

Internship Report

Master's programme
Department of political science

Tawasul, Palestine Internship period September-January 2010

Tawasul is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that was founded in 2002 by a group of Palestinian civil society activists committed to peace, democracy and the two-state solution. The name Tawasul in Arabic means Linkage. The organization is located in Ramallah, (West Bank) Palestine.

The aim of Tawasul is to promote a culture of peace, enhance democratic values and act as a catalyst for non-violent communication between all levels of the Palestinian society. As well as to strengthen Palestinian grassroots movements and help them fulfill their social and political aspirations.

One of its core activities is to encourage women and youth to participate in decision-making processes in society and works to inspire and bring hope to civil society activists in general so that they can contribute to the promotion and advancement of democratic and secular movements in Palestine.

Tawasul is the head of the Palestinian National Network of the Anna Lindh Foundation and a co-founder and a steering committee member of two civil society networks: the Palestinian Youth Network and the Palestinian/Israeli Forum for Peace.

The active projects during my period were the *Youth access to media* project and *Creative change agent* which has an aim to work together with Israeli NGOs such as Neve shalom/ Wahet salam. Neve shalom/ Wahet salam is an NGO located in Israel, well it is rather a community of Arab Israelis (Palestinians) and Jews living at working together.

My working week started on Sunday and ended on Thursday from 8 am to 4 pm. The staff of Tawasul constitutes of the general director of the organization Dr Fathi Darwish, Rebecca Kaufman the project coordinator, Ahmed the head of Media and Public relations, Sabreen the project assistant, Mohammad Shbayta the project facilitator and Majd as the administrative assistant. Most project facilitators have knowledge in Hebrew language as there are many projects with Israeli NGO's, so our project facilitator Mohammad was bilingual.

Working closely with my supervisor Rebecca Kauffman, who is the project coordinator,

my role became assistance program coordinator. The first month of my internship we mainly worked with the project *Youth Access to Media* that was founded by US Aid, who is one of the biggest donors in Palestine. This project aimed to enhance the linkage between the Palestinian youth and their society.

The original proposal was suppose to enable the youth to discuss topics that affect their lives and also inviting leader of the society to answer their questions on a debate show. The second objective of this project is to assist the newly graduated Media students to get some work experience. Ten trainees were chosen from different cities in Palestine, these trainees would do a seven months advanced internship at Al Quds TV (AQTV) station. The ten trainees with the assistance of the staff of AQTV comprise the working group that outline and produce the 16 episodes that would be broadcasts in Palestine. To understand more of the needs of the youth we had three focus group meetings at different youth clubs, the YDRC's are centers for the youth. The cities that were chosen were Al-bireh, Nablus and Al-Khalil (Hebron). These focus groups was a way to survey the interest and need of the Palestinian youth and through them come up with the different topic suggestions for the episodes.

Our work at Tawasul was planning, preparing and also reporting weekly and monthly to our Palestinian donor Ruwwad which had been granted the found from the USAID and they would work along us and monitor the project. The preparing information for the youth, introducing Tawasul, writing weekly and monthly reports Ruwwad was my main tasks during the first period and to make sure the project was going according to the time table.

I also participated in the Israeli-Palestinian women project that Tawasul had, fifteen female journalists were chosen from each side to discuss the role of the media during a 4-month period, they would have five sessions on each side and the final workshop was held in Acaba, Jordan, for 4 days.

Being a non-governmental organization depended on outside funding there is a constant need to create new project so that the organization can survive. So, another part of my work was to research about different needs and realities in Palestine, research for funds so that we could match the project we wanted to implement with the funds available. I also assisted with writing new projects that Tawasul wanted to implement.

Relying on funds as a means of function can at time have a somewhat confusing aim for the NGO as in the project *Youth access to media* where the money come from the generous support of the American people as is the slogan of USAID.

The monitoring is extensive and there is a lot of administrative work.

In the end the original proposal had to be cut to meet the donors aspiration. There was some covert censoring as in the case of the topics for the shows. All topics and the selection of the trainees had to be approved by the USAID and a non-terrorist paper must be signed with all that the NGOs have contacted with. The topics were in the end decided by the USAID. As there is an political sensitivity with the donor and receiver situation there were some topics that was not allowed to be talked about in the show such as the Wall that surrounds the West Bank, the Israeli military, referring to the situation of Palestine as Occupation was politically incorrect.

The question of the role of NGO's in society as someone that is non-bias and acts to represent the citizens of the society can be questioned.

Are NGO's really an independent actor in the society with no strings attached to governments? How much power does NGOs in reality have or is it as Foucault describes power; "power is ubiquitous and there can be no personalities that are formed independently of its effects"¹ In the end the NGO's must meet the criteria's and the approval of the donor which makes the NGO controlled in one or another way.

The "civil society came to be understood as the realm not just between the state and the family but occupying the space outside the market, state and family.. the realm of culture, ideology and political debate"² But maybe since the civil society organization can fully occupy a space of there own, maybe they just occupy a small space on the market, the state and the family due to the fact that they depend heavily from aid, but the also that can choose which projects and which donors they would like to work with.

¹ Foucault in Steven Lukes, Power a radical view, p 92

² Mary Kaldor, Global Civil Society, p 584