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Independent Media Program in the West Bank and Gaza

Quarterly Report

October – December 2006

Associate Award Number: 294-A-00-06-00208-00
Under Leader Award No. GEG-A-00-01-00005-00

Submitted by Pact on behalf of Internews Network, Inc.

I. Executive Summary

During the first quarter of *Aswatuna: Independent Media Program in the West Bank and Gaza*, Internews Network's successfully launched the two year project by accomplishing the following:

- Project launch meeting with usaid and staff
- Submitted project start-up documents to Pact
- Hired local staff (4 positions), COP and Grants Manager
- Set up new office space; purchased equipment
- Trained new staff on Internews Network and USAID Rules and Regulations
- Conducted implementation meetings with USAID
- Prepared to launch programmatic activities
- Received USAID's approval for several segments of the work plan
- Held an initial introductory local media meeting

II. Background

The goal of *Aswatuna: Independent Media Program in the West Bank and Gaza* is to enhance the role of local independent broadcast media in their local communities by strengthening reporting, enhancing business sustainability, and improving program production related to issues of local policies, good governance, civil society, and the aspects of democratic culture in the West Bank and Gaza.

The three main components are:

- 1) Strengthening the local media by creating self-sustaining business models, enhancing reporting and production capabilities, and skill-building on investigative and issue-specific journalism, and re-connecting the media outlets with their local communities by reporting on and working with local civil society organizations (CSOs) on field reporting.
- 2) Strengthening the knowledge base and awareness of the media and CSOs regarding each other's work, as well as strengthening the legal and regulatory sector that govern the media, and strengthening the networking and informal association of the media sector in order to professionalize the field.
- 3) Funding innovative program productions combined with training to build more cooperative, responsive and professional production capabilities, and implementing a small grants program focused on CSOs' communications and work with the media and community outreach to their.

Aswatuna: Independent Media Program in the West Bank and Gaza runs from 24 October 2006 through 21 September 2008 with a sub-grant of \$3,884,026.

III. Key Results This Quarter

Key Result 1: Project Launch Meeting

On November 13, Internews Network engaged in a project launch meeting with USAID. Chief of Party Julia Pitner and Washington-based MENA Senior Program Associate Valerie Rowles met with the USAID team, headed by Nancy Shalala, in Tel-Aviv to discuss the administrative and financial aspects of administering the new project. The meeting also touched upon some programmatic and communication issues. This meeting helped guide initial project set-up, including finalizing the work plan, hiring staff, and setting up accounting systems. Internews Network was pleased with the open communication that was established between Internews and USAID at the meeting.

Key Result 2: Submitted project start-up documents to Pact

On November 20, Internews Network submitted the project start-up documents outlined by the subgrant agreement to Pact. The documents included:

- Workplan
- Small Grants Plan
- Innovative Production Grants Plan
- Performance Monitoring Plan

The project implementation plan was created in two different formats. The first was created using Pact's Gantt chart format. However, during a brief meeting with Nancy Shalala and the staff of the DG office of USAID - WB/Gaza, a narrative format based on the project objectives for Year 1 was requested. Both the illustrative and narrative formats of the workplan were submitted.

Working with the Grants Manager, Anne Kindrachuk, the plans for both the Small Grants Fund for CSOs and media outlets, and the Innovative Production Fund for media outlets and producers were completed and submitted for approval. The plans include a description of the funds, eligibility, proposal guidelines, and reporting requirements. The language to describe these two grant funds was developed for use for website posting and various public materials once it is approved.

The Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) for the overall program and project components was outlined and also submitted. The PMP is based on the submitted workplan and will be modified as necessary upon final approval of the workplan. Baseline data will be collected for submission next quarter.

Key Result 3: Hired Local Staff

According to the project description and budget in the agreement with Pact, Internews Network was responsible to have staff to be based in the West Bank and Gaza in place by the end of the first quarter. At the outset of the project the following positions were filled:

- Chief of Party – Julia Pitner
- Grants Manager – Anne Kindrachuk (starting January 2007)
- Media Development Expert (WB) – Abdel Karim Samara

- Program Assistant (WB) – Ahmad Mousa
- Senior Accountant, Admin Manager and IT specialist

Both the Chief of Party Julia Pitner and the Grants Manager Anne Kindrachuk are U.S. hires, who were identified during the proposal development process. Julia Pitner relocated from the United States to Ramallah on November 10. Anne Kindrachuk is already based in Ramallah, and will start work for Internews in January 2007. Both Media Development Expert Abdel Karim Samara and Program Assistant Ahmed Mousa worked for Internews Network in Ramallah as the Local Media Advisor and Assistant respectively. Satisfactory performance and familiarity with Internews Network made them ideal candidates for the new positions, and they began work under this project on November 1.

The remaining positions still open for hire in the West Bank were recruited through two separate advertisements appearing in *Al-Quds* Newspaper. *Al-Quds* was chosen because, according to several surveys, it is the number one newspaper for employment and economic news. On November 10, the first ad was placed for the positions of the full-time Senior Accountant and part-time IT Specialist. Internews Network received dozens of resumes for each position, and, over a period of four days, interviewed five candidates for the Accountant position and three for the part-time IT Specialist position.

Following the screening of resumes and interviews, Internews Network selected Enass Shuaibi for the Senior Accountant position because she has significant experience working as an accountant for USAID projects in West Bank/Gaza. She also has very strong English skills and strong knowledge of USAID Rules and Regulations, and was available to start immediately.

The individual selected by Internews Network to fill the IT Specialist position was Sameh Humaid, selected because of his significant experience setting up office networks and maintaining them. Mr. Humaid has worked as an IT Specialist for other USAID projects in the past, so he is familiar with the bidding and geographic requirements related to obtaining office equipment. He also is available part-time, was able to start immediately, and will provide on-call service for any maintenance needs.

Internews issued a second advertisement for the Administrative Manager and Media Business Specialist positions. Internews Network selected Summer Husain to be the Administrative Manager for the Ramallah Office due to her prior experience working in an administrative capacity for a USAID project as well as her skills in both written and oral Arabic and English, including significant translation experience.

Two candidates for the Media Business Specialist position are currently under consideration and will be re-interviewed. Mamoun Mattar has worked with media since its beginning in the West Bank and Gaza. First, he worked with the Ministry of Information and then in private business, but he has little experience in business plan development or business management techniques. Mazan Assad has significant experience training others in business management, business plan development, and organizational development, but has little direct experience with the media. It became clear that this is a new field, and therefore, there are very few people who have the ability and/or combined skills for which Internews Network is seeking.

In terms of hiring staff for the satellite office to be established in Gaza, Internews Network decided to hold off on the recruiting process for the time being. The deteriorating situation in Gaza, combined with a string of holidays has made the staffing process there very difficult and impractical. USAID is aware of this delay and is supportive of Internews approach.

Key Result 4: Moved in to new office space

Due to the lag between the ending of the previous OTI/ARD project and the launching of the new USAID/Pact one, the office space that had previously been spoken for was lost. Ten different spaces were looked at and considered. Of the ten spaces visited, Internews Network narrowed down the options to two spaces that fit the needs of the project. Upon further consideration, however, one of these choices was excluded due to warnings about Palestinian perceptions about a media development NGO working in a building that also houses the new US Mission in Ramallah. This could not only risk the reputation of Internews, but also of the media who might lose their reputations as “independent” if seen as being too closely affiliated with the US. This became especially important after the Reuters article that appeared on 13 October 2006, which stated:

The United States has quietly started a campaign projected to cost up to \$42 million to bolster Hamas's political opponents ahead of possible early Palestinian elections, say officials linked to the program.

... "This project supports (the) objective to create democratic alternatives to authoritarian or radical Islamist political options," one official U.S. document obtained by Reuters said. ...

Senior Hamas political leader and lawmaker Fathi Hammad called the U.S. money part of a plot to bring down the Hamas-led government. "It is a challenge that we are aware of and we will confront it," he said.

Therefore, Internews Network opted for the second choice at the Millennium Building, Al-Masaef Street, El-Ersal, Ramallah. The office needed a bit of work to prepare, specifically the layout and the wiring of the network. The contract was written, approved, and then signed on 28 November and work began. The date set for move in was 1 December. That did not happen due to a two-day strike that was enforced by the Kitab al-Shabiya group, who paid a visit to the office and scared the workers away. The following week, the Israeli Defense Forces visited the office building and work on the space stopped for the day. Consequently, Internews was not able to move in until 10 December. All the equipment needed immediately was acquired and installed. The rest will be purchased and installed in January.

Key Result 5: Trained new staff on Internews Network and USAID Rules and Regulations

On December 2nd Internews Network's Senior Accountant Diane Dobbs, based in Arcata, California, and Senior Program Associate Valerie Rowles, traveled to Ramallah to conduct training for the staff on USAID and Internews accounting procedures. She spent one day with the entire team, and then two additional days with the Accountant and the Office Administrator setting up the accounting and bookkeeping systems. The three-day training session was very

beneficial for the staff based in Ramallah, as it familiarized all employees with USAID Rules and Regulations and Internews procedures for internal communication, procurement, documentation, subgranting, and contracts.

Key Result 6: Conducted meetings with USAID

On November 16, USAID/WBGaza/DG held a Partner Coordination Meeting in Jerusalem. Internews Network Chief of Party Julia Pitner attended the meeting. The meeting was divided into two sessions: the first addressed the major challenges in the operational environment; and, the second addressed the possible opportunities and entry points for intervention. Each of the organizations represented gave their perspective from their projects. It was useful to hear how other organizations based in West Bank Gaza are dealing with the political situation vis-à-vis the project work and to share ideas.

On November 29th, USAID/WBGaza/CO held a meeting in Jerusalem for all of the Implementing Partners on the following issues: VAT, Mission Orders No. 20 and 21, Contact Policy, Access issues, Audit briefing, and Fraud Awareness briefing. The Chief of Party Julia Pitner and Accountant Enass Shuaibi attended the meeting. It was very informative and many questions were asked, especially regarding the Mission Orders and Audits. USAID told all of the partners that they would be audited in the first year – some were already in the process of an audit. Based on this guaranteed audit in the first year, Internews Network office in Ramallah requested to keep all original receipts on site and permission was granted.

During the month of December, several meetings were held with USAID/WBGaza/DG and USAID/DG partners to explore areas of cooperation. Internews Network was invited by USAID to Tel Aviv for a partners meeting to explain the media program and to better understand the other programs in order to look for possible areas of cooperation. Internews then followed up with one of the partner organizations, ARKAN, to discuss a joint meeting in February for their training of journalists on rule of law and the role of the media. It was agreed that follow up would be done after the holidays.

Key Result 7: Prepared to launch programmatic activities

At the end of November and beginning of December, the media stations started calling because they had heard that Internews Network was back. Therefore Internews Network began contacting the stations to update their contact information and to ask about the new stations. The majority of the stations wanted to know when the new project was going to begin conducting programmatic activities. Several stations mentioned that they had started working on their business plans, or were anxious to receive assistance from Internews Network to help them start needed ones. Overall, the reaction to the announcement of the project's launch was very positive.

However, many expressed concern about the type of support and who will receive this support. They stressed that specific requirements should be applied equally, keeping in mind that many stations are not in compliance with the professional and technical standards. Internews will need

to be careful with how it approaches supporting media stations, and strive to balance between those areas that should be open so that all can benefit and those that will be specifically targeted to stations that have best chance of succeeding and meet the professional and technical criteria. A good deal of this will be determined by their business plans once they are complete. Internews Network already has an informed idea of the stations on which it will focus.

The media training on business planning was postponed until January because the project implementation plan was not approved until 20 December 2006 and the various Christian and Muslim holidays commenced shortly thereafter. However, a letter was prepared to send to all the stations announcing the official start of the program with a date for the first meeting in January. It was approved in its English and Arabic versions and was faxed in the last week of December. (Please see attachment I for the English version of the letter.)

Internews Network is organizing a project launch meeting for media professionals that will formally introduce the new project and its objectives. The meeting is scheduled for mid-January. Following this meeting, Internews Network will move full-speed ahead into implementing the project in order to benefit the local broadcast media outlets, and to improve the access to community-based information for all Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza.

III. Comparison of Planned and Actual Accomplishments

Activities Planned for This Quarter	Timeline	Status
Work Plan and small grants document Creation	Oct-Nov	Completed
Hiring Staff Office Start-up	November	Underway – the Media Business Expert for the West Bank and the Staff for Gaza were delayed. The person of key interest for the WB position would not know of his availability until mid-January so this hiring was delayed. In Gaza, as stated above, the timing was not conducive. However, it will be completed in January.
Train Staff on accounting & USAID procedures	December	Completed
Media Training on business planning	December	This was delayed until January because the project implementation plan was not approved until 20 December and it was too pressed with the holidays to initiate this first meeting. It will be moved to January

IV. Activities Planned for Next Quarter

Activities Planned for This Quarter	Timeline
Launch of Small and Innovative Productions Grant Program	January
Media Business Planning Launch Meeting	January
Local Community Polling	January
Development of Business Plan	January/February
Training on informal polling	January/February
Selection and training of local trainers	January/February/March
Technical Assessment of Stations	January/February
Development of programming priorities	February
Business Management – Int’l consultant	March
Open Workshop on issues of democracy and role of media	March
On-site mentoring to begin	March

V. Success Stories/Lessons Learned

Throughout the first quarter of project implementation, Internews Network was pleased with the success of office setup, including the high caliber of individuals who will be working out of the Ramallah office. Internews was pleased by the high number of qualified people who applied for each position, which meant that Internews had a good deal of options and was able to select who seems to be exactly the right person for each position. Despite this, the position of Media Business Expert proved more difficult to fill than originally believed, simply because the field is so new in the West Bank and Gaza. Internews Network chose to be careful to hire exactly the right person for this very important position, so the final decision is being slightly delayed.

Internews Network was also very pleased by the local response to the new and more long-term project that is being conducted in the West Bank and Gaza to improve local broadcast media. Local stations are excited about the new opportunities that the project will provide, and the assistance that they will potentially receive. This overwhelming welcome back to the West Bank and Gaza will provide the momentum needed to push the project forward.

Despite the positive response received by the media to the new project, Internews Network remains aware of the challenges ahead. One major challenge in working with the media is that the broadcast media community is very small, and stations are constantly talking to each other. The West Bank and Gaza is a very small place in general – and the media sector even smaller – so it will be important to be aware of the delicate situation that could develop when selecting which stations to work with. In the context, it will also be important to protect the perception of media independence, especially now amid the current political situation. Stations are being attacked, both verbally and physically, for perceived bias toward one faction or the other – Hamas or Fatah being the primary ones. Therefore, as the project launches in this factionalized and fractionalized environment, Internews Network must tread cautiously with the media.

ATTACHMENT:

Letter announcing new project to local stations:

Dear Owner\Director and Managers of the local media stations,

As promised during our meeting with you in the Ramallah workshop last summer, and during our field trips to your stations, we would like to inform you of new developments in the Internews Networks project. It is our pleasure to announce that we now are launching this project that aims to support the local media stations.

As you may know, the design for this program was based on the assessment; the Internews team conducted over the term of three months, and demonstrated the necessity to support the local media, specifically the audio-visual sector. Our assessment was based on many aspects; the visits the Internews Network team made to various stations; the technical questionnaire conducted on the status of programming, performance, equipment, software, specific problems faced; and the workshops we conducted with you in Ramallah where we discussed together the visual and audio media sector and the means to develop based on what you considered as a priority to achieve your goals.. Finally, a scientific survey for the benefit of Internews was conducted, in order to better understand what viewers and listeners think of the local media in general in the area of performance and how it relates to and affects them and their daily interests and concerns.

The project:

The project will consist of various stages, some of which overlap, but all lead towards one goal and that is providing the support that we hope will develop the Palestinian media so that it will be sustainable, relying on its own resources, as well having a vital and productive interactions with the local community. Eventually we hope that it can achieve its role in creating change and building a healthy media environment that is capable of affecting the laws pertaining to this sector in a way that will guarantee working in a secure environment both legally and logistically.

We are sure that you are aware that good planning is the basis for success and it was one of the most important fields of discussion during the workshops. Good planning in this case would be one that takes into consideration the political and economic variables in a way that guarantees sustainability and minimizes the dangers caused by developments that may negatively affect the media sector. In order to achieve this Internews will provide training, guidance, and mentoring, as you require, in order to prepare the plans needed to fulfill the goals that you put for yourself. We will also aid you in understanding the target market and its mechanism so that you can make efficient use of it specifically in the field of advertisement and sponsoring.

Another important foundation for success that we discussed during the workshop is training, whether journalistic or technical. Therefore the project will hold training courses

either through workshops or in-house training, i.e. in the stations themselves. So through the use of good planning and training we will raise the status of programming you provide and focus on local political, social or economic issues as well as any other topics that concern target audiences and deal with the Palestinian citizens daily life.

We will also encourage collaboration between stations in the field of programming, production, and professionalism in order to spread and exchange successful experiences without effecting the privacy and “flavor” of each individual station. Along with these methods, we will be providing small grants to help raise the technical level of the stations that prove eligible for development. As it is evident these issues are all interrelated. For example, through successful programs you gain more audience therefore creating the perfect grounding for advertising and sponsorship, while through raising the technical and professional level you create the perfect grounding for laying financial and programming plans that will lead to achieving the goals placed by every station.

The current situation and upcoming challenges:

It is interesting to point out that since conducting our surveys in September, a number of new stations began broadcasting that, according to our sources, do not have the proper licensing, mostly due to the current political situation. Four out of these stations were founded by political fractions and as a result, have good financial potential that is reflected in their programming and ambitions for development. Another challenge facing local stations is the launch of two new Palestinian Satellite TV channels. These facts ultimately point to the necessity of developing the local media so that it will be able to compete, grow, and develop despite these challenges. Specifically, it was pointed out during the workshops that most stations compete over the same small audiences, which according to all surveys are also being pulled away by Arab satellite TV channels.

In addition to these challenges, the laws that are established to re-regulate the media sector, and require fees to be paid by the stations, are still not being implemented by the government. But someday they will be, along with the implementation of the item that demands raising the percentage of local broadcast production. This issue deserves your attention in order to guarantee that the local media will continue to work according to scientific and professional standards and have the power to influence decision making.

Finally, we will keep you updated on the activities we plan to conduct in order to fulfill the aforementioned goals. And, soon we will invite you to a short seminar that will explain these activities and the developments that have taken place since our last work shop last September, as well as to answer any questions about the project. We suggest Sunday 14 January for a meeting in Ramallah to discuss these issues and start work. Please let us know if this date will work. Once we hear back, we will send you an official invitation.

Best wishes from the Internews Networks Team