



FIRST PERSON Women Take Pride in Participation

Women get involved in the election process, many for the first time



Photo: Yusef Abu-Eljedjan, Tamkeen

“The elections were a golden opportunity for women to participate in political life,” said Mai. “It was a challenge for us to prove that we are equal partners in society... With the training, I wanted to ensure the transparency of the elections and to see our new leader elected by the people.”

Mai Shaheen, a 25-year-old woman from Gaza, was one of nearly 120 Palestinians who received training from USAID on how to mount election observation campaigns — from the basics of training and fielding monitors to the complex

procedures that should be observed. Based on what she learned from the two-day workshop, Mai compiled a handbook for election observers ahead of the January 9, 2005, presidential election.

She then recruited 25 volunteers — all women — trained them using simulation techniques from the course and got them accredited as domestic election observers. Nine of them stayed late for the ballot count, which ended around midnight. In a society where it is uncharacteristic for women to stay out of their homes late at night, many were impressed by their determination.

The training provided a chance for women like Mai to be involved in the electoral process for the first time, both as observers and voters. “The elections were a golden opportunity for women to participate in political life,” said Mai. “It was a challenge for us to prove that we are equal partners in society... With the training, I wanted to ensure the transparency of the elections and to see our new leader elected by the people.”

Telling Our Story

U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>