Advancing reproductive health in Area C, Palestine

Limited access to health care, discrimination and violence are part of everyday life for women and girls living in Area C of the Jordan Valley. Palestine Red Crescent Society operates mobile clinics providing much needed health services, while community committees promote reproductive rights.

**Barriers to reproductive health and rights**

The Jordan Valley situated between Jordan, Israel and the West Bank is home to nearly 60,000 Palestinians. Around one quarter of them including 7,900 Bedouin and herders live in areas under Israeli control – the so called Area C. Palestinian access to and from the Jordan Valley is highly constrained by the Israeli military and is particularly difficult for the 3,400 people who live in fully or partially closed military zones.

These restrictions of movement prevent Palestinian women, particularly from the Bedouin population, to access health services, which are located in the larger cities. In addition, cultural taboos prevent them from being seen by male health staff.
Violence against Palestinian women and girls is a significant problem - but the real extent remains largely undocumented, since victims who come forward are often blamed for the attack and their families are shamed for not exerting greater control over their sexuality.

Red Crescent action
Since 2011, Palestine Red Crescent Society has been providing primary health care services to Palestinians in the Jordan Valley, using a mobile clinic to access the population. The clinic is staffed by a physician and a nurse who visit Bedouin villages across the valley once a week. They provide general consultations and medicine free of charge.

Responding to the urgent need for reproductive and sexual health services for Bedouin women, the mobile clinic was refurbished in 2015. Among other things it now provides pre- and postnatal consultations, ultra-sounds, psychosocial support and family planning by a female gynecologist twice a week.

Palestine Red Crescent Society also mobilized Community Awareness Committees, whereby women regarded as leaders in their community, raise awareness about sexual and reproductive rights and gender based violence prevention. The Committees establish a link between the mobile clinic and the communities, promoting the services available and helping the Bedouin women express their needs.

Achievements
During the first month and a half of operation, 175 Bedouin women were reached by the mobile clinic. As a testimony to the improved access to maternal care, one Bedouin women in her 34th week of pregnancy said that she now received regular care thanks to the mobile clinic. Such regular care was not previously possible with the Israeli restrictions and her economic situation.

Beneficiary satisfaction surveys show that the mobile clinic improves health care and information in the most inaccessible areas. Moreover, the availability of a female gynecologist is deemed culturally appropriate by Bedouin leaders, who now encourage pregnant women to use the mobile services.

The Community Awareness Committees raise Palestinian women’s awareness on sexual and reproductive health issues and rights, changing their attitudes towards violence.

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KEY ACTIONS FOR SUCCESS
• Weekly visits across the Jordan Valley with a mobile clinic providing general health services.
• Specific reproductive and sexual health services for women provided by a female gynecologist.
• Establishing of Community Awareness Committees with female leaders to promote the clinics and raise awareness.