

THE MAKANA PROJECT (JORDAN)

THE STORY

Eman Zu'bi, a twenty three year old Jordanian woman, was dismayed by the state of her former school, the Khadija Bint Khuweilad Primary School in Jerash's Kitteh village. The school was dilapidated and in disrepair; and plans for a new school were stalled. When Eman became a volunteer with the Makana Project, she was given the opportunity to help the students of her former school. Makana volunteers spent eight months paying weekly visits to the Jerash Directorate of Education, and finally their tenacity paid off; construction of the new school is now underway.

The challenges Jordanian women face- domestic violence, sex discrimination and restrictions of rights – are all deeply rooted issues which have caused Jordanian women to become stereotyped and stigmatized as helpless victims behind their veils. Yet, contrary to this stigma, women across the country are mobilizing themselves and others in order to make drastic changes in their communities and their country, challenging the preconceived notion in Jordan that women should have no place in community participation and public affairs. The Makana Project, which has been termed “the first of its kind in Jordan,” has taken this mobilization to a new level, training female volunteers to ignite progressive change through social activism in their local communities.

The program, which is run through the Queen Zein Sharaf Institute for Development (ZENID), began in January of 2004 as three teams of twenty women from the Jerash, Madaba and Karak governorates were selected as volunteers who would be trained as social activists in order to bridge the wide gap between disenfranchised Jordanians and the government. They received training regarding local laws, the rights of Jordanians, advocacy skills, computer skills, and interview techniques. When the training was complete, the women set off to different impoverished communities and begin to address issues of domestic daily life by listening to the demands of the locals and responding with direct action in the form of lobbying and coordination with local governments. Some of the main issues tackled by Makana are insufficient or derelict infrastructure, insufficient transportation, health care, education reform, local environmental issues and poverty. Their projects have included the creation of classrooms and



aid for children with learning disabilities, waging a campaign against rat infestation, the drainage of a large pool of unsanitary stagnant water, as well as the installation of much needed street lights and trash facilities to local communities.

Makana has had a significant impact in Jordan, for the project has created a local form of democracy that gives impoverished Jordanians access to local officials. This in turn allows citizens to claim their full rights and improve their daily lives. In a recent speech, Jordan's Princess Basma praised the group's work, “Through projects like Makana, women become an empowered female electorate demanding transparency and accountability of all elected leaders. They create a local form of democracy in action, grounded in grassroots realities, and embedded in the local context.” In addition to helping disenfranchised community members, the project is also helping Jordanian women break the oppressive social barriers and stigmas that have traditionally kept them out of public affairs. Now, with Makana, Jordanian women are proving that they do indeed have the tenacity and power to mobilize, lead and change their country.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Join Spark in celebrating these and other inspiring Jordanian women at the “**Images of Jordan**” event on **Tuesday, February 20th from 6-9pm at 111 Minna Gallery in San Francisco** (\$20 Nonmembers, \$10 Members), featuring the photos of Marianna Nobre from Spark's delegation trip, where delegates had the honor of meeting the inspiring women of Makana. Partial proceeds from the event will benefit the Makana Project.

