

**Evaluation Report**

**Project**

**Strengthening Citizen Participation on Critical Social Issues to Prevent Conflict**

**Submitted to**

#### Search for Common Ground

**Submitted by**

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# Background

Alpha International, hereinafter “**the Evaluator**”, was solicited by the Jerusalem office of Search for Common Ground (SFCG) to evaluate its project “**Strengthening Citizen Participation on Critical Social Issues to Prevent Conflict**”, hereinafter, the Project. Funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Project was carried out in partnership with Ma’an Network, the local Palestinian News Agency which also runs a network of local TV station throughout the Palestinian Territories. SFCG managed the Project through subcontracting Ma’an which was tasked with organizing, producing and distributing all program contents.

The Evaluator’s role, as defined by the Terms of Reference (TOR), included providing a brief outline of the project; specifying the scope of the evaluation; and outlining the evaluation methodology followed throughout the process.

The SFCG Jerusalem office partnered with Ma’an Network to manage the content and produce the Project over a period of two years. The Project included a variety of media content material for Palestinian television and radio. The designed outcome was (1) creating and/or strengthening the mechanisms for citizens’ participation in policymaking on critical social issues; and (2) strengthening constructive engagement between civil society and local authorities on critical social issues.

The Project had a set of outputs listed as follows:

* 1 interactive reality TV program (12 months in duration)
* 750,000 active viewers across the Palestinian Territories, Middle East, North Africa, and Southern Europe
* 150 episodes of an eyewitness radio program are produced per year
* 1.2 million listeners have access to an eyewitness radio program
* 22 televised town hall meetings are held across the West Bank and Gaza (including marginalized areas) per year
* 1,100 citizens participate in and discuss key issues at town hall meetings each year
* 25% of town hall meeting time is devoted to women-specific issues
* 70 feature stories are created and distributed through TV, radio, and Ma’an News Agency each year
* Over 5 million visitors per month from 180 countries read the published feature stories

The activities that were set in the Project included the following:

* Produce 1 interactive reality TV program, which highlights the efforts of citizens engaged in creative and effective methods to prevent, mitigate, and resolve conflict.
* Produce an eyewitness radio program that provides audiences with in-depth investigative reports, which initiate enquiries, spark debate, and provide an analysis of complex issues.
* Organize 22 televised town hall meetings each year across the West Bank and Gaza, which bring together citizens and those in leadership positions, to discuss pressing community concerns.
* Develop 70 in-depth investigative feature stories per year, which follow up on the progress (or lack thereof) of any government pledged commitments announced during the town hall meetings.

# 2.0 Methodology

The Evaluator undertook upon its staff to carry out the evaluation as requested while keeping in mind that the objectives of the evaluation were clear and were met. The evaluation objectives as defined by the TOR were as follows:

1. Identify the outputs produced by this project by verifying that they match the log frame of the initial sub-recipient agreement.
2. Assess the effectiveness of the project (i.e. the extent to which the project’s stated outcomes have been achieved).
3. Assess the management and administration of the project by assessing the working relationships between project staff and sub-recipient partners.

The Evaluator inquired about the outputs that were produced and examined if those outputs were in line with the quantitative expectations the log frame of the sub-recipient agreement set out. It also approximated how the viewers/ listeners perceived the production quality of the media outputs.

The Evaluator also examined to what extent the project’s outcome has been achieved and whether it strengthened mechanisms for citizens’ participation in policymaking and whether it strengthened constructive engagement between civil society and local authorities on critical social issues. It also probed if the project activities were adequate and appropriate to realize the outcomes designed in the TOR.

To examine the management and administration scope of the Project, the Evaluator dug into the question whether the direction, supervision, and support that SFCG provided to the sub-recipient staff of Ma’an Network were appropriate. It also looked into the relationships between partners and probed whether they were effective as far as communication, clarity of roles of each side, and other issues were concerned.

The primary audience of this evaluation is Search for Common Ground, which was the party that tasked the Evaluator with the mission. SFCG wanted to use the result of this evaluation to shape future projects with the media sector in the Palestinian Territory. The secondary audience of this evaluation is, the funder, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which will use the evaluation to verify whether the project’s outcomes, outputs, and activities have been achieved.

The Evaluator was tasked with analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data. For this purpose, Project documents and reports were shared with the Evaluator before, during and after the Project was finalized. During some phases throughout the Project, the Evaluator shared monitoring feedbacks that would help the implementing body in writing interim evaluation reports and others.

The Evaluator examined the detailed reports by Ma’an and SFCG on the set of activities included in the project, including the following:

* Media content produced by the project activities, including all episodes of the interactive reality TV program
* 150 episodes of an eyewitness radio program produced per year
* 22 televised town hall meetings per year, and 70 written investigative feature stories per year.

The Evaluator then interviewed staff members from both SFCG and Ma’an Network, who were involved in the project. Those interviews were designed to assess the working relationships between SFCG and Ma’an, as well as weighing the quality of supervision and support provided by SFCG to Ma’an.

**Evaluation Tools**

The Evaluator also conductedphone surveys among randomly selected respondents at the national level in the Palestinian Territory to measure figures of viewership and listenership for the aired project productions. The phone surveys helped in assessing viewer/listener perception of the production quality of the media content.

For sampling purposes of the town hall meetings written questionnaires were distributed among the participants to measure how these activities strengthened mechanisms for citizens’ participation in policymaking and whether or how they strengthened constructive engagement between civil society and local authorities on critical social issues.

Prior to the start of the evaluation, the Evaluator constructed a detailed evaluation and monitoring plan and finalized it in consultation with SFCG’s Project Manager and Evaluation Coordinator.

The Evaluator was tasked to investigate the following four principal target groups:

* Television audiences in major cities in the West Bank.
* Radio audiences in major cities in the West Bank.
* Participants and local officials who took part in the town hall meetings in designated cities in the West Bank.
* SFCG project staff in Jerusalem who managed the project, and sub-recipient staff with Ma’an Network in Bethlehem who implemented the activities.

# 3.0 Findings and Results

## 3.1 Output Level Findings

The findings on the intended outputs of the project were as follows:

1. **To produce 1 interactive reality TV program (12 months in duration).**

Ma’an reports, broadcasted program, SFCG reports and Alpha observation show that this program was done as scheduled and planned.

1. **To reach at least 750,000 active viewers across the Palestinian Territories, Middle East, North Africa, and Southern Europe.**

Alpha used the general public survey to estimate the number of adult Palestinian who viewed the show. Based on the survey results the total number of adult (18 years old or above) Palestinians who viewed the President show regularly (more then 50% of the episodes) was 562,328. This number does not include those Palestinians whose age is less than 18 and viewed the show. The evaluator estimates that the number of Palestinians overall who viewed the show exceed 750,000 viewers based on family statics of 5 members per household. Citizens mainly reported watching the show through their televisions (539,835), while 22,493 citizens had watched it through the Internet.

1. **To produce 150 episodes of eyewitness radio programs each year.**

During the process of the implementation, Maan was providing the evaluator with all media products produced under the mandate of this project. The result of the evaluator verification was that Maan produced 306 eyewitness radio programs were produced during the lifetime of the project. This number achieves the target which is 300 episode (150 per year).

1. **For 1.2 million listeners to have access to an eyewitness radio program.**

There are almost 4.6 million Palestinians living in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. Based on the survey, almost half of the respondents said that they listened to the Ma’an radio station regularly (52.7%). In numbers, that is almost 2.4 million. Of those, according to the survey, 8.3% (approximately 200,000 people) said they listened to the program called “On The Table” (Ala Al-Tawleh) while 10.8% (approximately 260,000 people) said they listened to “Ma’an and People” (Ma’an wa Al-Nas). Both programs were broadcasted on Ma’an local radio stations network. As such, the estimated total of listeners to these two programs is a little less than half a million, which is less than half of the projected target of listeners.

1. **To hold 22 televised town hall meetings across the West Bank and Gaza Strip (including marginalized areas) per year.**

The original number of episodes broadcasted was supposed to be 44 televised town hall meetings across the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the final number of those meetings was 47 meetings that were conducted between February 9, 2013 and February 18, 2015 exceeding indicator.

1. **To have 1,100 citizens participate in and discuss key issues at town hall meetings each year.**

The average number of participants in town hall meetings was 40, making the estimated number of 1,880 participants who attended the 47 town hall meetings that Ma’an Network and SFCG organized during the two years. Accordingly, the percentage of accomplishing this target of reaching the designed number of participants was 85.4%.

1. **To have 25% of town hall meeting times devoted to women-specific issues.**

Records of Ma’an Network show that the topics that were discussed in the town hall meetings and broadcast under the new name of Intibaha included infrastructure, agriculture, health, roads, livestock, water, electricity, environment, minimal wages, labor law and its infringement, lack of government support to farmers, prevention of child labor, and the two topics of unemployment facing university graduates and the role of youths in politics where the gender issue was addressed as part of the overall discussion of the topics. As such, none of the town hall meetings was fully devoted to discuss women related issues.

1. **To create and distribute 70 feature stories through TV, radio, and Ma’an News Agency each year.**

Ma’an reported that all 140 feature stories had been produced and broadcasted by the end of February 2015. SFCG verified by collecting the recorded feature stories.

## 3.2 Outcome Level Findings

## The main objectives of the program were:

1. To create or strengthen the mechanisms for citizen’s participation in policymaking on critical social issues.
2. To strengthen constructive engagement between civil society and local authorities on critical social issues.

## To examine whether these two objectives were achieved, a list of indicators were developed to measure the contribution of the project to achieving the objectives. The indictors were measured through conducting several surveys among stakeholders. Some of the surveys were conducted twice: one within the first 3 months of the project (Baseline) and the other at the end. Here are the findings:

* 88.3% of the Palestinians believe that youth can play a positive role as leaders in Palestine when asked during the first 3 months of the project. The survey conducted after the Reality TV show ended was over showed that the percentage of 88.3% went up to 93.2%.
* 77.3% of the Palestinians have discussed at least once in the precedent week (first 3 months) issues of democracy (elections, public officials, or freedom of expression). After the Reality Show ended survey showed viewers reported discussing elections on a weekly bases during the life of the show.
* 73% of the respondents in the survey believe that dialogue is a valuable tool for addressing problems in their communities. After the reality show 91.4% of the respondents in survey agreed the format of reality TV was an innovative way to encourage political and social dialogue.
* 75.5% of the Palestinians (asked within the first 3 months of the project) believe that dialogue with leaders is a useful method for having public concerns addressed while after the Reality show was over their percentage slightly went up to 77.6%.
* 30.7% of the youths who voted in university elections have watched at least 50% of the President reality TV show.
* 44.1% of the youths who participated in political student movements have seen the President Show.
* 61.2% of the youth believe that their participation in democratic processes can make a positive change in national level politics. The survey that was conducted after the project was over showed that the percentage of this youth went up to 65.7%.
* 90% of the leaders who participated in the town hall meetings have taken initiative to redress at least one public issue or concern that they learned about through the town hall meeting or the radio program.
* An absolute 100% of the leaders who participated in the radio show or in the town hall meeting believe that their participation in either of these two programs was a useful mechanism for learning about the priorities of their citizens.
* An absolute 100% of the local leaders could identify the three most important issues raised by citizens at the town hall meeting or the radio show that they attended.
* 93% of the participants in the town hall meetings believe that dialogue in this format is an effective way to solve problems in their communities.
* 92.9% of the participants in the town hall meetings believe that they play an important role in personally addressing the challenge of their community.

## 3.3 Management & Administration Assessment

The Evaluator conducted interviews with staff members of both SFCG and Ma’an Network following are excerpts from interviews conducted with Ma’an staff members, hereinafter Ma’an, on the kind of relations that existed between them and SFCG with regard to the project:

**Coordination**

SFCG and Ma’an have a long term partnership going back 12 years. They have implanted several media programs over the years. This was the first time a new innovative reality show was designed. The initial phase of brainstorming was constructive and existing as reported by both Ma’an and SFCG. The new innovative idea was a risk and an opportunity. It was unclear how the population would react to such a bold topic and it was unclear how much financially it would cost. In the interviews Ma’an said that in the second phase of development, relations between SFCG and Ma’an were “slightly strained, due to a wide range of existing issues within the working culture of Ma’an Network.” But that was a side issue related to staff turnover and staff not sure if the current staff was qualified, the Evaluator was told, because “essentially communication between Ma’an and SFCG were cordial and productive.” In short, Ma’an staff members said they had “great respect for the professionalism of SFCG staff members working with them to resolve the staffing issue.” Besides, Ma’an noted that the SFCG media experts were willing and able to assist if needed particularly the Project manager and Country Director. The Evaluator was told that coordination with SFCG during the project “was especially helpful due to the high amount of project management turnover at Ma’an.” Ma’an noted that over the course of three years, four different staff members managed different aspects of the project. In a case like this, Ma’an concluded, SFCG “was a source of consistency.”

**SFCG Direction, Supervision, and Support**

Ma’an staff members interviewed by the Evaluator had various levels of contact with SFCG, based on their role in the project on behalf of Ma’an. Therefore, their assessment of the level of direction, supervision and support was obviously governed by the load of work and amount of involvement they had in the project implementation. SFCG team, they said, “provided appropriate guidance and clarification” while the attention and support SFCG team provided particularly during the implementation of the reality show, and during the preparation of the first and second annual report, was “crucial.” SFCG was collecting monthly reports therefore despite the various Ma’an staff SFCG had the collective knowledge of the process.

**Was the project implemented as planned**

Ma’an confirmed that the project was implemented as planned although it was awarded a no-cost extension in June 2014 due to the war in Gaza. Activities were put on hold until regular media production could resume. With the additional year, the project was able to achieve all outputs by the end of the project timeline, Ma’an said. It was noted in the interviews that “there were certain minor budgetary indiscretions” but none “adversely affected” the overall quality of the product. SFCG and Ma’an worked through the difficult period and were able to resolve discrepancies and timeline with the approval of the donor’s extension.

**Changes on the original plan and their effect on cost**

Ma’an noted that the changes made to the project timeline did not affect the total cost of the project. Similarly, the adaptation of the eyewitness radio program into a television program Intibaha was absorbed at no additional cost. Radio program was changed due to low audience recognized during monitoring process.

**Main impact of the project on the target groups**

Ma’an noted that the project “got people talking and obliged the PA to put on suits and look semi-active for a few weeks.” According to Ma’an, The President Show “was meant to send a message and it did.” SFCG management intended for this program to highlight new young voices into the political national dialogue. Based on the evaluations, interviews with participants, viewership, international media coverage and numerous request for a second session SFCG believes that this program revitalized youth to reengage in a constructive manner in national politics. The top candidates of the reality show went on to work in prominent government positions and also the winner has become a national speaker worldwide on half of Palestine being a democratic state. SFCG management see’s this program as one of the most influential media initiatives in Palestine in regards to youth and democratic engagement.

Furthermore, Ma’an said that the project’s various programming and wide reach “ensured incredible impact amongst target groups.” The President show “directly strengthened participants’ knowledge of and participation in democratic initiatives,” Ma’an added, noting that the Intibaha program directly benefitted roughly 1,500 Palestinian civilians throughout the West Bank who increased mechanisms to hold their decision makers accountable for providing civilian services.” With regard to the eyewitness radio program, Ma’an said it “directly impacted both the participants of the program and its viewers/listeners with increased mechanisms for engaging in policy dialogue on critical social and political issues.”

**Main obstacles faced during the project implementation**

All results were achieved as far as Ma’an was concerned “although there were a number of challenges throughout the project period.” Those challenges included logistics of coordinating a national reality television program that effectively covered all areas of the West Bank and Gaza and accommodating a large number of participants. There were participants who dropped out of auditioning due to difficult public transportation, caused in part by the visit to the West Bank of US President Obama and the security complications that accompanied his visit. Another challenge involved engaging people from Gaza as the process of permissions was lengthy. And so was the challenge of entering Jerusalem whereas some Ma’an staffers, holders of Palestinian ID cards, were not allowed to enter the city. They needed permits from the Israeli authorities. The authorities denied such permits. (Other challenges reported in SFCG’s annual report).

Ma’an stressed that The President show was the only real youth program in the Palestinian TV landscape as it “united people living in Gaza Strip, West Bank and Jerusalem, perhaps for the first time and Ma’an was the first to accomplish such an achievement.”

Ma’an encountered difficulties finding local government representatives who were willing to participate in the televised town hall meetings. Some audience members feared reprisals for having spoken out publicly against the government but received Ma’an assurances that the show “had been running for a long time and no participant had ever faced negative consequences.” Also having an neutral international donor like SFCG also helped relieve the concern of what the objectives were from Ma’an.

Ma’an adapted the Eyewitness Radio Program into a television program in order to create greater audience engagement. Subsequently, the program proved it was a much more engaging outlet for audiences, guests, and participants.

There was a big challenge posed in the summer of 2014 when the war in Gaza broke out. Ma’an Network and other Palestinian media outlets focused the majority of their productions on covering the war, interviewing analysts, and providing breaking news. As such, scheduling the remaining filming of Intibaha was postponed until October 2014.

**Main benefits that Ma’an obtained from implementing this project**

Ma’an said it benefitted on multiple levels “due to the sheer size and scope of The President show and others as the project improved Ma’an staffers’ capabilities in the fields of logistics and coordination.” Ma’an developed high quality production skills including live TV. Ma’an worked with professional media experts in Israel (Arab-Israelis) to quickly develop the capacity and knowledge of high quality programing and production at an international standard SFCG reported.

**Would this project become a unique one**

The President show, said Ma’an, was unique on its own as it was a daring step by the mainstream Palestinian media to raise questions of political accountability in the West Bank and Gaza. Besides, this project, according to Ma’an, reflected a new concept of using media to enhance democratic practices in Palestine. SFCG is convinced this format of combing entertainment with social/political messaging with direct engagement is the best method to attract and keep Palestinians engaged. There are thousands of youth projects funded each year in Palestine but none reached the impact of one realty show according to SFCG.

**Were similar programs implemented in Palestine**

Ma’an said there were other programs that sought to strengthen citizen participation in democratic political structures, including programs Ma’an itself produced in the past, but “none has been as successful or had this large of impact as this project.”

**Did the project achieve it goals**

Ma’an is confident the goals were accomplished as the project’s overall objective to strengthen citizen participation on critical social issues for the purpose of preventing conflict in the Palestinian Territories was achieved.” SFCG confirms all goals met and project exceeded expectations.

Production and broadcasting of The President effectively created a platform to realize the project’s first outcome, that citizens have increased mechanisms for participation in policy-making on critical social issues. Participants had the chance to act as a Palestinian ambassador, proposing policy ideas to serve the Palestinian people. At the same time, the program included an educational element that investigated some of the major social issues facing Palestinian civil society, allowing participants as well as viewers greater access to dialogue and education on pressing issues. Similarly, the eyewitness Radio Program was a direct method of strengthening citizens’ policy dialogue through live participation with the show.

Conclusion

**Alpha International conducts various media evaluations for multiple NGOs and is also involved in surveying the Palestinian population on its media habits. In this particular three-year project it was evident that while radio may still be viable, TV programming is still the mains source of information for Palestinians. Speaking to this project only it is evident that youth are looking to engage in politics and are extremely interested in new innovative ways to be heard. This project clearly had impact in various ways from the town hall programs with the community leaders to the reality show. The town hall meetings had 100% success rate in engaging and making real change within the communities as leaders acted on citizens concerns. In this context citizens impacted is proportionately smaller but the direct effect on the relationship between the citizens and their leaders can not be underestimated as citizens realized they can change their community and leaders are willing to listen when presented in a constructive manner. At the same time the most effective and outstanding results come from the reality TV show the President. After the reality show 91.4% of the respondents in survey agreed the format of reality TV was an innovative way to encourage political and social dialogue. In a political environment riddled with stalled efforts, hopelessness, and a continued confect with Israel, it must be noted that many Palestinians have given up hope on solving the conflict as well as having a viable sustainable government of their own. This realty show ignited a renew of interest in the political process. It is evident based on the evaluation that youth are looking for a safe platform to reform and voice their views on the future of their state. This reality show gave them the platform to be heard and be seen as well as to develop their own personal leadership skills. This combination that Ma’an and SFCG encouraged youth to go beyond the household and their universities and take the risk of addressing the entire Palestinian population. It is Alpha’s recommendation that SFCG and Ma’an work to develop a structured and planned method to continue engaging as many youth as possible from the West Bank and Gaza with this creative tool.**