



# Annual Report 2015

— **Women Now for Development** —

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# Foreword

Summarizing one year of work in a few pages is always a very hard exercise. However, the most challenging exercise is to summarize one year of emotions in addition to intense and continuous learning. After five years of war raging in Syria, we face sadness and despair every day.

Despite this, every day in Women Now, there is a new story of hope led by a woman coming to one of our centers to learn, participate or to educate. We are learning from all of them about what resilience and persistence truly mean. We also learning about creativity and solidarity as they continue to inspire us.

We are today a team made of over 100 dedicated women who work in favor of a better future for Syria. We are dedicated to both the work and our hope that allows us to continue despite bombs, chemicals attacks, fear and losing beloved ones.

I am very honored to work with all those women and Women Now will continue to support them on the ground and on the international stage as well to ensure their voices is heard and their vision for a new future for Syria based on peace and justice is visible.

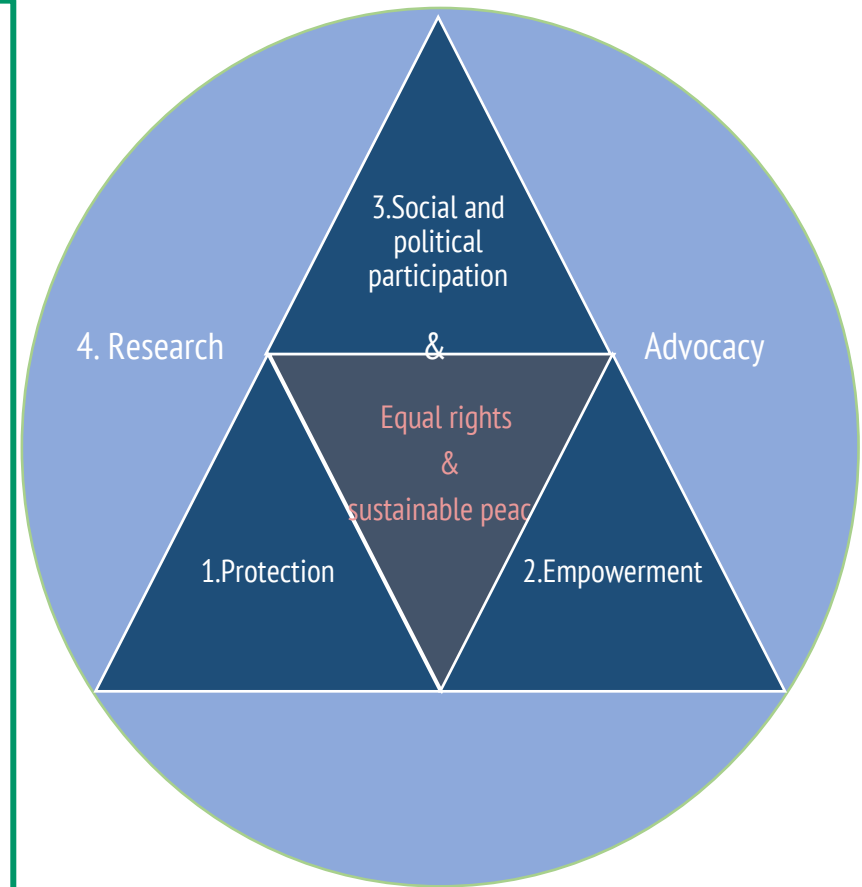
**Dr Maria Al Abdeh**  
**CEO Women Now**

## Theory of change

In Women Now For Development we believe that the struggle for women's rights – is a wide-ranging (holistic), multi-layered and gradual process, especially in the context of war and atrocities. Moreover, struggle for women's rights cannot be separated from struggle for peace and democracy. The process must include men and young people. It must be based on a needs based approach as well as a rights-based one, building from the grassroots and starting with the most vulnerable and invisible women. It must work to define women as actors rather than just victims, to allow real democratic participation for women, because those women are the real actors on the ground against violence and terrorism. Syrian local women are agents of change to build resilience to radicalization to violence and conflict, when they are empowered with self-confidence and knowledge. The process is composed of four main axes: protection, empowerment, political and social participation for women and research and advocacy.

## Focus Areas & Objectives

1. **EMPOWERMENT:** Train and educate Syrian women economically, professionally, socially and culturally; fight illiteracy; increase women's employment opportunities, financial independence and entrepreneurship
2. **PROTECTION:** Protect women who are victims of war and gender-based violence (rape, child marriage, domestic violence, terrorism, etc) both legally and psychologically ; provide secure and safe spaces for all beneficiaries; enable the protection and education of children, especially girls
3. **PARTICIPATION:** Support the social and political participation, representation, input and influence of Syrian women at the local and international levels in accordance with UNSCR 1325, whether as decision-makers or upon decision-makers, towards the achievement of peace and counter terrorism
4. **RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY:** Document and collect experiences and testimonials, conduct in-depth qualitative and quantitative research and analysis, and raise local and international awareness about: women's rights, women-led activist movements, feminist civil society initiatives, gender-based violence and women's living conditions in Syria



# 2015 in numbers

❖ 8 women centers

❖ 6,969 beneficiaries

❖ 311 trainings



# Summary of activities in 2015

2015 was a very successful year for Women Now: numerous trainings were held, new centers were opened and the team grew both inside Syria and Lebanon. Thanks to the registration of Women Now in Turkey, a new office was established there responsible for projects and representing the organisation. At the end of 2015, the team of Women Now consists of 106 women and 9 men working in 8 Women Now centers in Syria and Lebanon and offices in France and Turkey.

Thanks to capacity building in the form of an organizational development workshop for some of the team, Women Now has refined its vision, mission and objectives and drafted its strategy for 3 years and the theory of change. We aim to approach all activities with a holistic approach which honors our values and treats women as subjects of their own lives.



## Vision

Our vision is of a Syrian society in which all people benefit from full human rights, dignity, freedom and justice; in which Syrian women play a meaningful and active role in political, social, cultural and economic life; and in which children are protected from harm and safe to develop and grow.

## Mission

Our mission is to initiate programmes led by Syrian women that protect Syrian women and children across socio-economic backgrounds, and empower women to find their political voice and participate in building a new, peaceful Syria that respects and safeguards equal rights for all its citizens.

# Women Now in Syria

Women Now has been established in 2012 in order to support women inside Syria. In 2014, three centers were opened inside Syria (two in besieged Damascus suburbs and one in Idlib) and their work was continued and further developed in 2015. In addition to these three centers, four new ones were opened during 2015 (3 in besieged Damascus suburbs and one in the Idlib countryside) in order to reach more women on the ground. They run daily and welcome women and girls to offer them various services based on their needs.



Our teams are acutely aware of the fact that the situation can change at any time and assess operating the center during bombing or shelling. Despite all the harsh conditions, the number of beneficiaries is generally increasing, however each month their number fluctuates depending on the security situation.

Two centers are also functional in the region of Idlib; one was opened in 2014 and continues to grow, the second was opened in September 2015. The same training program is conducted there, plus a leadership program in the new center. Following the bombing and use of chemical weapons, special trainings in emergency first aid was initiated to familiarize the beneficiaries with rescuing victims of chemical attacks.

We also aim to build the capacities of our staff in the centers, so 15 trainings were held for the teams, such as trainings in management, psycho-social support and politics.



Ruba is 30 years old and left school in 9th Grade. She took Women Now's hairdressing course: "I have loved hairdressing since my childhood but my circumstances didn't allow me to train, as I needed to work. I chose to enrol because Women Now was the only centre that taught the profession for free, and it is known for its excellent treatment of people. Thanks to my teacher Fatima who pushed me, my skills have kept growing: before the course, I was just a normal housewife, but now I am a woman with a profession and dreams of opening a salon myself."

Ruba and four of her colleagues who graduated at the top of their hairdressing class are planning to open a collective salon in 2016, in cooperation with the local council.

The summary of our activities is very positive, many women found jobs after the training after the vocational training. Indeed, four of them are now working in a hospital, fifty found a job as a hairdresser, and nearly twenty make clothes that they then sell. Women in Syria have become not only the caretakers in the home but also the breadwinners for their families as the men fight, are detained or deceased. Also, women increased their skills in our educational courses like learning Arabic and English, especially young girls. These incoming generating and educational courses give them the opportunity to provide for their families and lead a dignified life.

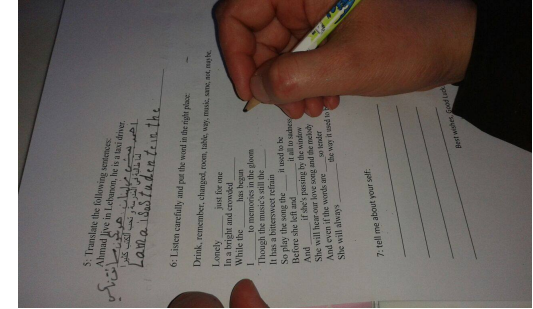
Women Now's conclusion of 2015 for the activities inside Syria is encouraging us to continue with our activities as we see the need on the ground. Many women have attended trainings and courses, showing their needs for our center to continue. Also, they have become safe places for women to come and meet others, not only for attending courses or activities, which we encourage as they have little safe spaces left. In 2016, we aim to develop the leadership program in all centers as well as a psycho-social support program, especially for the centers inside Syria, where the need for such support is tremendous.

# Women Now in Lebanon

The situation of refugees in Lebanon is quite dire, there are over one million Syrians in Lebanon, which means a lot of assistance is needed especially in the Bekaa Valley, where most refugees are located in the country. Here, local organisations are the most important support system for refugees. Most of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon are women and children. This also means that women find themselves in a double role just as inside Syria, where they have become the breadwinners and primary caregivers at the same time.

The center is Chtoura opened in 2014 and has been since been successfully operating. It has established itself as a trusted community center for women and children in the area. In April 2015, a second center was opened in the Bekaa Valley, located in Majdal Anjar. This center works according to the same logic as the others and implements similar activities. Both Syrian and Lebanese women benefit from these services, as Majdal Anjar is also a marginalized area for the Lebanese women.

The summary of the two centers in Lebanon encourages us to continue to provide further trainings and activities. Many women have attended the courses and wish to learn more.



# Activities

## 1. Economic empowerment of women

Women are empowered through vocational training, such as sewing, hairdressing, and support for income-generating activities. They face a new challenge as many have become the sole breadwinners for their families and need to work to support not only themselves but the rest of the family as well.



In Syria : 41 training courses with 749 women.



In Lebanon: 23 training courses with 456 women.

## 2. Educational empowerment

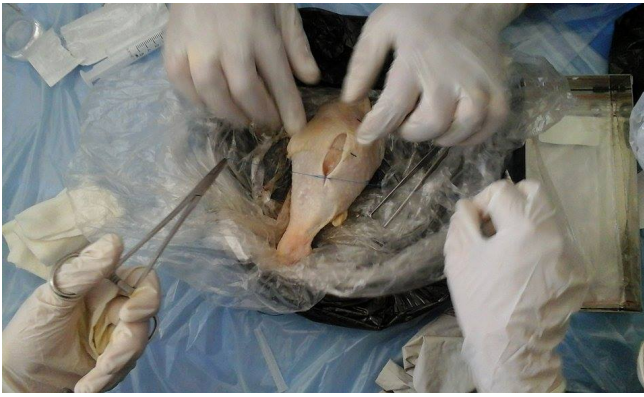
The educational courses in first aid, literacy, foreign languages and computer skills help women to develop their skills and also give them the chance to help their children's education, and find new opportunities.



In Syria: 69 courses benefited 1 790 women.



In Lebanon : 45 courses benefited 948 women.



Reem has been training at Saraqeb Hospital after graduating from the Nursing and English language courses at Women Now's centre in Saraqeb. She is the mother of four children and stopped working 15 years ago.

She says: "When planes were hitting Saraqeb and doctors were called to go to the hospital, I was much more distressed than I am now, because I wasn't able to serve my country. I love nursing, even though I'm scared of the sight of a needle!"

Reem now dreams of becoming an anaesthetic technician, a profession which Saraqeb currently urgently lacks. In addition to her hospital work, Reem helps her daughters with their homework, and after taking English courses she is now able to read and translate many words. She says: "The Women Now centre is like a home for me – even though I have finished my courses I still visit to check up on the staff and I would like to take more nursing courses in future."

### 3. Support women to facilitate their access to the public sphere

This part of our work was a focal point in 2015, as the centers are more than a space in which vocational and educational courses are held. It should be a place for women to meet and prepare them as future leaders. The specificity of the new centers opened in September 2015 in Syria is to develop a women's leadership program. Syrian women are excluded from power and decision making, they are only presented as victims of the conflict as objects not subjects. Women Now focuses through this program on strengthening women's involvement in public life, local councils, to head local women's associations to advocate for their rights and claims. So the goal of this program is to give women the tools and skills to help them lead their own projects and be more active in the political arena. Trainings and workshops on political participation are regularly organized to make women aware of their rights and their role in the Syrian civil society.

Since August 2015, a leadership program has been initiated in four centers inside Syria to enable women to play a substantial role in the future of Syria. They are trained on topics such as negotiation skills, decision making, communication and team management. They also attend an advanced English course.



In Syria : 4 programs with 50 women trained



In Lebanon: 17 workshops, conferences and activities for 481 women

The leadership program will be implemented in all Women Now centers in 2016.

#### 4. Education and child protection

Many of the women who come to the centers have children and the Syrian education system is no longer functioning. Schools are often damaged or completely destroyed, or used for refuge by people who had to flee their homes. As a result, Women Now saw the need to establish courses for children in order for them to continue their education. They can attend Arabic, Math and English classes in addition to other topics which they can suggest to the team.



In Syria: 6 courses benefitted 242 children



In Lebanon: 34 activities benefitted 968 children, and 16 courses benefitted 262 adolescents

#### 5. Protection and psychosocial support

The psychosocial support program was also developed in 2015. This work mostly includes awareness sessions on relevant topics, stress relief activities and group discussions. In Lebanon, Women Now has a dedicated psychosocial support team, which has constant contact with the beneficiaries and identifies those women most in need of dedicated sessions.



In Syria: 7 psychosocial support activities for 389 women



In Lebanon: 18 psychosocial support activities for 370 women

Qamar is a 68 year old Syrian woman who regularly came to a Women Now center in Syria to learn how to read Arabic and English and sew. Even though she is not physically strong, she came and very actively engaged with the staff and the other women, was very curious and asked many questions. She lives alone and found a way to read and write with a magnifying glass. She said “I come walking to the center and it is not easy, but I am always the first one here in the morning when they open the doors. My main reason for coming here is to learn. I love to learn new things and the women here have become my family.” Qamar is a shining example of the role of women community centers in providing safe space for women to build their resilience.

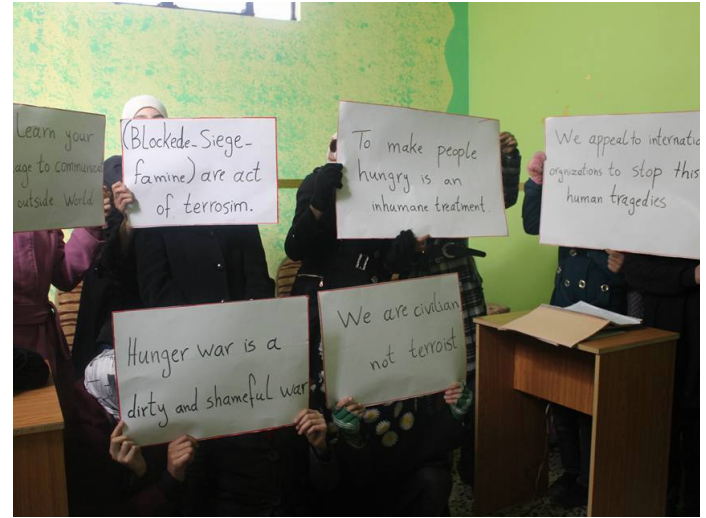


## 6. Advocacy and campaigns

In addition to the activities organized in the centers, the beneficiaries participated in other external events conducted at the center. For example, women of all centers have launched a campaign to support the city of Madaya, and other besieged cities. They want to show that they are in solidarity with the besieged areas, and they share their anger and frustration about the siege and the war. They staged a sit-in, brandishing banners which expressed criticizing the constant bombings.

In Lebanon, the team participated in the campaign “*Child Not Wife*” which denounces early marriage and its harmful effects. In the centers as well as in the Malala school, the medical consequences of early marriage were discussed with young girls. In addition, a special program was started to benefit youth, to reassure mothers who are afraid their children might be radicalised. During this program, one of our team members wrote the song “Voices of Refugees”, the children learnt it and this song was published on YouTube and was very well received.

The Executive Board of Women Now was also involved in advocacy activities especially with international actors regarding the situation of women in Syria or as refugees in neighboring countries.



#ChildNotWife

#طفلة\_لا\_زوجة





## 7. Other activities

In cooperation with other organisations, the centers in Lebanon regularly organise conferences and workshops on different topics such as peace building, civil and political rights of women, political participation, conflict resolution, international human rights, citizenship etc.

Short films by Dawlati and the Syrian Nonviolence Movement dealing with transitional justice and nonviolence were shown as well. And the documentary "Not Who We Are" by Carol Mansour, depicting the lives of 5 Syrian female refugees in Lebanon, was also screened . In addition, many cultural activities were held; over a hundred books were borrowed from the bookseller, book clubs were organized to initiate and encourage reading. These readings were accompanied by lively discussions between the women and the facilitators.

Women Now has developed a partnership with the Kayani Foundation in Lebanon for an all girl's school called to provide education for young Syrian refugee girls, supported by the Malala Foundation. This school teaches girls from the ages between 12 and 18. In addition to their education curriculum provided by Kayani, Women Now has organised trainings on sewing, first aid and nursery. In total, 270 girls participated in these trainings.

The management of our centers in Ghouta had the opportunity to organise a gathering on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, at an event held in a suburb in collaboration with the Local Council, which also helped build the network and solidarity between the centers.

# Women Now for Development

The year 2015 was a pivotal year in the development and the sustainability of projects for Women Now for Development.

## **Opening an office in Turkey**

Women Now for Development opened an office and registered the association in Turkey in August 2015. This office is responsible for the development and monitoring of projects inside Syria. The team consisting of 5 people works closely with the teams in Syria and the office in Paris to develop the projects of the organization. This opening of the office in Turkey has increased the visibility and stability of Women Now. It has also given us the opportunity to work administratively in the projects inside Syria in order to allow the centers to focus on the work on the ground and with the beneficiaries.

## **Developing the organisation**

In September 2015 in Gaziantep, the management team participated in a lively training. The objectives of the workshop were to develop the vision, the mission, and to define the objectives of Women Now. We also worked on the structure and the governance of the organization, procedures, development of an action plan, and a three-year strategy. The workshop helped Women Now have a better organizational vision, and for the team to have a better understanding of the mission and objectives.

# The future

In the coming 3 years, it is our plan to consolidate the work of our 8 existing Centres for Empowerment and Peace, and to build 4 new centres. Each centre will work in our 4 programming areas, building on work already initiated in the period leading up to 2016. Whilst the vast majority of our beneficiaries in Lebanon are Syrian women, the center's activities in Lebanon are offered to all women in the area, whether Syrian, Lebanese or Palestinian.

In addition to the center's programming, Women Now's Executive Council – which consists of the regionals directors, program manager, HR and Executive Director – will initiate a number of new organization-wide activities, mainly in the areas of research and advocacy, representing the interests of Syrian women in national and international forums through commissioned research and participation in policy groups.

Women Now aims to increase the number of beneficiaries in 2016 by offering more activities, developing a psychosocial support program (for beneficiaries and staff) and organizing workshops. Another focus is the continuation and development of a women's leadership program in all centers.

# Donors

Our work would not have been possible without the generous support of

- ❖ The French Embassy in Beirut
- ❖ Asfari Foundation
- ❖ Kvinna till Kvinna
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Women Now for Development thanks them for their trust and support.



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