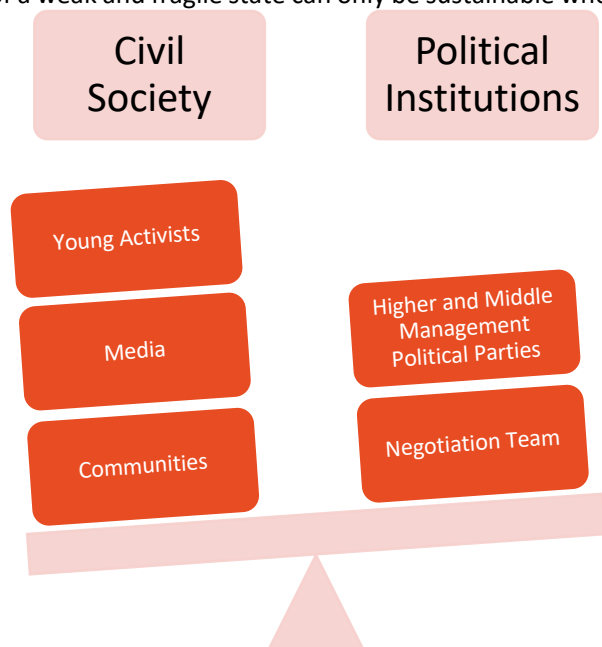
An examples of how the opportunities were connected is the component implemented by the media. The media coalition members checked on the development of parties, gave news coverage to activities from both the parties and the youth and provided learning/internship opportunities for activists. Another example is that activists from the communities did also engage with the party's basis in the community and connected their community plans with the action plans with the political parties when possible. Lastly, political parties were stimulated by the participation of the media in the project and were able to reconnect with their basis through the project activities and the community plans that the youth activists implemented.

Besides, the project also connected with opportunities outside the project; e.g. the municipal elections that were held during project implementation. Young activists were connected with the central election commission and other external organizations for internships; while women and communities were briefed on women political rights and participation.

2)

## Both Sides of the Democratic Equation

Working on peace building in a situation of a weak and fragile state can only be sustainable when efforts are made on both sides of the democratic scale. This means, both to strengthen the fragile political institutions (so they become capable of implementing choices for peace) as well as building civil society (so they can fulfill their role as voicing their opinions and keeping their decision makers accountable). Therefore, the project team made the strategic choice to work on two sides of the democratic equation by choosing actors from both the civil society, media, women organizations and young community leader, as well as the political institutions, namely political parties. The action was designed with long term, sustainable change in mind that would not hurt the development of a democratic system nor would be powerless. The







intention is that both civil society and political parties will push agendas of women participation and peace building, with both of them having different tools and opportunities. Where political parties might have the mean to influence the political mechanisms and high-level decisions more directly, civil society should take its freedom to voice women’s priorities and concerns more boldly.

Similarly, political parties were seen as layered actors where the basis in the community should be engaged separately, while middle and higher management require their individual approaches. Through the project, different political parties were reconnected and re-engaged with their basis in the communities and party leaders heard more local voices. In the same way, renewed interaction took place between established women organizations and young upcoming female leaders from the communities. Through the community activities, local CBOs were also connected with established NGOs or networks. This ongoing conversation is crucial to strengthen the voices for women political participation sustainably.

### Choosing a Strong Local Partner 3)

The above-mentioned two-sided approach has only been possible by working through a strong Palestinian partner who could ensure access, openness and neutrality. Access was needed to the political parties, who would have been unlikely to agree to working with an external organization, as this would have been seen as outside intervention. Now all actors felt high ownership over the project activities, which was reflected in the parties’ eagerness to work on the activities and even their attempts to use the activities for party purposes (in a way that was challenging to the team to manage, but still shows the level of access WATC had).

The choice of working with WATC in the project was a very natural one. WATC’s historical role on improving the political participation of women has made a good accumulation of experience, contacts, credibility and trustworthiness among the political parties and the community. It has been the case that WATC was and maybe still the only organization that has had periodical meetings with the parties. In several cases, WATC has been invited to the meetings of the National Coordination Body of all political parties. In addition, WATC was the first women’s organization to be able to sign a charter of honor with the political parties. Through WATC the communities, parties and media were also open to interact with this sensitive topic of peace making and specifically the role of women participation in that process. On many occasions, communities have refused to work with such activities, but through the efforts from WATC and the methods chosen communities were brought together around these issues. It should also be underlined how women participation (even though sensitive in itself) served as a more neutral access point for discussions on “peace”. Using such access points in the communities to build your activities around has been proven successful for several project cycles.

While all the work included political actors the activities were still seen as “neutral” by the communities, because of WATC’s position as well as the transparency and openness in the activities. Also all political parties were included in the project, except those who didn’t commit to the Charter of Honour for women participation in the first place.

While the project has been building on WATC’s experience and local networks, the project has also been set up in a way to expand WATC’s capacities, especially in the areas of project management, operationalization of right-based approaches, new approaches for community mobilization (such as the Action Research done) and allowing them to benefit from regional networks through CARE’s regional programme.

## Engaging Men on All Levels

4)

In recent years CARE in West Bank and Gaza has accumulated many pieces of learning on gender and women empowerment. Several of these lessons have been incorporated into the project’s design and proved a key game changer. A main lesson learned on gender issues has been the need to engage men and boys on all levels of the project. This is first; to create good will and openness for women to participate and enter male-dominated social spaces; secondly to attract key male personalities of support for women and project activities; thirdly men are included in project activities to have the opportunity to support women in the process of interacting with them in the project; and lastly men need to be reached to make social change sustainable.

In PEACE II engagement of men was crucial in many areas of the project. In the middle and higher management levels of political parties’ space had to be opened up for women to confidently enter and supportive leaders were enlisted to back up the empowerment of women in the party. In the media sustainable change was aimed for by equipped both male and female staff with skills and tools. Many opportunities were created in the communities where women were helped in their engagement with men. The project also helped to open up space in the community for women’s voices to be heard, either in the meetings of the political parties or the CBOs/NGOs/women organizations.

Some of the lessons learned in this project on this issues are listed in the section below and will be added to the CARE WEE strategy.

## Establishing Coalitions

Whenever was relevant and possible, the project created coalitions or was building on already established coalitions. Coalitions had a key function in the project; they would offer opportunities for shared learning, encourage actors to really act, create fusions between established channels/NGOs/women organization and new voices, increase the reach of the project’s message and offered places for participants to practice and develop confidence. In short; they multiplied the project’s impact!

5)

A unique media coalition in Palestine was established that brought together nine actors, among them national media outlets and women media organizations. It is the first media coalition that brings together media on the

topic of political rights and stimulated learning while also increasing the reach of our message. The infusion with women media organizations in this coalition brought a unique perspective for the established media and it increased capacities on both sides. Stories on women political participation were shared from both West Bank and Gaza Strip, crossing any territorial division. Combined, an audience of more than 500,000 was reached with these broadcasts, spreading the message of the promise of women participation in peace building.

The national meetings that were established among the political parties were also important to create a sense of accountability and check on the work they were doing. For the youth activities, the networks were a great opportunity to be exposed to more information and experience that they could find in their own circles. It exposed them to new aspirations and boosted their confidence to become a visible advocate and practitioner of women's political empowerment.

## 6) Building on Previous Accomplishments

It should never be underestimated how women empowerment is a long process of social change that has no quick fix and might not show its real results in one project cycle. However, building forth on the first project cycle funding under the Partnership for Peace (PEACE I<sup>1</sup>) much higher results have been reached than by undertaking separate projects in separate communities. Now the project could build further on the already engaged political parties who had already signed the Charter of Honour, as well as the youth activists who were already equipped with some knowledge and skills. The project communities were already involved till some level in project activities, which made them much more accessible for these new actions.

The importance of working through local partner WATC has already been stressed, but it should be underlined their previous relations with political parties as well as the established media and women media organizations in Palestine made it possible for the project to reach such results in this timeframe.

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<sup>1</sup> "Grassroots activists for Peace" (EC Partnership for Peace 2012, ENPI/2012/296-883)

## Change Seen in the Communities

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### **O**penness for women participation in communities and parties

Throughout the project, communities were exposed in many ways to the message of the importance of women's political participation. This took place in the political parties as well as in the communities where community activists organized activities. The complementary activities with the political party members reached the objectives of increasing female leadership and meaningful women participation at the different party levels. In some parties, it was the first opportunity for the young women and men to participate in decision-making processes with the executives of their political parties. Their voices were heard and their ideas incorporated in the action plans. This gave the youth the chance to be noticed within their parties, and many leaders supported their active participation.

Through the openings of the community initiatives and youth activists, many people were reached with the project's message in an original and meaningful way. At least 1,700 people benefitted directly from activities organized in the 20 communities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The benefit the community initiatives brought to the community, made them more open to receive the message of women's political participation as one of the undividable women's rights. More CBOs, schools local councils and municipalities who were not part of the project became interested to be part of this movement and are eager to join us in organizing similar programs with young people in more communities

The national media was able to play their role as a watchdog on the political processes and held the political parties accountable for their support for women's participation. They also shed more light on the work of the political parties and young activists in the communities, and their roles in supporting women and youth. All community initiatives were covered by the media coalition in a way that was gender sensitive and supportive of women's empowerment. This media campaign by the coalition had a durable effect as it reached more than 5 million people by sharing the same messages through nine media outlets.

### **S**kills, confidence and new momentum for women and youth activists in communities

Lives of the young activists and female leaders were positively affected through the many opportunities they received in the project. At least 270 young men and women built their capacities in different subjects like gender, political participation, leadership skills, communication skills, advocacy and community mobilization. Twenty of them participated in the more advanced program that included the exchange visit to Jordan, internship placements in Palestine and one-on-one coaching that set the young people on a path of leadership and future influence in their society. All of them reported back very positively about the support received during the project and feel enriched by the many experiences and opportunities. Change was also seen in their own views on the importance of women political participation, which was reconfirmed and made stronger.

The participating young men and women in this project became points of reference in their communities and were able to advocate for women's rights among their people. They also asserted the importance of women's political participation through the activities they were responsible for implementing within their communities.