



Arab Foundations Forum – Women Empowerment

The Arab Foundations Forum (AFF) is an association of foundations that aims to foster dialogue, networking, learning and collaboration among foundations as well as other partners in order to strengthen the capacity of strategic Arab philanthropy towards advancing public good and the well-being of citizens in the Arab region. The work of our member organizations spans different geographical areas across the region as well as diverse scopes of interest and focus areas. Foremost among our goals as a forum of foundations is to help advance our members' work through creating partnerships and networks of support between member organizations and all sectors of society, be they governmental, private or civil society. Among AFF's objectives is to build a platform whereby Arab foundations are represented among other networks, associations of foundations and partner organizations in the world. It is in this light that the AFF and the United Nations Office of Partnerships (UNOP) are currently engaged in the development of a partnership agreement that will offer a framework of cooperation that reflects and serves our mutual goals and objectives. We, at AFF, look forward to concluding this partnership with great interest and anticipation.

Our member organizations share a solid commitment to work together towards contributing to social justice and equality in the region. The empowerment of women is an area that takes priority in many organizations throughout the region that share that same commitment and one in which several of our members are actively engaged. This short report highlights some of the work done towards the empowerment of women by three of our members: The Welfare Association in Palestine, the Makhzoumi Foundation in Lebanon and the Jordan River Foundation in Jordan.

Welfare Association – Palestine

Welfare Association is a private, non-profit foundation established in Geneva in 1983 to support Palestinian society in sustainable development. As a leading Palestinian non-governmental development organization, the Welfare Association is dedicated to making a distinguished contribution toward furthering the progress of the Palestinians, preserving their heritage and identity, supporting their living culture and building civil society.



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As an important component of its Community Development sector strategy, the Welfare Association supports women being empowered to take an active role in their communities. Since 2006, WA has been assisting local organizations to provide legal and social rights counselling to women living in rural or marginalized areas in the West Bank, in East Jerusalem and in the Gaza Strip. The program works with four major women's NGOs to provide 90 female lawyers and 90 social workers in the northern and southern West Bank with further training in women's rights and supports community awareness-raising activities for women. Also 60 health workers have been trained in identifying and addressing cases of domestic violence. The program also encourages coalition work and networking among 20 women's NGOs to improve services.

In Jerusalem, the program supports a legal clinic that aims to assist several hundred women facing violations of residency rights, and educational and social rights that are unique to residents of the city and has given rights workshops to 500 women in poor neighbourhoods in the city. In Gaza, 3 female lawyer interns are being trained in providing legal services for women in both civil and Shari'a law, reaching 300 women, and outreach awareness-raising activities to 1,500 women in Gaza. In Nahr al-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon, more than 200 pregnant women have been empowered regarding health issues and future activities will target an additional 900 women to take a leading role in community health issues.

This year WA will begin a new program to support local efforts by at least 20 grassroots organizations to improve gender rights in their small communities by linking with larger and more specialized women's NGOs in their area; the project is expected to benefit about 1,000 rural women. WA has also supported vocational training for hundreds of women in non-traditional occupations such as computer maintenance and NGO administrative work, on women's food production activities through home gardens, women's handicrafts production; 25,000 needy female university students have been assisted by a special tuition assistance fund managed by WA. WA has been pro-active in ensuring that women represent at least half of the beneficiaries in all of its development and humanitarian aid programs, and has been committed to increasing the number of women in its Board and General Assembly and in senior management positions.



Makhzoumi Foundation – Lebanon

Makhzoumi Foundation is a Lebanese family foundation established in 1997 to contribute to the development of civil society throughout Lebanon, addressing different needs of different target groups including women and children, and working on diverse areas such as health care, environment, training and economic empowerment. Stemming from its commitment to empowering Lebanese women, the Makhzoumi Foundation launched several programs that work towards that end. These include a micro-credit program, awareness programs and crafts workshops.

The micro-credit program was launched in 1998 catering to Beirut, and has since expanded to cover the Greater Beirut area, the North and Mount-Lebanon. Makhzoumi Foundation is the fourth Lebanese NGO that joins Microfinance Network of Arab Countries, "Sanabel", winning the Network's 2008 Regional Award following one of the Foundation's beneficiaries being awarded "Best Micro-entrepreneur in Lebanon" during the Fifth Annual Conference that was held in May 2008 in Tunisia. In addition, the Foundation is a permanent participant in the "World Award for Microfinance Entrepreneurs" Program of which the Foundation's women beneficiaries have received several awards including the first five prizes for the year 2005, one of which won the prize of Pioneer Woman Entrepreneur; 3 prizes in the 2007 Award, one of which was the Grand Prize, and first and second place for the year 2008.

One of the Foundation's pioneer projects targeting women has been the Basic Bee-Keeping Skills program that targeted the training of and project set-up for 140 women in five different villages. Upon completing the skills training component of the program, graduates received materials and tools for starting their production, including bee colonies, hives wax and suits and masks. In addition, each village center received the equipment needed to provide support for the women's production and harvesting including the packaging and sales of their honey harvests. The women were provided close technical advice and monitoring to ensure that they were getting the support they needed for the efficient harvesting of honey from their beehives. Some of the trainees applied to the Foundation's micro-credit program for funds to expand their projects following the success of initial honey harvests. The positive impact of the program and the results it showed has seen increased demand on conducting similar programs in different areas of Lebanon.



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The Foundation also conducts regular awareness sessions that involve disseminating knowledge and information on relevant topics, raising awareness on issues of public concern and encouraging the engagement of women in their local communities. Women are also offered different training sessions in various arts and crafts including recycling solid waste to create different products which they are then offered the opportunity to sell at Foundation's yearly exhibition.

Jordan River Foundation – Jordan

The Jordan River Foundation (JRF) is a non-profit Jordanian NGO established in 1995 and Chaired by Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah. The Foundation's mission is to promote, in partnership with stakeholders, the development of a dynamic Jordanian society by initiating and supporting sustainable social, economic and cultural programs that empower communities and individuals based on their needs and priorities. In all of its programs, the Jordan River Foundation strives to mainstream gender considerations from the design phase of the project to its implementation and follow-up.

Building on the need to reduce poverty in Jordan while involving young women, the Jordan River Foundation has developed a unique approach to implementing successful community-based, income-generating projects through its Community Empowerment Program. A major component of this is the handicrafts projects that include the Bani Hamida women weaving and candles project, the Jordan River Designs project, and the Wadi Al-Rayan banana and halufa leaves project. Handicrafts have always been a main source of income for many women in rural and remote areas of Jordan and a source of pride to any country with an extensive heritage like Jordan.

Members of communities working on these projects received several technical and managerial training. These projects were increasingly managed by the beneficiaries themselves with minimal supervision from the Foundation. The production process is essentially fully run by the communities. JRF continues to play a role in the overall management of each project, capacity building and training sessions on topics that include project management, accounting, bookkeeping, and marketing, providing design and services, quality control, raw materials and marketing support due to the remoteness of the projects' site, and in the sale and marketing of the products.



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With regard to the marketing of products, JRF's marketing department promotes and sells these products through multiple national and international channels. They are sold worldwide through tradeshows and featured in prominent home-furnishing magazines and publications. The current number of women employed in Community Handicrafts Project is 46, with 641 direct beneficiaries engaged in project design and implementation.

The Arab Foundations Forum is committed to continue to provide the necessary support and collaboration networks necessary to further the work and goals of our members of which the three organizations mentioned in this report represent a sample of. We are proud to represent our member organizations and to partner with them in addressing the needs of the growing number of the strategic Arab philanthropy institutions throughout the region in contributing to creating more social justice and equality in the Arab world.

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