

Impact Report on Public Information

Outreach and Dissemination

Submitted to:

USAID/West Bank and Gaza

Submitted by:

ARD, Inc.
159 Bank Street, Third Floor
Burlington, VT 05401 USA
Telephone: (802) 658-3890
Fax: (802) 654-4247

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I. INTRODUCTION

ARD's assistance to the Public Information Department (PID) during PLC2 has strengthened the PLC's capacity to establish a positive and transparent public image. Working through its new media specialist, ARD enabled the PID to present information more effectively and routinely to the public and improved Members' fluency in dealing with the news media.

The PID is maturing into a self-reliant media unit, with a rising level of production quality and new standards to guide its interaction with the public and local press. Buoyed by new skills, PID staff are performing with greater ease and confidence. Media coverage of PLC activities, particularly during the Democracy Day campaign, soared to new heights.

The *intifada* has affected work of the PID and ARD, making some proposed activities difficult. In particular, ARD found it difficult to implement the planned activities to strengthen media linkages. Over the last six months, journalists were consumed with covering the *intifada* and were no longer available for coordination. However, the project was able to take advantage of the lull in Council activity to create new media resources for Members and constituent offices and assist the PID in carrying out its highly successful Democracy Day activities.

II. IMPACT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION ACTIVITIES

In this sector, ARD focused on working with the Public Information Department to strengthen its media and public relations capacity through training, technical assistance, and strategic coordination.

A. Press and Public Relations Training

1. Improving the Quality of Publications

PID staff improved their capability to produce high-quality publications on the PLC. Prior to the training courses provided by ARD, PID staff played a relatively minor role in the production of publications, depending on consultants to design and finish materials. Projects were sent to external design companies, resulting in the PID losing control over uniformity and quality.

Following practical training courses in graphic design (see *A.4.b*), the staff are now able to manage the entire design process, leaving only the printing in the hands of outside companies. Consultants are used only for on-the-job training and supervising the finalization of publications. The staff have more control over production and feel more confident in their creative development.

A review of the publications since the start of PLC2 reveals an emerging PID style: publications have become standardized and recognizably PLC products. Training in editorial skills increased staff ability to monitor the content of publications, preventing PLC materials from being released with flaws or incorrect information. With ARD's encouragement, the staff also became more creative, including using illustrative sketches in a user-friendly booklet on PLC laws published for the Democracy Day campaign. The new designs proved popular and make public relations materials, such as the booklets, substantially more accessible, which will positively impact the public understanding of PLC legislation.

By offering practical training, ARD strengthened PID's capacity to assist the PLC in its public outreach activities. During the last year and a half, the PID produced booklets on the Standing Orders, the Basic Law, PLC laws, a brochure on the Council, a brochure on Member interaction with the media, and a variety of material for the Democracy Day campaigns.

2. Improving Video Production Skills and Video Dissemination Systems

Under this activity, ARD concentrated on developing the dissemination of videos to local media to coincide with its strategy of developing the PLC's media linkages. The PLC has produced tapes of its plenary sessions for the media since the establishment of its TV Unit in PLC1. However, the tapes were only given to one TV station (Al Quds Educational TV), which has a very small audience throughout the West Bank and Gaza; consequently, distribution of tapes was ineffectual.

With ARD's encouragement, during PLC2, the PID began distributing session tapes to five stations with coverage throughout the Palestinian areas, including Watan TV, which is one of the most widely watched Palestinian stations. Two regional stations (Bethlehem and Nablus) distribute copies of tapes to other small stations, ensuring that the vast majority of Palestinian TV audiences are able to watch the PLC in action.

When TV coverage was first introduced into plenary sessions, Members were uncomfortable with the degree of public exposure it symbolized. It is clear that the PLC has now largely accepted the importance of media coverage. The immediate and regular distribution of unedited session tapes to the media indicates the progress the PLC made towards transparency of legislative discussion. Members responded to this interest and have opened up to the media. Some Members even direct comments in the plenary sessions to the TV cameras, indicating that they are aware of and want to impress the unseen audience.

In the last six months, ARD also worked on building the capacity of the TV Unit. Following the success of live transmissions of plenary sessions during PLC1, the in-house production unit was developed to continue providing TV coverage of the PLC without requiring the presence of non-PLC staff during its sessions. However, very little training has been provided to the unit.

With the start of the *intifada* and the resultant decrease in legislative activity, the TV Unit had little to cover. Taking advantage of this lull, ARD arranged for the unit to be involved in the Democracy Day campaign as a form of on-the-job training. The project hired two well-known Palestinian directors to manage the production of four TV spots on selected laws to be broadcast during the campaign. During the weeklong project, the staff worked on all aspects of the production, under the supervision of the directors and an outside editing team.

Since then, ARD has noted an increase in production skills, unit cohesion, and staff morale. The staff are proud of their work on the TV spots, which are still regularly shown on local TV. Once the PLC resumes its normal activity, the TV staff will undoubtedly be able to apply their new skills to improved session coverage.

3. General Training

ARD provided several training courses to PID staff during the last year and a half, with impressive results. The staff are more independent, adventurous, and productive. Larger numbers of staff are able to share responsibilities, and the quality of work has risen significantly.

a. Computer/Internet Training

ARD provided specific computer training courses to PID staff (described below) to improve their production and press relations skills. Following the installation of a new publishing network in the next reporting period, ARD will conduct general computer and Internet training to department staff.

b. Graphic Design Training

An ARD consultant trained the PID staff responsible for publication layout in graphic design programs, including Photoshop, PageMaker, and Mac software. The training was designed to be practical and focused on improving staff ability to independently use their equipment to produce PLC materials in-house. As described above (*see II.A.1*), the training resulted in a substantial improvement in publication quality and released PID staff from their dependence on outside consultant designers. Using their new skills, the PID staff took a leading role in producing attractive and accessible publicity materials for the Democracy Day campaigns.

c. English Language Training

ARD supported English-language training to three translators within the PID. However, foreign delegations and English-language press conferences declined after the outbreak of the *intifada*, and the translators have had little opportunity to use their new skills.

d. Simultaneous Translation

ARD is discussing this training activity with the PLC. So far, the Council has preferred to delay ordering the equipment until translation training is complete, but ARD is concerned that training will not be feasible without the equipment.

B. Develop PLC Web Site (www.pal-plc.org)

Although the PLC requested ARD's assistance in developing its newly established Web site, little substantive progress was achieved due to an ongoing discussion within the PLC about which department should take main responsibility for the Web site. The leadership has not yet assigned a clear mandate, but ARD is confident that this will be finalized in the next reporting period.

Despite the delays, the project feels that it has had a positive impact on the Web site through enhancing the PLC's perception of the site's potential as a media tool. When the Web site was first opened in PLC1, it was largely considered a symbol of institutional prestige. Since then, ARD's coordination with the departments has resulted in a greater awareness of the Web site's multiple media uses, such as informational archives, Member-only domains, and audiovisual streaming of sessions.

C. Support Linkages to Local Media

ARD concentrated on building the PID's capacity for media outreach and improving the Council's understanding of how to interact with the media.

PLC linkages to the local media flourished over the last year and a half. High media coverage of PLC events indicates that the Palestinian media consider the PLC to be newsworthy, even after the outbreak of the *intifada*.

Prior to the *intifada*, the PID had great success in increasing local coverage of PLC activities. Following meetings with the PID, the Voice of Palestine broadcast a half-hour weekly program on the PLC; Al-Hayat Al-Jadida and Al-Ayyam newspapers began regular columns devoted to PLC news; and national and regional TV stations regularly showed the plenary sessions in full.

Although training for legislative coverage was never carried out due to the *intifada*, journalistic interest was high, and the PLC remained an object of public interest. Even after the *intifada* began, PLC events garnered media attention; town meetings and Democracy Day activities attracted journalists. A popular local radio station broadcast a four-hour series on democracy and the PLC.

ARD worked closely with the PID on developing ways to solicit and influence media attention. Since many of the staff have only an academic background in media, training courses in journalistic editing and communication skills gave them practical skills in dealing with journalists and improved their writing and editing abilities. PID staff now regularly write press releases and articles about the PLC, cover meetings, and write internal reports. The staff can also set the tone and content of media coverage by preparing their press information for easier acceptance by journalists. Similar training for district office directors enabled the Council to decentralize its media interaction; Members can now call on skilled support for public outreach without having to depend on the PID.

During the *intifada*, ARD noticed that Members, who were increasingly appearing on TV, had little experience in media relations. They often arrived late, wore unsuitable clothes, and handled questions awkwardly, creating a poor public image of the PLC at a time when public confidence was already low. Working together, ARD and the PID developed a media relations manual for the PLC, based on a chapter in the Constituent Relations Member Manual. Using their new skills, the PID designed a user-friendly, attractive booklet with drawings, accessible language, and a handy list of international and local media contacts.

The manual discusses how to deal with the media, emphasizing the importance of doing media outreach, maintaining links, and using the media to disseminate PLC information. Effects already can be seen. The detailed media resource filled a large gap in the PLC's knowledge of the press and encouraged independence among Members and the district offices. Members are performing more professionally with the media, giving polished and lucid interviews. Some Members are actively seeking media contact, even with international journalists, which demonstrates a significant jump in confidence and awareness. The PID Director reports that district offices and Members often directly contact the press and depend on him less for media information.

Published at a time when there is little PLC activity and increasing Member-media interaction, the manual is a timely resource and an effective response, by ARD and the PID, to an important PLC need.

D. Provide Training to Journalists on Legislative Coverage

In PLC2, ARD planned to train journalists in legislative coverage to improve the quality and quantity of PLC coverage in the media. Before the *intifada* started, preliminary arrangements were made to bring international consultants to work with the Wafa' and Amwaj press agencies, which work closely with the PLC. However, due to the intense media focus on the ongoing *intifada*, journalists were not available for the proposed training activities, which have been postponed.

E. Support Democracy Day Campaign

The PID played a central role in the publicity campaigns that accompanied the Democracy Day activities in 2000 and 2001 and gained invaluable experience in using its expertise to mobilize the press and public. The media blitz coordinated by the PID was instrumental in stimulating interest in the events and is responsible for the record levels of press attention, even during the *intifada*.

Through the campaigns, the PID staff were able to fully utilize their improved skills and, particularly in 2000, churned out a wide variety of sophisticated publicity materials, including TV spots, posters, PLC brochures, stickers, information sheets, and booklets on PLC achievements. (The 2001 campaign was intentionally conducted at a lower profile due to the ongoing conflict.) The materials were distributed throughout the West Bank and Gaza by PLC district offices and Palestinian ministries. (ARD staff reported that, in 2000, posters fixed to walls near the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem inspired the sheikh to mention democracy in his Friday sermon.)

III. GENERAL ANALYSIS

During PLC2, the Public Information Department matured as an independent public relations unit, attaining new standards in disseminating accessible information about the PLC to the public. High-quality and innovative publications – produced entirely by department staff – enable seminal public insight into the Council’s legislative achievements. Coverage by the department’s TV Unit is broadcast regularly on local TV and radio stations, while stronger linkages with local media ensured impressive independent coverage of PLC activities, particularly during the Democracy Day campaigns. Assistance to Members, in the form of a brief manual, significantly enhanced Member confidence and performance with the media.

The *intifada* prevented the PID from carrying out some planned activities with the media, as journalists and media organizations became consumed by the daily-changing story. Some activities, particularly those requiring coordination with journalists, were postponed, and regular print and TV coverage arranged by the PID was cancelled.

However, the PID was able to use its new capacity for media outreach to stimulate press interest in the 2001 Democracy Day campaign, held in the midst of the conflict. When the situation normalizes, the PID will be in a stronger position, with experience gained from the *intifada*, to maintain and increase media attention on the PLC and its activities.