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# STRENGTHENING THE ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY OF THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS IN THE WEST BANK AND GAZA PROJECT (*BAYAN*)

**THE ROLES OF PALESTINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN THE  
LEGISLATIVE PROCESS**

**INFORMATION DISSEMINATION TRAINING REPORT**

May 2008

This document was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by the BAYAN team of DAI Washington.

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## **Executive Summary:**

In a joint effort, BAYAN and Internews conducted a training program to build the capacity and skills of partner Palestinian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and media outlets in the West Bank to disseminate quality information and enhance media coverage of the legislative and policymaking processes in Palestine. The training was conducted from April 6-7 2008 targeting 12 representatives from 7 CSOs and 9 journalists representing 8 media outlets in the West Bank. The workshop was led by a local consultant, Ms. Wafa' Abdel Rahman, with direct assistance and supervision from BAYAN and ASWATONA technical teams.

The training program was built around the main findings of both a needs assessment and a survey following consultations with leading CSOs and later discussions with USAID funded contractor Internews. Based on findings and recommendations, the BAYAN team learned that there are a number of CSOs that have a keen interest and some initial plans to analyze report and disseminate information regarding the legislative and policymaking processes in Palestine. These CSOs however noted that many of them have neither adequate experience nor capacity required to fulfill this role.

CSOs emphasized the need to understand the concept of access to information, how and what to disseminate and what are the most effective ways of dissemination, and how to forge effective alliances between CSOs and local media

To address these and other issues, the training concentrated on a number of topics to strengthen the participants' ability to effectively plan and manage successful information dissemination strategies to hold government accountable and to better acquaint and involve citizens in the policy-making processes.

Based on the training program, participants now have the foundational skills to:

- Understand where and how to access certain types of public information;
- Coalition building strategies;
- Emphasize the importance of accessing accurate information and how to use it in the background research for story development; and,
- How to effectively utilize Press or News Releases.

## Introduction

The BAYAN project is designed to strengthen the accountability and transparency of the legislative process in the West Bank and Gaza. The project is a three year, approximately \$6 million project, which began October 1, 2005. One of the specific goals of this project is to strengthen the accountability and transparency of the legislative process. Promoting expanded and informed media coverage of the Palestinian legislative and policymaking process is a key project component to ensure increasing public awareness, citizen interest and potential participation in the policymaking and legislative processes. This component takes on added significance since the PLC is no longer active and policies could be developed and implemented with little public knowledge or input.

The purpose of this assignment is to build on the results and finding of the needs assessment and consultations conducted and to contract with a Palestine-based Public Information Media Expert (PIME) to deliver practical, hands-on training to partner CSOs and media outlets that will strengthen their capacity to disseminate quality information and enhance media coverage of the legislative and policymaking process in Palestine. The main objective of the assignment was to provide practical training to partner CSOs and media outlets in the following areas:

- Strengthening the capacity of CSOs and media outlets to collect, analyze and disseminate governmental information on the legislative and policymaking process.
- International best practices for access to governmental including, legislative information differ from PA and PLC practices.
- Declaration of assets: Identify different methods, including international experience, regarding public officials' Declaration of assets.
- Identifying, collecting, analyzing and publicizing key legislative and policy documents.
- Identifying key governmental and legislative data either not readily available, not available, or considered confidential.
- Having a basic understanding on how CSOs can obtain and/or prepare records to measure the performance of decision makers in the executive and legislative branches.
- Designing an effective information dissemination strategy/ tools? using governmental and legislative records.
- Coalition and alliance building skills between BAYAN partner CSOs and media outlets especially those partnering with Internews.

## Training Workshop Description

The training workshop included different training materials and methods including:

- Training materials (power point presentation) covering the whole training period.
- Laws and regulations pertaining to access to information from an International, regional and Palestinian perspectives.
- Website information for the main ministries in the West Bank, in addition to other alternative sources of information on laws and presidential decrees.
- Case studies and exercises.
- Surveys on people's best means for accessing information

The daily training activities were as follows:

### ***Day 1:***

It started by carrying out brainstorming on the definition of right to access information, why it is considered a universal human right and how it strengthens democracy. The discussion led to the main principles of freedom of access to information, followed by the enabling legal environment internationally and locally in addition to explaining the type of information that the public cannot access and why.

The second part of the day focused on how to access governmental information, main sources of information, protection of the source of information and finally how to deal with the collected information, i.e. how to use and analyze the information.

List of main websites of the Palestinian Authority institutions was distributed to all participants and exercises were given to them to apply the theoretical knowledge they gained during the day.

Day 1 concluded by requesting participants to work on a specific home assignment; an exercise that is likely to help them search for information, analyze it and finalize a story to be made public. For the CSOs, they were asked to write a press release on the presidential decree concerning the prior clearance demanded from citizens as a condition to receiving governmental services. Representatives of media outlets were asked to write a story about the decree.

### ***Day 2:***

Participants presented the stories and press releases they produced as part of day one assignment, followed by general discussion on the shortcomings of the presented stories

and a reminder of main principles on how to access and analyze information, how to double check any information and make a distinction between impressions, rumors and facts. Participants were introduced to statistics of the most listened to or watched stations, led by ASWATONA team, in addition to statistics on the most trusted sources of information by the public. In addition, the ASWATONA team introduced the main pillars of a story board which was applicable to both news stories and press releases.

Participants were also introduced to a new internationally used tool for assessing the impact of policy-making including law development. The pillars and how to conduct Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) was done through general discussion and exercises.

At the end of the day, participants were introduced on the most appropriate tools for effective dissemination of information.

## **Observations and Reflections from Participants**

In the introduction of the first session of first day a question of expectations was asked to all participants (What do you expect to learn from this training?). And thus, the last session of the second day was to answer the question (what did you really learn in this training?) Comparing the expectations with what has been learnt, the conclusion would be that most of their expectations were met:

### **Participants' expectations:**

In a quick brainstorming exercise on the first day of the training, participants were asked to share their expectations from the two days training. The following was what they expected from the training:

- Building on the previous trainings provided by BAYAN.
- Better understanding of concepts related to access to information.
- Difficulties facing CSOs in accessing public information.
- Better understanding of how media operates.
- Learning about the local and international laws pertaining to the issue of access to information.
- How media can present community concerns.
- Learn about new sources of information in Palestine (laws, presidential decrees, regulations, policies).
- Freedom of information in conflict areas.

## **Participants Feedback**

At the end of the second day, a discussion was opened to learn about participants' evaluation of the two days especially what they have learnt. The following is what they shared:

- Better understanding of access to information concept and its principles.
- Better understanding of the Difficulties of accessing public information in Palestine, and as well understanding that the right of access to information doesn't apply to all types of information.
- Meeting with media people was useful in learning what the media expects from CSOs.
- Learning about local and international laws that allow/prohibit access to public records.
- Learning about new websites, alternative websites and new sources of information
- Learning the importance of double-checking information accessed.

## **Final Evaluation of Participants and Organizers**

Throughout the workshop, ASWATONA as well as BAYAN technical team together with the consultant were observing the performance of the participants and getting continuous feedback to make the training more effective and responsive to their needs.

At the end of the second day, an evaluation form was given to the participants to complete.. The evaluation forms shall help ASWATONA and BAYAN teams assess the training and learn about future preferred training methods and needs of the participants.

Below is summary of the participants' feedback as written in the evaluation forms:

- The subject of the training was excellent.
- Time was insufficient.
- The trainer was very good with the information and a good way to share the information
- Dividing the subject and materials between the two days was very good.

- I didn't know how to get the information before but now I know where and how to get certain types of information.
- I would like more training like this.
- It was a good opportunity to discuss the stories and opinions.
- I know more how to build the story and how important it is for the media to be accurate in getting the information.
- It was a very good training because we use it in our daily work.
- This training strengthened the relationship between the civil society organizations and the media.
- We wish we could have another day.
- We need new training on how to write the press release in a good way.
- We need to know more about our legal rights in getting access to the regulations and law from the government.
- We thank BAYAN project for partnering with Internews to do this training.
- This training is on a new topic with a new approach that includes the media and CSOs.
- It was not boring and was a very active training.
- We know the media and some stations from different areas now.
- The relationship between civil society and the media as partners

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Having the right to access information and use it to advocate for better public policies, better laws and better practices is one of the main pillars of building a democratic system. It is obvious that this topic doesn't have enough attention from Palestinian civil society or media and thus there is a need to concentrate on such a topic.

### **Recommendations to USAID:**

- Bringing together CSOs and media professionals was a very positive step to build a stronger alliance between media and NGOs. It is a new way of defining cooperation

and understanding of each others' roles. It is recommended that USAID follow up on such initiatives in future projects.

- It is recommended that USAID in the context of its relationship with governmental institutions and ministries and related support programs, emphasizes the concept of free access to information by the public. USAID can ensure this by referring in signed contracts. .

## **Recommendations to ASWATONA:**

- It is critical to follow up on what has been accomplished and continue to bring ASWATONA media partners with BAYAN CSOs partners together to deepen and institutionalize the fruitful relationship..
- Private media is looking at itself as information transmitter, and those who participated in the training couldn't understand their role of questioning and being critical of information that is given to them. Being objective- or neutral doesn't contradict the fact a journalist shall be critical. It is recommended that ASWATONA follows up on this issue as part of building the media capacity which should not be limited to their media skills.

## **Recommendations to BAYAN:**

- Organizing more joint initiatives with ASWATONA project
- The right to access to information in Palestinian related laws is encouraging but further efforts are sought from of all concerned parties to advocate for a special law that regulates and enforces the disclosure of information from public bodies. As BAYAN is working on strengthening the legislative process, I recommend that a special focus be given to this law, helping CSOs formulate and work together in order to be ready to introduce it when the PLC is functioning.
- Dealing with the media as an advertisement agency is not the right approach for CSOs to get their messages across. Thus, I recommend that in any advocacy training BAYAN plans to carry for its CSOs partners should take into account and stress the issue of understanding and allying with media.

# Annex 1 – Training Agenda

## First Day:

Activity	Objective	methodology
<p>What is freedom of information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why access to information</li> <li>- basic principles to access to information (timely, accurate)</li> </ul>	<p>Participants understand the importance of information in relation to holding elected officials and appointed ones accountable. Participants realizing the power of information – timely and accurate- for any advocacy activities.</p>	<p>Q&amp;A, slide show and group exercise.            (Clearance example: based on your knowledge, state what do you think was the problem of asking for clearance from citizens?)            * note: this exercise will serve as the module for access to information, strategies to influence the government and public and will be used all through the training. (learning by doing)</p>
<p>* enabling legal environment</p>	<p>Participants realize and understand local legal environment, international best practices and situation and what are the constrains on certain information.</p>	<p>Interactive discussion, Q&amp;A, and Slides show            Exercise: back to the clearance case study:            Where does the power of CSOs including the media lie? List the enabling laws that will help your case?</p>
<p>How to access information: sources of information</p>	<p>Participants learn how to access multiple sources of information, and as well learn how to apply code of ethics on what to make public</p>	<p>Q&amp;A, handouts on main sources for government policies and practices.            Exercise: Back to clearance case study: what information do you need? What are the methods you will apply to access those information- make a list of sources and next to each item, state who will be</p>

		responsible for collecting the data- from your team.
Putting information together	Participants learn how to conduct row materials- information from different sources	Group work: develop the clearance case putting all information the participants know about it
End of first day, evaluation and home work for second day		Each group shall collect the correct information and be able to present on the second day the accurate information

**Second day:**

Activity	Objectives	methodology
Revision of the accessed information on the case of clearance that was the day before.	Participants apply the learnt tools from the previous day to obtain accurate information. They learn how to correct the old- not accurate one	Groups' presentations and discussion on the difficulties faced
what to do with the accessed information? What is the good strategy to use them	Participants learn how to analyze the information, who are the target audience of the collected information? Is it the public? Is it the government?  Participants get introduced to the RIA	Slide show and Groups' work: back to the case study: list the stakeholders of the case and their position. List the alliances that your CSO can build and what do you want from each stakeholder? What is the best method of addressing each stakeholder? State the outcome of applying the RIA into the case.
make your information	Participants learn how to	Slide show and Open

<p>public: Partnering with the media-</p>	<p>attract, address and utilize the media in their campaigns.</p> <p>Participants learn what constitutes a good press-release.</p>	<p>discussion (media participants raise their perspective- short list- on what attracts them to partner with CSOs and what is the best methodology CSOs can use to make the media involved-. Participants split into groups to design their media strategy with the help of media participants. The strategy shall include a press release draft</p>
<p>Make your information Public: partnering with the community</p>	<p>Participants learn methods to disseminate information to the community- short fact sheets, posters, town hall meetings, hearings, debates, talk-shows</p>	<p>Slide show, Groups work: Write a plan to involve the public in the debate and advocacy on the issue of clearance case</p>
<p>End of day 2: evaluation</p>		

## Annex 2 – List of Participants

### INTERNEWS Participant:

Station	Name	E-MAIL
Radio Isis	Jehad Aldeek	[REDACTED]
Radio Isis	Yousef Amro	[REDACTED]
Wattan TV	Nizar Habash	[REDACTED]
Al-Nour TV	Bakeir Whadi	[REDACTED]
AlFajer AlJadeed TV	Jawad Turkey	[REDACTED]
Al-Sharq TV&R	Hussam Yaseen	[REDACTED]
Radio Tariq AlMahaba	Suha Rasras	[REDACTED]
Nablus TV	Mahmoud Barham	[REDACTED]
Qalqilya TV	Raed Omar	[REDACTED]

### BAYAN Participants:

Organization	Name of trainee	Personal E-mail
Civic Forum Institute /CFI	Madiha Al-Araj	<a href="mailto:madeeha@cfip.org">madeeha@cfip.org</a>
Al-Hares Center for Studies and Media	Mohammed Manasri	[REDACTED]
	Rashid Shahin	[REDACTED]
Center for Human Rights and Democratic Participation	Yasir Malaysheh	[REDACTED]
	Dana Mar'e	[REDACTED]
Ta'awon for Conflict Resolution	Shadi Zein Al-Deen	[REDACTED]
	Hani smirat	[REDACTED]
Filastiniyat	Kamil Hindi	[REDACTED]
	Wijdan Jaber	[REDACTED]

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Juhoud for Rural and Community Development	Yehya Nafe'e	<a href="mailto:Ynafee@juhoud.org">Ynafee@juhoud.org</a>