

AL-TUFULA DURING COVID-19

Update of our work during the nation-wide shutdown



COVID- 19 increases the marginalization of marginalized communities and highlights their vulnerabilities.

We at Al-Tufula have been in lock down since the 15th of March. The Al-Tufula staff is partly working from their homes and working more hours than usual due to the negative impact of the COVID19 on the community. All the caregivers are on unpaid leave; however they continue to be in contact with the children and parents while at home. As an organisation committed to marginalized groups in our community we had to cope with the immediate needs of the field which could not be ignored. Sadly, but not surprisingly, the various government ministries are not taking into any consideration marginalized women issues such as women suffering from violence, women with disabilities, women in unrecognized communities and unemployed women. Without the lobby, advocacy and activism of the different Feminist organisation and civil society ad Hoch forums most of the important issues of these marginalized groups would remain absent from the government agenda.

Due to neglect and the Ministry of health delayed dealing with COVID 19 in the Arab society we are two weeks behind the Jewish communities, only after lobby effort that they began examining the Arab villages and as such, the numbers in Arab locations were still climbing long after the numbers decreased in the Jewish community, due to this and the limited budgets for testing and dealing with the cases in the Arab society. We in Al-Tufula joined the effort in different platforms addressing issues of interest to us and advocate for women's right as represented in CEDAW and as reflected in 1325. As Palestinian women citizens of Israel our rights are impacted due to discrimination policies Patriarchal norms and militarization of the surroundings.

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Increased violence against women in times of stress such as COVID 19

In time of stress such as COVID-19 we witness in the world and increase in violence, especially domestic violence and especially against women. In the Arab community the situation for women has worsened and there has been an increase in the violence experienced by women in their own homes. The impact has been mental, emotional and physical. To deal with this challenge we at Al-Tufula, are working with various means to deal with the issue. The stay at home order while essential for the containment of the spread of the virus has resulted in an increase in cases of violence against women. PCI (Palestinian Citizens of Israel) women who are living in abusive homes, either from their husbands, fathers or brothers, no longer have the respite of work or being able to leave the home during the day. They are quarantined in their homes with abusive men, many of whom have also been affected by unemployment which further increases their chances of abusive behaviour. It has been recorded by Palestinian feminist organisations that there has been a spike in calls towards hotlines and with limited resources and a lack of police response; it has been difficult to handle the influx of cases.

Advocacy

Together with other feminist organisation a position paper was drafted and sent to the government addressing all issues that women living under violence are struggling with it. We continue our lobbying and advocacy together with our partners (we are in different coalition such as feminist coalition and are in the subgroup dealing with issues that needs consideration by the government, we are in the Emergency Feminist Coalition, and are working on many platforms to deal with marginalized women groups. Our youth groups have also joined this struggle against violence against women as described below. We also continued the preparation of our position paper against weapons that is spearheaded by our Arab Jewish learning group (women against weapons) which summarize our learning on the subject in the last three years to be disseminated soon for different potential partners before we presented it to Government..

The first virtual demonstration against killing of women

After the killing of the first women (6 women were killed in Israel during the last two months) under Covid 19. Together with Palestinian feminist organisations citizens of Israel we organized the first virtual demonstration against women killing and the increase violence against women in time of COVID 19. Later Joint Jewish and Palestinian women protest activities were organized after the killing of other women.

Campaign

Together with WAVO (Women against violence) and IWN (Israeli women network) we organized a campaign aiming at reaching out for different women's groups and supporting them to deal with their problems, advocacy in front the Arab local councils and in front of the government. Together we issued a position paper referring to three groups of marginalized women

(women suffering from violence women, women with disabilities and unemployed women) and presenting their needs in time of COVID19 and demands governmental action to address these issues.



We also widely published our three Arabic hotlines via special messages to thousands of women and via Arab local councils. These include, the hot line for women suffering from violence at WAVO, the hotline for unemployed women by IWN and our Itaha hotline for persons with disability. Not only does the government neglect women but also within our own society we had to lobby to include women in decision making in the newly established bodies.

In this campaign we and Women against Violence worked closely with the Arab Emergency Platform to include women issues in the position paper they prepared for the government and they included our demands in the position paper they presented on the needs and demands of the Arab community. Both of our organisations also demanded from the local councils to address women issues in their plans and to publish the hotlines on their pages. Currently we are finalizing the last part of the campaign which addressed to government this special campaign in Arabic and Hebrew addressed to decision makers will be launched soon.

Community Violence:

Lately we have also actively reacted to a violent incident in Nazareth and the Coalition Against Violence in Nazareth issued a letter for the prime minister and the internal security minister, asking for serious implementation of the law in Nazareth and the Arab society for the protection of our community.

Palestinian women unite against violence

Together with our sisters from Occupied Palestine and Gaza and feminist Palestinian organizations in Israel we prepared to launch a campaign against gender based violence calling upon women to speak up and to call the different hotlines and urge the society to take responsibility.



Preparation and distribution of play kits

In one ad hoc platform several partners shared their plans to distribute food kits for needed Families, we suggested to join their efforts and to add for the food kits children play kits. We used for these kits our Plants Kits (which include table toys such as puzzles, memory, dominoes, etc. games, as well as children stories) We distributed 1500 kits and currently preparing other 1000 children play kits combined with ideas to parents on how to spend the time with their children, and with sheets of suggested activities in times of stress as well as two pages with activities to do at home with materials at home. Together with other organisation that provide food support we distributed them to needed families in 40 villages

Supporting Parents in time of stress

Our Nursery closed on the 15th of March and our caregivers remain in contact with parents to support them at the beginning with information and present ideas how to explain the virus for children and later with creative ideas of what to do with their children and disseminate these ideas to the families sitting at home via Whatsapp groups and on our Facebook page. We invited parents to share with us ideas from children at home and we shared them on our page.

We began a project of stress relief and meditation techniques to help parents, children and followers of our organisation during this difficult time.

Our coordinator specialist one wellbeing training Samar Abu Alhijah produced videos and photos, with instructions on different ways one can give themselves a moment of peace of mind and distress. These were uploaded to our social media pages and disseminated amongst the general public.

Youth

We continue our work with the youth groups. Due to the break out of the COVID-19 virus, the meetings between the project coordinator, the youth leaders, and the youth were moved online where they continued to plan and prepare their respective projects. We are also supporting the youth with creative ideas and working with youth from our project to motivate other youths and set examples to them of creative ideas and pertinent information during this difficult time. The youth groups created several videos to address other youth on how to spend the time effectively

They also planned and implemented 2 campaigns against violence against women publishing hotlines available in other feminist organisation that help women suffering from all kinds of violence. The youth continue to be active during these meeting with our project coordinator and are continuing to plan and implement their projects.

Currently they are working on preparing a video addressed for youth on their role to struggle against valance against women.



Persons with disabilities

We are also supporting persons with disabilities who are experiencing difficult times as well as wanting information. Some of our staff's telephone numbers have become hotline numbers of support. During the last two months they received 60 new calls and 278 follow up call. On the other hand, we are supporting women in many ways to ensure their well being. Beside the hotline we post each week information on the subject and we ensure that the issue of women with disability is on the agenda of all forms that we are active in. We have continued to provide assistance both generally and personally through these hotlines and conduct online meetings with the volunteers who partake in the information days for women with disabilities. It is imperative that we remain in contact with the women with disabilities and support them during this difficult time.

Project Hawyatana Wakyanna

We also continued a project that was planned prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, of distribution and in person readings of children's books that have been produced by our organization. These three stories are about the villages that remain in us (the destroyed villages in 1948). Originally, the project coordinator was to go to schools and nurseries; using the books, "story telling time" and activities after the stories; however all education centres were closed. To adapt, we created videos with audio recordings of the book, accompanied with photos of the pages within the book itself. These were also posted to our Facebook page and distributed amongst parents and teachers for their children and students. Furthermore, on Nakba day, which took place on the 15th of May, we produced a video with a book reading on a story which is centred on the destroyed village Bassa. It was created as a means to support parents in opening a dialog with their children on the subject; this was also disseminated to parents and teachers.

This project has received very positive feedback from parents and teachers, who have been looking for ways to both entertain and educate their children and students during this unprecedented time. We received some of the videos that we present on our page.



Advocacy for ECCE

The government is also neglecting children from birth to 3 years and all information, budgets, policies etc are excluding this age group. As a result, we are also issuing papers with recommendations to the government ministers working with an Israeli wide coalition to bring attention to these children's needs. In this coalition we bring the voice of Arab Palestinian children and the institution they serve, we present these issues to the local Arab news agents and we publish articles and give interviews on what needs to be done and the importance of this age group and taking their needs into consideration. Especially now, we are contributing to the discussion on the policy of reopening the nurseries and kindergartens and we identified several issues that needs to be addressed from the government. We published an article on the issues of reopening the nurseries that was distributed widely and we were sought for our professional knowledge and experience to write a list of suggestions to be presented to the government. In addition, Nabila was interviewed on this list of suggestions. We are also in the emergency Arab body that discusses and suggests policies for local councils on issues of education; this body makes decisions based on analyses from different professionals in the Arab society.

All bodies that run the nurseries and kindergarten refuse the decision and the government had to postpone the return until the 15th of May. Furthermore, the government's discrimination towards the Arabs is very evident in this COVID19 situation and at many levels. One issue is that COVID 19 in the Arab society is two weeks behind the Jewish communities and as such, the numbers in Arab locations were still climbing when they decided to reopen the education system, without compensation for the Arab Nurseries which were excluded from governmental support. Despite this, the government is mandating that the young children from 3 months to 8 years to return back to nurseries and schools. As you can imagine, with decisions like this, we have to react professionally and continue our lobby and advocacy pressure. The government wants to begin easing in the lockdown to allow parents to return to work, without clear and specific plans to protect the children who are expected to return to schools and nurseries. All bodies that run the nurseries and kindergartens refused the decision and the government had to postpone the return until the 10th of May, even then many Nurseries were not open. The one opened have to work with limited children leaving many parents without a service for their children and with a lot of open question. We provide our analyses and share our knowledge with other professionals, ministry persons, local council persons and so forth.

In accordance with the ministry of health's recommended guidelines, our caregivers and staff thoroughly cleaned and disinfected the nursery area and the centre where the children reside during the day.

In preparation for reopening the Nursery we prepared a document with guidelines on the new situation. This is meant to be for our nursery but we additionally published it for the wider public and interested organisations.

ECCD Network

We are also active in the Arab network and in the subgroup on resources development here we are working to impact policies and practices in the Arab world on COVID 19 and we are in the process to develop Palestinian focal point and through this coalition we are connecting to different regional networks on ECCD.

Follow up on education issues and decided on policies for education system in the Arab community.

A special body was established by the follow up committee to address the issues of Arab education and to advice on the education system reopening in the Arab community. We acted as member in this group and followed up carefully on the issue. Since the shutdown, schools and all education facilities have been closed. All classes and modes of education moved online through virtual classes, where the teachers continued their scheduled curriculum. At the beginning of May, there was a decision to try and open schools again; however, due to the continued spread of the virus, students were less likely to attend and there were fears that there was still a great risk of spreading corona among the students and staff. After careful deliberation the ministry of education in accordance with the ministry of health decided that the schools will reopen gradually. The committee decided not to reopen the Arab schools since most of the schools are not equipped to adjust to the deal with the situation only this week we decided that it was time to reopen schools up on the 17th.

Media

During this unprecedented time, all our work and efforts have shifted to an online platform. We have further developed our Facebook page and our Instagram page, as well as showcased our work through various video interviews and online discussions. Our director, Nabila Espanioly, has taken part in interviews for news outlets and online platforms on the situation of the Palestinian citizens of Israel in relation to the current situation and on topics of women's rights, violence against women and the centres efforts to provide ideas to assist parents who have been quarantined with their children as a result of the nation wide shut down.

Militarization and Racism during Corona

Throughout this difficult time, the discrimination towards Palestinian citizens of Israel has been prevalent. From the beginning of the pandemic, there was little to no information in Arabic which is one of the main languages that is spoken by the population. Due to a serious lack of information, the PCI population was not updated on the rules and regulations that are to be followed during the shutdown of the country. The spread of information in Arabic on topics such as how to maintain hygiene in order to quell the spread of the virus was taken on by Palestinian organisations and local municipalities.

The government has also dealt with the situation with a military mentality that reflects the decision making bodies in power. Through analysis of the rhetoric used, the names of the established bodies, and the general behaviour conducted during this crisis will demonstrate this view. 17% of the country's doctors are PCIs, and have been on the front lines since the virus first began to spread in the country. Despite this fact, the racist comments from the government continued to target the Palestinian population of Israel. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu posted multiple comments on his social media pages stating that a government with an Arab Joint List majority would be a "disaster for Israel" or a "danger to Israel." These comments show that even during a time of global crisis Racism does not take a break.

Furthermore, enforcement of the social distancing regulations and precautionary measures has shown to predominantly affect the Arab population. Police and law enforcement have been seen to give harsher and a great number of fines to PCIs compared to the Jewish population. There has already been a lot of tension between the police and the Palestinian citizens of Israel population, and the disproportionate policing have further exacerbated the tense relationship. Testing for the virus additionally became a time of contention. Arabs were two weeks late in receiving testing for the COVID-19 virus and as a result the virus was spreading among the population as people were unaware that they were carrying the virus.