



Villagers learn that keeping a family healthy depends on more than just medicine

Mobile Health Clinics Visit Bedouin Communities

The Bedouin have limited access to health care for a number of reasons. Primarily, the Bedouin are mobile, so they do not have “fixed” clinics and visit multiple clinics in Jericho and other urban areas in the West Bank. Generally, the Bedouin lack information on health service, have difficulty crossing checkpoints to access these services, and women and children (because of the nature of traditional Bedouin culture) cannot travel to these areas without being accompanied by a male relative.

In addition, the Bedouin have little knowledge of civics such as the basic principles of elections and democratic forms of government - making it difficult to engage them in discussion of democratic issues. They also lack a basic understanding that government services are there “to serve their needs.” The Bedouin tend to regard government services as a “gift,” as opposed to a “right,” and this includes the educational system.

One day, a mobile clinic came to the community of Fasayil near Jericho to provide basic health services combined with civic education. While receiving medical treatment, Mohammad Jdei'a, a father of 12 who lives in Fasayil, listened to a civic education facilitator named Nour Abdallah from the mobile clinic. Nour stressed the importance of educating girls and allowing women to partake in decisions on birth control. Jdei'a, who is in his 50's, said he didn't know women could face health problems as a result of frequent pregnancies.



Photo: Tamkeen Project

A Bedouin mother listens to a social worker explain women's right to share in decisions on birth control.

USAID sponsored the mobile clinic project under a grant from the Civil Society and Democracy Strengthening Project (Tamkeen). The mobile clinic project is the second of its kind and has been designed to help build awareness of the problems facing a largely marginalized population. USAID helps more than seventy civil society organizations survive, grow, and educate vast numbers of Palestinians - particularly marginalized groups like children, youth, women, and the poor - on human rights, the rule of law, and other aspects of democratic political systems.

The USAID-sponsored mobile clinics serve more than 5,500 people at fifty Bedouin camps in the Jericho area. During the mobile visit, a team of doctors, nurses and social workers provide health education, civic education, medical testing, blood testing, training in first aid techniques, and social support services. The teams reach isolated communities three days a week over the duration of a year. Civic education focuses on access to government services including health care and education. Most Bedouin families, for example, do not realize that their children have the “right” to attend government schools and, therefore, they do not send their children to school.

“While the physician examines people, I talk to them about their right to education, right to better sanitation, and the right that women have to be part of decision making in the family...Our frequent visits build bridges of trust that will yield more civic education opportunities in the future”

- Nour Abdallah, Civic education facilitator

The program has raised awareness of health issues and changed how the Bedouin communities are educated about important social issues. By informing Bedouins about their rights and promoting their integration into the larger political and social community, the program increased Bedouin participation and drew the attention of Palestinian policy-makers and legislators to their needs.

Success Story

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