# Promoting Arab Women's Participation in Politics

## Final Project Evaluation

Evaluated by:
Mohanad Berekdar



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**Kayan** - Feminist Organization

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# Project Title:
# "Promoting Arab Women's Participation in Politics"
*End-of-Project External Evaluation Report*

## February 2019

Submitted to
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**Mohanad Berekdar**

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# Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the end of project evaluation study solicited by Kayan Feminist Organization and cfd Feminist Peace Organisation in December 2018 to examine and assess the impact of "Promoting Arab Women's Participation in Politics" project. The evaluations of activities were conducted between the 18TH of December 2018 and mid-February 2019.

In 2016, Kayan Feminist Organisation started the implementation of the project "Promoting Arab Women's Participation in Politics" and it lasted until the end of 2018. The stated purpose of the project was to create the necessary conditions for Arab women to participate in local politics, and for women's needs to become a part of local political agendas. To achieve this purpose, the project targeted women's groups while bringing together women leaders and their communities, and raising-awareness on an ongoing and intensive basis. The project held intensive community work, awareness raising campaigns, and study days that were directly related to the election of women in the 2018 local council elections.

The evaluation process relied intensively on key-informant interviews and focus group discussions. Interviews were conducted with project staff and management staff. The evaluator also met with participant women in four focus group discussions held in the four localities where the project was implemented. Questionnaires were distributed to the beneficiaries and community members. The evaluator also took into consideration a variety of documents including project documents, reports, publications as well as external studies related to the theme of the project.

The evaluation assessed the impact on the personal level, family level and society level. Moreover, the evaluation conducted assessed Kayan's contribution to this project from lessons learned; strengths, challenges, opportunities; and the report presents recommendations for future projects. The final aim in this evaluation assessed each location's experience in this project, from the main process they went through, the tools they gained and used, the work of the team and its involvement in this project, and the analysis of the models of their participation in the election.

The overall impact evaluated was very good and was expressed clearly from the various interviews, focus groups and the questionnaires. Based on the evaluation, the highlights of the project were as follows:

Changing the discourse regarding women's participation in politics, challenging men's political hegemony, and allowing a new discourse to flourish. The project had changed the attitudes and beliefs of women involved towards the way they perceive themselves in politics and their role within the council. The project managed to break the barrier that excluded these women from the political circle and women now see themselves as legitimate players in the political scene. In the three localities where the groups decided to run for the election, the groups succeeded in entering one woman as a member of the local council, in Isfya and Arabeh for a full term and in Shafa' Amer on a rotation agreement. The four groups assessed the result as a considerable achievement.

Moreover, the emergence of women-led political groups and putting the topic of women participation in politics high on the public agenda were major accomplishments. It succeeded to respond to the needs and interests of women of different backgrounds and stages in life, from empowered women with social engagement experience, who said "I have been considering participating in politics for the last 15-20 years, but I have never found the right circumstances" as quoted from a participant who was elected as council member, and also the project connected with women whom it was their first experience to be in women's groups, as one said "who would have thought that we'll be talking about politics!". The formation of these groups has laid the ground for their nomination and participation in the 2018 elections.

The study days and the workshops were of a great importance for women to meet other women who have experience in political participation as mayors for instance in the West Bank, or council members. This greatly influenced the participating women in terms of motivation and inspiration, as the newly elected council member in Arabeh said" after the meeting in Ramallah and listening to the stories of the mayors in the West Bank, I decided to run for the elections" Furthermore, most women had repeatedly expressed

the importance of the trainings which contributed greatly to their knowledge, as they mentioned the topics on functionalities and roles of the council and its organizational structure, responsibilities and budgets. In addition, women within the project learned a lot about community work, engagement and initiatives. This gave them the needed skills to work with people on planning and implementing community initiatives. Also, the trainings gave them the skills to plan a social campaign and to work with the media. More than 80% of women evaluated the trainings on different topics were as high and very high of importance.

It is worth noting that the project's work model is uniquely new for both Kayan and the Palestinian society in Israel as it, more specifically, is working with groups of women representing the wide spectrum of society, in a long term process that includes personal empowerment, community initiatives, social awareness and political engagement. This ambitious work approach has proven to be effective and comprehensive, and at the same time added more unpredicted complexity and challenges, in which Kayan staff and the women groups had to face and endure as women who chose to lead the way.

Lastly, Kayan's role and contribution to the project was highly significant. Women often described it as 'the embracing organization' and 'the bosom they always return to'. The warmth and admiration towards Kayan was felt greatly in the focus groups discussions. Women highly appreciated Kayan's staff availability, accessibility and responsiveness, not only by the project team, but rather from all staff members. In addition, the facilitators who accompanied the women's groups were highly evaluated on their knowledge, quality of their skills and their ability to support the group to understand and reflect on their participation.

Besides the significant highlights of the project, there were also challenges faced during the implementation:

There were large variations in the groups' compositions and dynamics. There was a difference between a group that started three years before the elections and a group that started ten months before; all had different capacities and levels of readiness to run for

election. This required different models of work plans depending on the status of the group's location and the group's status. The project design and intervention plans didn't take these variations into consideration and couldn't offer different paths based on the group status.

Lack of information and clear answers on specific topics caused tensions and conflicts especially in the last phase of the project, close to the time of the election. These topics were related to: legal restrictions to be nominated in the election for some municipal or governmental employees,  information on financial expenses related to the elections campaign and decision-making mechanisms, possibilities to run in coalitions, and issues regarding human resources for the campaign.

Another note mentioned, regarding the change of facilitators in the middle of the process, the turnover of the group's facilitators caused disturbance and ambiguity for the group. Building trust with a facilitator for long time then starting over with another was inconvenient for the group.

Another challenge was limited human resources of Kayan allocated to manage the project. The project is very demanding and it requires a lot of staff. During the focus group meetings women expressed that it was felt that Kayan's staff are overloaded and that not all their needs were met. This point was expressed from both Kayan's staff and the group members. This is especially applicable in the last stage close to the elections. As mentioned before the level of effort for some components of the projects couldn't be accurately predicted, as it was implemented for the first time by Kayan and the groups.

Furthermore, decision-making processes and boundaries between Kayan and the groups in some cases were not clear, who is deciding what, especially topics like joining a coalition, nominations and strategies. The decision-making mechanism wasn't set clearly in the first stages of the work and, as a result, when many decisions were needed to be taken in the last stages close to the elections, some decisions that either the group took or Kayan created great

deal of tension between both sides. Three groups out of four, said that they should've started the work earlier, more specifically some milestones and key decisions should have taken place in earlier stages of the project: how to run their campaign?  Who are the nominees in their group?  Are they running independently or shall they consider coalitions? How to decide upon these topics above should've been sorted out during the earlier stage of the project.

# Introduction

As a continuation of Kayan's work in women's empowerment, Kayan decided to bring the work to a new level and promote the direct participation of Arab women in local politics. Kayan's work took place on parallel and mutually re-enforcing levels, as they targeted grassroots Arab women, the Arab civil society, and Arab political decision makers and candidates through different activities and initiatives. Through the holistic approach to Arab women's political participation, Kayan targeted separate yet connected groups. They empowered Arab women with the tools they needed to participate in elections both as candidates and political activists, challenged the Arab civil society's acceptance of gender-discrimination in politics, and held politicians accountable for fostering a gender-inclusive political sphere and putting women's needs on the public agenda. Taken together, the varying activities in this project created the necessary conditions for Arab women to participate in local politics, and for women's needs to become a part of local political agendas.

The strategy used for the implementation of this project included the following:

Comprehensive work that was undertaken with four women groups in four different locations: Tale't Ara, Isfyia, Arabeh, and Shafa' Amer. The first phase of the project that was implemented included women empowerment workshops, in addition to other workshops that targeted politicians and gender mainstreaming groups. Additionally, the work and activities implemented had included other public events, home meetings, and workshops with youth at different schools.

The national campaign that was created and launched in social media (Durek). This campaign was operated and implemented by Jusur Forum women leaders, which included slogans, messages in the social media, posters, stickers, banners, and videos.

# The Scope of the Assignment

This evaluation followed the outlines of the scope of work that detailed the methodology and the expected outcomes of the assignment. As a result, the evaluator set out to assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the project.

This evaluation was solely focused on the activities that fall within the scope of the project. Accordingly, no information provided in this report shall be taken to constitute an evaluation of a specific training programme or organisation delivered by one of the partner organisations. Any reference to a partner organisation herein is intended solely as an example.

# Methodology

## Evaluation phases

Based on the Guidelines, the evaluation was divided into five phases: preparation, desk review phase, field phase, questionnaires and synthesis. The preparatory phase consisted of the initial meeting with the project team that was intended to provide an overview of the project and the expected deliverables of the assignment. This constituted an opportunity to acquaint the project team with the consultant and clarify any ambiguities related to the assignment or to the methodology proposed by the consultant.

Immediately after the inception meeting, the desk phase of the assignment began. This phase was divided into two separate types of tasks refinement of the methodology and tools with data collection from secondary sources. The consultant reviewed key project documents, focusing on the intervention logic and the project logical framework.. In collaboration with the evaluator, Kayan coordinated the meetings, focus groups discussions, questionnaire distribution for the purpose of data collection with the different stakeholders.

 The synthesis phase included drawing up the conclusions on each of the tested assumptions and drafting the final report and recommendations that were identified by the evaluator.

## Evaluation Questions

The evaluation questions covered the three aims presented clearly in the terms of reference, the following are the evaluation questions:

The first aim of this evaluation was to examine and assess the impact of "Women in Politics" project on three levels:

- Personal level: Women group members who participated in the project in the four locations which were mentioned previously in this terms of reference document.
  - What did the project provide which they could otherwise not achieve (or not in the same time)?

- Where do they perceive their areas of biggest growth and development?
- Through their participation in the project, what kind of positive and negative changes did they experience?
- In hindsight, what would they do differently?
- Where do women see changes within themselves beyond the scope of the project?
- How women perceive the contribution of Kayan?

• Family level: The families (or closer circles) of the women who were nominated as potential candidates for the local council elections.
- What was the contribution of the families to the success of the project participants?
- What kind of changes in the family members (or closer circles) could be observed after the project?
- Where were the biggest challenge for the family members? And how well have these obstacles been overcome?

• Society level: To assess the impact of this project on the four different communities mentioned previously in this terms of reference document.
- How do villagers/ members of the specified communities perceive the activities of the project?
- How do they approve (or disapprove) of women participating in politics?
- Are there examples which can illustrate a change in society towards the participation of women in politics?

The second aim was to conduct this evaluation to determine the extent of Kayan's contribution to this project; derive lessons learned; identify and assess strengths, challenges, opportunities; and develop recommendations for future projects.

- What were the main lessons learned from the 3 years project implementation?
- In hindsight, what would Kayan have done differently?
- What where the main obstacles during the project implementation and how were those overcome?

The third aim of this evaluation was to assess each location's experience in this project, the main process they went through, the

tools they gained and used, the work of the team and its involvement in this project, and the models of their participation in the election.

- What were the differences in the context of the 4 project locations?
- What were the reasons for the different approaches chosen in all 4 locations?
- Why where some approaches more successful than others? And could the approaches in other context/under other circumstances work better/worse?
- What could be described as a conducive environment for this particular type of project?

# Sources of information

The approach followed emphasised the centrality of beneficiary provided information as the main basis of any conclusions. The evaluation identified the key assumptions that were tested for each of the evaluated areas based on information directly obtained from the sources laid out below. These concepts are central to the integrity and professionalism for any project evaluation in general and to the approach described herein.

Based on the brief presentation of the project intervention logic, main sources of primary information include:

- Kayan staff directly involved with the project. The evaluation meetings with this target group in particular focused on the evaluation areas related to outputs, sustainability and, relevance.
- Women groups from the targeted communities. This group provided crucial information on the different components of the project. Beneficiaries/women in this group also hold valuable information regarding the impact and effectiveness of the project as well as its relevance to their needs.

# Data collection tools

The methodology used for collecting data for this assignment are:

- Interviews: Structured and semi-structured interviews were used to collect information from key informants who participated in the project. This tool was used mainly with staff members from Kayan and other key informants such as candidates, family members and media representatives. Information was collected on the relevance and effectiveness of the project activities.

- Focus groups provided more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the different areas covered by the evaluation. Focus groups were comprised of participating women from the targeted localities. Each focus group brought together 4-7 participants and lasted for 2 hours. Focus groups were designed to gain a solid understanding of the effects of the project on the beneficiaries, its relevance to their needs and the prospects of its future sustainability.

- Questionnaires provided quantitative data on issues related to women in politics and this questionnaire was distributed to participants in the four locations/ women's groups. Another questionnaire was created for the community members distributed in three localities.

# Sampling

The evaluation activities relied on information collected from a variety of sources. The selection of the participants was based on the category of the participant (i.e. the type of activity that participant engaged in) and the type of partner/community that participant belongs to. Moreover, the overall design of the focus groups reflected the geographic and cultural diversity of the project beneficiaries. The table below provides more information on key variables related to the participant in data collection activities.

|  | Focus Groups | Interviews | Questionnaire |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Total Number of activities** | **4** | **9** | **2** |
| **Total Number of participants** | **19** | **9** | **247** |
| Kayan Staff Members | - | 2 | |
| Per location - Isfyia | 4 participants | 3 | |
| - Shafa' Amer | 7 participants | 2 | |
| - Arabeh | 4 participants | 1 | |
| - Tale't Ara | 4 participants | 0 | |
| Questionnaire for the participants | | | 25 |
| Questionnaire for the community | | | 222 |
| Media | | 1 | |

# Data Analysis

Data collection under this assignment was qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative information was analysed based on the questions presented in the evaluation. Response categories were identified in reference to each of the questions presented in the ToR. The different responses were compared in order to corroborate information obtained from different sources. Quantitative data was analysed in order to examine and assess the entire project.

# Evaluation Findings

The evaluation addressed three aims:
- The impact on the personal level, family level and society level.
- Kayan's contribution to realizing the impact
- The project itself, including lessons learned; strengths, challenges, opportunities; and the report presents recommendations for future projects.

The evaluation assessed each location's experience in this project, from the main process they went through, the work of the team and its involvement in this project, and analysis of the models of their participation in the election.

## The impact on the personal level

One of the main contributions of the project is strengthening women self-esteem, self-confidence, believing in their capacity to change as a group, to believe in themselves that they can be part of the decision-making position in the local council. A sentence that was repeatedly mentioned by the women in the focus groups was 'they can actually do it.' The council should not be dominated solely by men and women participation within the elections is needed to make the desired change. One of the participants in the group said, 'I never dreamt that I would be part of the election campaign for the council.' The project provided a systematic approach to be part of the council all the way from a distant idea to the point of how to actually be a council members.

Besides, being part of a group contributed a great deal for their success and motivation which gave women confidence and encouragement. The exposure and interaction with women holding positions in councils as mayors from the West Bank left them with positive effect and repeatedly emphasized how it changed their whole perspective on women in politics. The new perspective for women is that it is possible. Secondly, they understand the complexity and challenges involved in the role of being a female council member or a mayor. Thirdly, women recall how inspired and motivated they were following the meetings.

In addition to the meetings with other women, the groups also conducted meetings with local council members and male politicians. On one hand, these events has contributed immensely to crystallising the  women's political awareness and providing an overview on the current affairs of the town, and, on the other hand, these meetings has put the women's agenda and political aspiration on the local map, though men's reactions varied from ridiculing them to seeing them as competitors. Still, the event itself has intensified women's motivation for action.

Some women, especially the leaders in the three locations where they ran for the elections and those who were elected as members of the council, shared during the interviews that the idea to run for elections for the local council was not new, but something they had thought of for many years. On the other hand, most of these women never saw a suitable environment to make it happen: it was too complex or the timing wasn't right. When Kayan offered the project, it surely affirmed women political aspirations and created the space to make it happen. It was time to translate the idea into reality. More importantly, the support that Kayan provided in the formation of the groups and maintaining it was essential to the commitment of women and the group growth.

Many participants said the project was relevant to their needs, the project provided them with the knowledge about several important topics that weren't fully explored, such as gender equality, honour killing, sexuality, patriarchal privileges. Besides, the topics on the council in general, how it's designed, how it works, how it performs, the decision-making mechanism, how to influence and affect the decisions in the local authority and about budgets. If it was not for the project, they wouldn't have had the chance to learn and deepen their understanding on the mentioned topics.

From the survey, these are the topics and fields by which they mostly were influenced:

***To what extent the project expanded your knowledge and strengthened your skills in the following topics:***
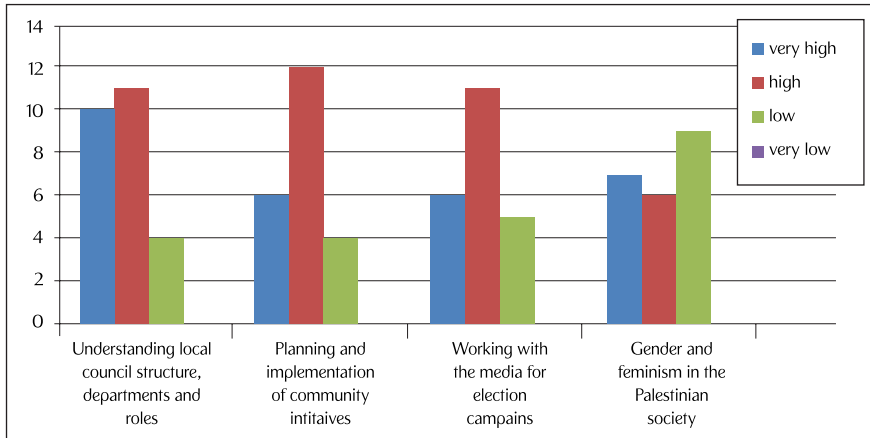


Women perceived their biggest growth and development within different areas and they are as follows:

- **Personal Empowerment:** a considerable number of women emphasized that they are more confident, having the ability to speak in front of large audience assertively with more knowledge on the topics delivered. When speaking out, women feel their ideas are more valued, important to be expressed and much more crystallized. In addition, women now have the power to demand their rights from the council or any official department more confidently.

- **Social responsibility:** Following the initiatives and social campaigns in the local council, women became an address for community initiatives and organizing. Women feel strongly that they are part of the public space and are no more standing individually. Their social engagement gave them the strength and responsibility for being part of the social change. Women expressed happily how being involved within this project changed their social status for the best.

- **Knowledge:** In general, most of the topics trained were evaluated highly by the groups in the four locations. The first topic which was on the top of the list was on the local council organisational structure, how it operates, the mechanisms of work and roles and responsibilities. In addition, the second topic on the list was the home meetings where they held meetings with members of the community to discuss their agenda and the needs of the people.

- **Social and community initiatives:** Shafa'a Amer group initiative was to revive a public park and encourage the people to use it. Arabeh group worked on women health, organising group walking and the marathon. When both groups shared their experiences, their enthusiasm was apparent. Women were greatly satisfied and motivated by the work done. For some, it was the first time they organised an initiative in the public space. Both activities were not traditional as in classrooms or behind closed doors. The initiatives were seen by the public and they attracted many people with positive responses from both women and men. These initiatives gave women the opportunity to connect with new groups in town which whom they otherwise wouldn't have. By doing these initiatives, women gained the trust and credibility from the community regardless of whether these initiatives were used for elections. The great accomplishment and satisfaction they took from it will stay with the women for a long time, as expressed.

There were positive and negative experiences from their participation within the project, the positive experiences which were discussed through the evaluation process were:

- **Events that involved visibility and public presence,** the four groups described their public activities as powerful and positive even though organising the events was exhausting: The Marathon in Arabeh, the public park in Shafa' Amer, the conference in Isfyia, and the short video in Tale't Ara, a shared factor among these events, is the high visibility of women, and the high visibility of the event with the involvement of many people from the community.

- **A number of men joined to support women,** although in the beginning it was mainly women who were the audience and, with more time, men joined the supporting circle. A great accomplishment in Isfyia was when men publicly announced their support for the women.

- **Study days and workshops with council members and politicians,** especially the ones that took place in Nazareth and Ramallah, changed women's attitude towards their ability to run in the elections. It made it more comprehensible and possible.

- **Ahel training** was described as rich and informative in terms of how to present themselves and structured approach to work on campaigns. The training helped in forming their campaigns and were able to take the time to think about it thoroughly.

- **Social status:** the women are more known and more accountable for their actions.

As for a positive experiences that came beyond the project, several women stated that, as a result of the project, they can now ask for their rights and they can express themselves more clearly and assertively, whether at their work place or social circles. This is in addition to their ability to ask easily for information or acts from the local council.

### Negative experiences:

- **Dropout of group members,** in three groups the dropout of members throughout the project negatively affected the work progress even though Kayan had to recruit new members. In some cases, resolving the issue was not reflected on or dealt with properly.

- **The most demanding and pressuring period was five months prior to the election**. At this time, many decisions needed to be taken, unforeseen issues rose that were a surprise to the groups such as the decision to join coalitions or not, the level of effort required to lead the campaign, the financial cost, and the decision making mechanism in case

of arguments. All these issues were raised in the period close to the elections and in some cases were poorly handled.

In hindsight, most of the groups suggested that better preparation and clear idea of what they could face, could save a lot of conflicts and mistakes. Moreover, setting up an agreed mechanism on communication, decision making and sharing vital information is very important. Stressful times will always be present before the elections, however, to avoid too much stress, it is very important to choose the right candidates for elections at least a year before the election time to allow enough period for preparation and campaigning. From the three group's experiences, Osifya's work model, in which they chose their leading candidate at early stage, proved to be most effective. Changes that occurred in other groups in later stages has negatively influenced the group work, motivation, dynamics and their perception in the community.

**Kayan's contribution as perceived by women:**

On a significant note, Kayan's contribution was on several levels, the first thing that comes to mind when women were asked about Kayan's contribution was that they are the fuel behind their work and, if it wasn't for Kayan's work, persistence, coordination and follow-up, the group wouldn't have come to the point where they are. The group felt Kayan was always supporting and providing direction on how to go on for the next steps.

Also, the groups spoke about Kayan's psychological and mental support which was much appreciated. Kayan's staff always were there to encourage, motivate and help them move on to the next steps. It was very important for the groups in all stages as a lot of frustration and almost giving up sometimes were present. In addition to the support, the women see Kayan's contribution in terms of knowledge as most significant, as it was a crucial component that helped the groups develop further in terms of thinking, election agenda, and empowerment.

Kayan helped in putting clear steps in planning their work such as the formation of the groups, house meetings, community initiative, conferences, building their media presence, building their social

campaign and then the election campaign. All mentioned were important stages that helped plan and organise their work. More importantly, Kayan's contribution was there to help see a wider picture how their work within the community is connected to a greater movement, a bigger feminist movement, and how their actions and their accomplishments will be affecting the Palestinian society as a whole.

*How would you assess the following organisational aspects of the project?*
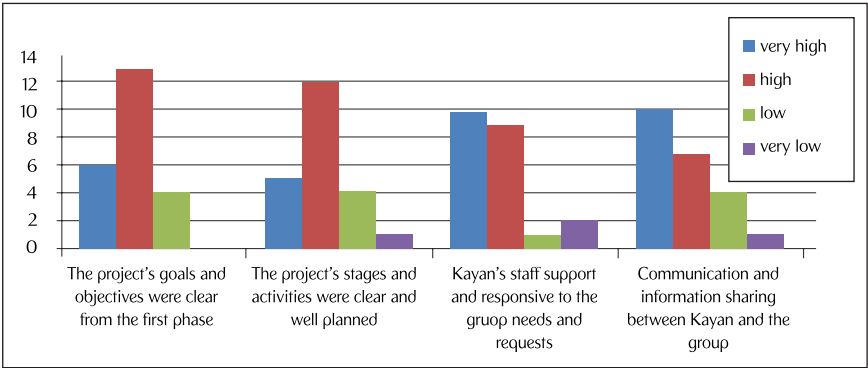


## The impact on the family level

The project obviously affected the closer circles of women nominated as potential candidates for the local council. Not all family member automatically supported the decision to run for elections. In some cases, close families were asking to step away, give away the nomination or asked to rethink their decisions. In all cases interviewed, communication was a very important element to the family. Communicating openly with the family, explaining their decision to carry on and how to cope with the period for elections was extremely needed.

When the family accepted the new reality, the contribution was shown clearly and was needed to the success of the project participants. Families started taking part in practical tasks so they are more engaged in their activities, taking part in their meetings,

conferences, giving rides to home visits, printing and setting up posters in town. Besides their high level of engagement in social media such as sharing the posts, promoting their agenda and defending The impact on the family level it.

## Challenges on the family level

The biggest challenge for the family members was facing the wider family – the clan, due to the conflict of interests that this decision raises. The clan expects every one of its members to vote collectively for the candidate they choose, to maintain their power status in the town. The nomination of women in the project shook the consensus they are used to, especially as it would be at the expense of the votes of the clan's candidate. In many cases in the family, it was a question of loyalty, a loyalty to the clan, and in some families the brothers were torn between voting for their mother or for the clan's selected candidate, and, in another family, it led to one of the sons/ daughters voting for the mother and the rest for the clan's appointed candidate or to another group. It wasn't always a consensus or one voice.

A second challenge was the fear of failure and the reputation of the family after the election. They were afraid they would lose respect among the community and their efforts would not be appreciated.
Another challenge that faced the family members was how to deal with the critics and aggressive comments against the mother or wife mainly on social media when they were exposed to it. With time, they learned how to defend, how to explain their agenda and how to even support and promote their agendas.
A number of family members of the women candidates faced exclusion and even were boycotted by the wider family/ clan or other acquaintances. This happened the moment they publicly supported their mother of wife.

Since some of the candidates declared the nominations close to the election time, and at the same time shared the decision with their family members, it was surprising and difficult for the family. The families didn't have enough time to digest, to prepare or to figure a way to cope with the new situation. Some women suggested that family members need time to be prepared at earlier stages, and it is worth involving the family when the group is ready and know that they would be going for election in early stages before going public.

## The impact on the social level

For the community members, the responses can be divided into two main sections; the first one is in response to the community initiatives and the second one is in response to their political participation.

For the community initiatives, women received great responses; people were cooperating and taking part in the activities. Whether it was reviving the park, the house meetings or the marathon, people encouraged and supported their initiatives. The activities attracted positive media coverage on newspapers, websites, and social media. Through community work, women built new connections with people wanting to join their initiatives.

On the level of the political participation, there were mixed responses. Some people were extremely happy and expressed that finally women in our community is running for the election. On the other hand, a considerable number of men and women were against this step. The way how people expressed their objection varied from one group to another:

- Some responded with underestimating women and ridiculing them as not to be taken seriously.

- Others by scaring women about the work environment in the councils and describing the environment as masculine and aggressive. Language used was not appropriate for respected women, and occasionally they were asked how they will attend meetings that starts at 10pm to try showing that it is impossible for women in our society running for elections.

- Also, one of the most difficult arguments used to object their nomination was that they were causing a split in the family and that the step taken was not fair for their own family.

These comments were spoken directly in some cases, and in other were indirect. Indirect comments were often hidden in messages articulated as concerns and attempt to protect the women.

Another change that can be observed in society was apparent during the last elections was how the media, television and radio

were very cooperative and supportive in promoting the agenda of women participation in politics. Kayan staff were interviewed multiple times in several media outlets, and the project was covered widely.

Still, despite the objections to women running for the election, based on the survey conducted as part of this evaluation, it shows that 87% agree or highly agree that more women should be in the local councils. 88% agree or highly agree that women possess the skills and capacities that qualify them to council members.

*To what extent you agree to the following statements:*
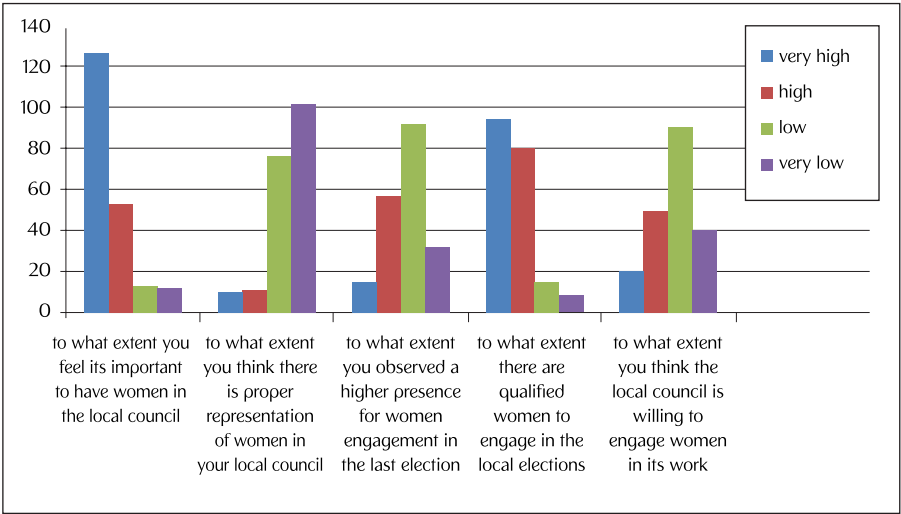


In addition, the majority of the respondents agree that the local council and the community are not ready to integrate women in politics. 69% of the respondents believe that the local council is not ready to integrate women as council members and 71% of the respondents believe that the community is not ready to integrate women as council members.
56% of all respondent in the four locations knew who were the women candidates who were nominated, either by personal name or the name of the list.

# Kayan's contribution to the project

The **second aim** of the evaluation is to determine the extent of Kayan's contribution to this project, identify lessons learned; identify and assess strengths, challenges, opportunities; and develop recommendations for future projects.

Kayan's contribution was on several levels. The first thing that came to mind when women were asked about Kayan's contribution was that they are the  fuel behind their work and if it wasn't for Kayan's work, persistence, coordination and follow-up; the group wouldn't come to the point where they are. The group felt Kayan was always supporting and providing direction on how to go on for the next steps.

Also, the groups spoke about Kayan's psychological and mental support which was much appreciated. Kayan's staff always were there to encourage, motivate and help them move on to the next steps. It was very important for the group in many stages. There was a lot of frustration and almost giving up sometimes.

In addition to the support, the women see Kayan's contribution in terms of knowledge as most significant as it was crucial component that helped the groups develop further in terms of thinking, election agenda, and in terms of empowerment.

Kayan helped in putting clear steps in planning their work such as the formation of the groups, house meetings, community initiative, conferences, building their media presence, building their social campaign and then the election campaign. All these steps mentioned were important for helping plan and organise their work. More importantly, Kayan's contribution was there to help see a wider picture of how their work within the community is connected to a greater movement, a bigger feminist movement, how their actions and their accomplishments will be affecting the Palestinian society as a whole.

The development of the project was a continuation of Kayan's work in women's empowerment, women's rights and the creation of a feminist movement. During these years, a number of individuals from trainings participants, grassroots activists, Jusur Forum and staff shared the idea of the need to move forward to

political participation, as a logical next step for women collective empowerment. Kayan also conducted a comprehensive research regarding women political participation that laid the key direction for the project. On the other hand, through the implementation of the project, many experiences and events had provided the staff and the groups with a number of insights and lessons learned, and key ideas and insights that are worth capturing for the coming years:

A.   **The system of the local authority is not supportive and welcoming for progressive, skilled professionals,** not only for women but also for youth and men. Improving and changing the system would bring a different environment that attract people with different values and attitudes. Kayan raised this specific topic in most of the trainings, media interviews, and during other opportunities to raise awareness.in relation to this point Kayan worked with local authorities' staff on topics related to gender sensitive budgeting, and also worked in partnership with lawyers for accountability and integrity. For the upcoming work, the approach for the project should be more holistic including men and youth who are also excluded from local councils.

B.   group with **powerful leadership** skills and clear objective for their political engagement from the beginning is very essential to be able to succeed and to cope with challenges and crises they will face during the process. In terms of the group composition, it was clearly stated by many interviewee that it is desired to have 2-3 women in the group that have leadership characteristics and are also considered by the group members as empowered and credible women. For these women, they should have a record of social involvement and be publicly recognized on the town level. At the same time, it is desired to have a diversity in the group in terms of age, religion, socio-economic status so they can actually represent the needs and interests of different people within the town.

C.   Kayan believed that **politics should not be limited to the privileged elite women.** It was a core idea that Kayan insisted to emphasize through all the activities and

platforms. This approach adds more difficulty and risks. On the other hand, it was received with great appreciation from women groups, and how the community perceived it and eventually was rewarded at the end. The present aim is to have the majority of women who are activist from grassroots, and who want to be part of the decision making in the local authorities. This point makes Kayan different in its approach than any other feminist organisations.

D.   **A patriarchal man is less harmful than a patriarchal woman.** This believe has been influential in the process of selecting and deciding upon which women are suitable to be in the groups and especially who is suitable to be nominated for candidacy,  Kayan tried to stress that the criteria for selecting a leading woman for election or joining a coalition, is not evaluated solely on how many votes it will gain and even if they have better chances to win, but rather what ideology and values this person or group believes in. In some cases their assertion on this principle caused conflicts. However, for the long run, Kayan believed this is the core objective of the project.

E.   **The importance of publicity and formality.** The conference 'New Isifya' held to formally announce their running to the local council, was described as a transformative event by the members of the group. They felt the event imposed formality and credibility on how the community perceived them. Four women sitting in a row on the table in front of the community and the media, presenting their agenda and the main issues of concern in their campaign. This event shifted the way the whole town looked at them and how they perceived themselves. They were no longer underestimated or to be ignored. They were approached by a number of parties to join them and some men publicly declared their support after the conference.

As a general note on what Kayan would have done differently, it's important to mention that the project approach and the scope of work is innovative and new within the Palestinian society in Israel. Many of the suggestions below are listed because of the

commitment and engagement of those who were willing to take the chance to be part of the project.
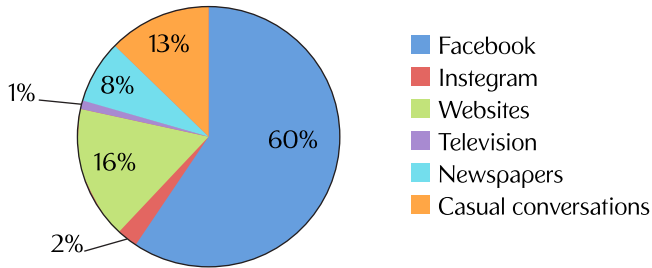
This section combines the challenges and the suggestions, as most of the suggestions below emerged based on the need to tackle the challenges:

- **Start the work earlier:** the formation of the group should start three to four years before the elections. This will allow enough time for the group to get to know each other, build trust, lead a number of initiatives, and learn the relevant topics thoroughly.

- **Allocate more staff members to manage the project:** even if it continues at the same scale, the pressure on the staff was at the expense of the availability to the groups in some cases and, in other cases, lack of time to handle conflicts and challenges properly.

- **Keep constant connection with the groups and open communication**: keep close communication with the groups and explain clearly beforehand when Kayan is restricted by law from working with them. Moral support at advanced stages of the project will charge the groups with positive energy. Kayan was always supportive and present during the project. On the other hand, three groups expressed disappointment from the distance of **Kayan in the last three months** before the elections, which contributed to a stressful and difficult environment at a critical period. Kayan staff were not available as they used to be.

- **Re-define the roles and tasks of the facilitators:** explore the reasons for the high turnover, the leaving and the replacement of facilitators affected the growth of the groups and the progress of the project.

- **Conduct mid-term evaluation and set milestones throughout the project:** it is important to have internal mid evaluation for the project. Such a large-scale project with considerable amount of activities and details, and many ideological, political and social dimensions, makes it worth

having a built-in mechanism in the project design for regular reflections and evaluations.

- **Expand the knowledge on topics related to election,** such as: who is eligible to be nominated? In what circumstances the nomination will affect their job? What kind of agreement the groups can make with different parties and candidate for the election?

- **Provide groups with more information,** and possible scenarios that might occur especially during the last six months, for better preparation. This can include: expected financial expenses to run the election campaign, how to build a budget, and how to fundraise for the campaign. In addition to the financial part, they would need information on: how many people are needed to run a campaign, putting up posters in the streets, being present in the voting centers, and observing and taking part within the election committee.

- **Clarify the roles and responsibilities for Kayan and the groups** from the beginning to the end to avoid conflicts and misunderstandings; this should be done in the early stages of the project. It should include the key values and principles that the project holds as pillars of work to ensure that the groups are presenting and practicing a real change in the political discourse and not maintain the current culture in politics.

- **Deploy the work of the groups and the various activities to strengthen the feminist movement** and enrich it with new members. Many activities through Kayan's work can be deployed and connected to the feminist movement they are building. This could be done through the initiatives, campaigns or through the coalitions.

- **Facebook:** the project should include an in-depth focused training on using social media, based on the survey conducted. Facebook is by far the  most central source of information for people in following the news and the candidates, 60% said the main medium they use to follow the elections is Facebook, website comes as a second with 16%.

## What is the source of information to follow up on elections and candidates

Facebook 60%
Casual conversations 13%
Newspapers 8%
Television 1%
Websites 16%
Instegram 2%

Legend:
- Facebook
- Instegram
- Websites
- Television
- Newspapers
- Casual conversations

- Kayan's work should be expanded through **coalitions and partnerships** for mutual learning, greater impact, coalition's solidarity, wider media coverage, research and knowledge development, although this will require more effort but it will amplify Kayan's impact for new areas that has not been reached before.

- **Challenge the mainstream discourse through the media:** Media is covering Kayan's main activities and is not challenging the mainstream discourse enough. Kayan could work more intensively and independently within seminars or short courses with journalists and media personas, so they can understand Kayan's approach and tackle it more courageously through their work. Also, it's an opportunity for Kayan to learn from them and develop their media strategy.

- **Design multiple work models** and not only one standard program. Kayan should develop different programs for different groups, for groups who are ready with high capacities and strong leadership, and another program for

those who need shorter interventions. Some will need one-year intervention, in case they are prepared and ready, before the elections and others three years intervention.

- **Balance between the in-depth work with the groups and between the horizontal work with society in general,** the work with the groups is demanding and exhausting, and requires a lot of efforts to be done properly. However, this investment was at the expense of the work on the societal level, schools, partnerships, community centers, coalitions, wider media campaign on the national level.

On the groups' level:

- **Groups shouldn't be convinced to take part in the project;** they should want to take part with high commitment to the idea of women participation in politics. The interviews showed that most of the women who were nominated for the elections were women who has been thinking and planning to engage in politics for long time, and what Kayan offered is a platform to translate their aspirations into practical work plan.

- Groups should work on **conflict management, decision making, group dynamics and democratic decisions and behavior,** resilience and personal security, so they can cope effectively with the challenges and problems within the group.

- **Work strategically with high school students.** They are an important segment to take into consideration. It was an unfortunate missed opportunity during this project, the groups were late to conduct activities in schools in the period before the Bigrut exams.

- The community **initiatives** should be planned in a way than can be linked in later stages to the political campaign and not separated.

The **third aim** of this evaluation was to assess each location's experience in this project, the main processes they went through, the tools they gained and used, the work of the team,

its involvement in this project, and analysis of  the models of their participation in the election.

It's not easy to identify unified processes for the four groups during the project, though there are similarities in some aspects. Still each group had its own unique story, experienced different challenges and internal dynamics, the starting point was different, in terms of readiness to run for the election, for instance Isfyia group from the start joined the project knowing that their goal is to run for the election, while Arrabe group took them longer to reach that decision. The starting point also differed in terms of time from the point of the formation of the group till the date of the elections; especially Tale't Ara group who joined relatively late and felt they don't have sufficient time to prepare properly.

However, the four groups participated in the main trainings and study days of the project, when asked about trainings and topics; they knew well what the topics for each training were, even though not all group members attended it.

With this section, I will address each group separately, giving a brief summary about their uniqueness and strengths during their journey, environmental and external factors affecting their work, and challenges and lessons learnt.

**Isfyia's group** since the beginning, had clear objective to run for the elections. The reason behind joining the Women in Politics Project was knowing that it will assist them in planning and setting their campaign, develop their capacities and learn how they can cope with challenges.

Uniqueness and strengths: a number of women within the group are known in the town, they worked within the education system and, having been educators for decades, engaged in some struggles the community faced years ago and clearly touched many people lives; therefore, they are perceived as credible and trustworthy. This helped the group in gaining the support of many people relatively quickly and their reputation didn't need to be built from scratch. In addition, within the society their social status is medium and upper class and they

already have a career behind them. Accordingly, people could hardly accuse them with looking for a job or in it for the money.

In addition, a central aspect that contributed to the group's success was that from the beginning they chose and agreed on who is the leading candidate for the local council, and they supported her through all the process, with no changes or hesitations, neither in the candidates nor in their agenda and election program. This consistency in work and messages, and harmonised group work helped them to gain the people's trust and credibility.

Environment and external factors: it is quite surprising that one of the most successful models emerged in a town like Isifya, which is religiously dominated, segregated and conservative. Isifya through the last decades wasn't involved in the national political discourse or the feminist movement. The success of the group in Isifya provides a lot of hope and inspiration to other conservative, traditional and even a bit isolated towns.

Challenges: one of the main challenges that surfaced in the interviews with the group, it was the wider family, the clan, since elections in Isifya, similar to many other Arab towns, are dominated and determined by family affiliations. When women informed their families about their decision to run for the elections in an independent group, in most cases, reactions were between surprise and objection. Family concerns were expressed overtly or covertly on how their decision will negatively affect the clan's nominee prospects to win the elections. Another challenge within the Isifya group was the appearance of Druze women's faces in the campaign, on posters and social media. Having women's faces wasn't accepted in their religion and the group should have found a way to deal with it.

Lessons learned: The main key indicator for the success of Isfya group was the group itself, even if in an environment that it is considered not ready for women participating in Politics. The diversity of women in the group, their capacities and life experience, how they are perceived in town, their status and credibility, their social status and their confidence were also key factors for their

success in the elections. In addition to this, the importance of public events, the group conference held was also a transformative event in their journey from the group members and their family. They all emphasized how the formality and visibility of the event created an atmosphere of seriousness and gave power to the group.

**Shafa' Amer** The group in Shafa' Amer went through difficult crisis, the changes in the candidates through the project caused confusion and uncertainty that was felt for the rest of the project within the group, the group members didn't agree among themselves on the strategy for the elections. They also declared they are running as an independent list in the beginning and later joined another political party which negatively affected how people perceived them. Furthermore, the differences on strategies between the group and Kayan contributed to the crisis. Part of the group felt Kayan are imposing their opinion and intervening in their decisions while not respecting the voice of the group. Mistrust and tension between the group and the Kayan had led to a loss of communication, and each side wanted the time to review their interests and considerations.

Uniqueness and strengths: the group had joined the project as a continuation of previous work, the group was formed earlier and known as Nisaa al Kala'a 'The Castle Women'. They already carried out community activities and went through various trainings and workshops on topics of gender and equality and empowerment.

Through the project, the group had worked on reviving the public municipal park, an initiative they were tremendously proud of doing. It opened new partnership opportunities, recruited a lot of volunteers to work with them, and created the chance to work with the municipality too. This experience shifted their perceptions of their roles in the town, to a proactive, socially recognised women. The group was also representative of the women in town, the group reflected a mixture and diversified backgrounds, professionally, religiously and age wise. Diversity is not to taken for granted in a town like Shafa' Amer, that had a lot of tensions in the past between the three different religions.

Environmental and external factors: Shfa'amr is an active political place and known to have strong competition over the local council among independent figures and political parties. These dynamics affected the work of the group and raised the dilemma whether to run as an independent group without affiliation and with clear agenda, or to join an existing political party to raise their chances for getting elected in the council where their agenda and principles had to be compromised.

Challenges: In the first stage of the project, the group agreed on a leading candidate to run for the elections. Nine months before the election, the candidate left the group. She accepted a role as a replacement for her resigning colleague as a council member. The fact that the above candidate was a member of another political party prior to the group, not clarifying her roles at both places in an early stage, caused a lot of conflict with the group. With the absence of a strong leader, the group had no choice but to nominate a woman that wasn't part of the group from the beginning; a step that was not acceptable to some of the group members. These changes and conflicts postponed many actions necessary for a successful campaign, many decisions in the final stages were taken in a hurry and the load of work was on few individuals. The dilemma mentioned above was not limited to the group members; it posed a dilemma for Kayan's staff too on how to deal with this complex situation.

Lessons learned: It is very important for the group members to have a clarification on their commitment and sort out potential conflicting affiliations, this step is crucial for candidates to build mutual trust among the members knowing that there will be no unpleasant surprises.
The entrance of new members into the group can be considered as a saviour in such circumstances, but it can turn out to be risky, mainly if she will have a leading role in the group and at the same time she doesn't follow the same implicit and explicit guidelines of the group and key principles and values that leads their decisions. This needs extra support until the groups are back on track. On an important note, despite all the challenges the group encountered, the focus group expressed keen intention to reconnect and continue with Kayan.

**Arabeh**

Uniqueness and strengths: The Arabeh group had also been active before the project, they were called Atyaf 'Shades' and implemented various activities, this history had equipped them with skills and knowledge of working with the community and leading social initiatives. Their focus on health in their work had attracted many women to participate within the group and organised the first women's marathon.

Challenges: Part of the challenges faced that there were two active members, who were employees of the local council. Local council employees have legal restrictions on candidacy and the use of municipal facilities for political purposes. These unforeseen issues created obstacles for the group work who didn't have other suitable nominees and were hesitant to run for the elections.

The main challenge faced is regarding joining another list. First, the challenge is upon deciding to what extent the other side's agenda is aligned with theirs, the other challenge is who takes such decision and how. Part of the group in Arabeh, as in Shafa' Amer, were left out of being consulted in the decision.

Lessons learned: The link between the community initiatives and the election campaigns were not always clear, the group couldn't leverage the interest and the engagement of the community in the initiatives into actual support for the election. Since the community initiative requires a lot of effort, it is worth rethinking its vitality.

**Tale't Ara:** decided not to run for the election, mainly explained due to a lack of time to prepare properly. On the other hand, the group managed to create a lot of discussions in town around their potential candidacy, many people were interested and approached to know more if they will be running for the election or not.

Uniqueness and strengths: Strong will to participate in politics, with a sense of maturity taking part in the process with high motivation and commitment to join the group.

Challenges: Unlike the other three localities, Tale't Ara has a

regional local authority that encompasses 5 villages, a complex structure that requires a different kind of work model and extra effort to address the differences, and characteristics of each villages. In addition, Tale't Ara is very conservative place and by suggesting the idea of participation in politics, was significantly courageous and challenging to the community. Kayan team believed that group had a good potential to run for the election, on the other hand, the group thought differently for this Kayan accepted the group decision.

Lessons learned: Upon completing the training in Tale't Ara they began to seriously discuss with potential women the possibility of running in the elections, almost all women took a step backwards. However, for the group to have this experience has been profound.

As a general observation of what can be defined as indicative features for the success of the groups, I would mention the following:

A. Composition of the group: it is essential that the group comprised from women with diversified backgrounds representing the general society, but still, it's equally important to include 2-3 women who have leadership characteristics, well recognised in the town with 'social credit'.
B. Being part of a wider movement engaged in politics, meetings with different politicians and women in councils and other groups, energized the group members and empowered them.
C. Prior acquaintance among some of the group members with mutual respect and trust among them.

Due to the great differences among the groups and their strategies, it was difficult to find more components that could predict success than the above.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the focus groups, individual interviews and the survey, the participating women in the project clearly expressed that the project had a great influence on them in terms of personal empowerment, knowledge and awareness regarding how the see their roles in politics. The four groups expressed a sense of accomplishment including the group in Tale't Ara, who didn't run for the elections.

The project through the meetings, trainings, facilitation & empowerment succeeded in making the idea of women's participation seen as actually possible and plausible, which it's not limited for men and also not limited for privileged women. Furthermore, today the women feel the responsibility to take a more proactive role in engaging in politics, and not leaving the local council solely in the hands of men.

87% of the respondents to the survey distributed among the community, stated they agree and highly agree that women should take part in the local council. And 88% of the people who participated in the survey agree and highly agree that there is not enough women in the local councils. These high percentage reflect the acute need to increase women participating in politics.
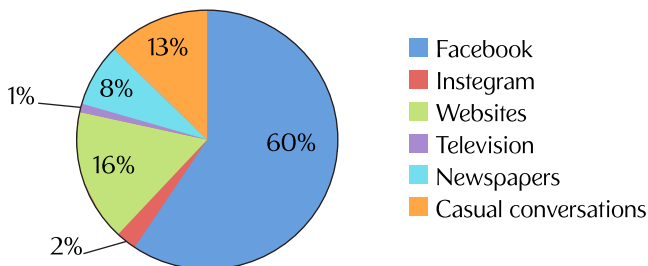Here are a number of recommendation that could advance the objective of the project for the future:

- Continue with the existing groups, all four groups expressed keen intentions to build on their experiences and improve their work for next time. Despite all the challenges, they say that today they cannot go back to be a standby audience, this experience changed them a lot, and they are more determined to continue.

- Set clearer guidelines for decision-making mechanisms and discussing the boundaries between Kayan and the group in early phases of the project.

- Draw a set of milestones, jointly examining the progress of the group work, accomplishment and dynamics. Milestones should also include the main activities: home

meetings, social campaign, and selecting candidates. These milestones provide a sense of direction and can be used as a tool to evaluate the readiness of the group.

- Deepen the knowledge on legal matters affecting the nomination of women, explaining the risks and restrictions before taking decisions for the nominations.

- Engage the women who were involved in the campaigns during the project, the candidates and those who were elected as lecturers and presenters of the project for future work, people are most inspired and affected when listening to personal stories and experiences directly from women.

- Deepen the work with the media. They are cooperative and thirsty to cover women stories. The focus should be the personal stories of 'ordinary' women who broke the traditional image and pursued their aspiration to be part of the decision making in local authorities.

- Facebook, the project should comprise an in-depth focused training on using social media, based on the survey conducted, Facebook is by far the is the central source of information



What is the source of information to follow up on elections and candidates

- Facebook — 60%
- Instagram — 2%
- Websites — 16%
- Television — 1%
- Newspapers — 8%
- Casual conversations — 13%

for people in following the news and the candidates, 60% said the main medium they use to follow the elections is Facebook, website comes as a second with 16%.

•   Involve and prepare family members especially families of nominated candidates. It is very important to work with the close family members on: reasons why the candidate was selected, importance of their participation, agenda, media, where and when they can get involved.

**Looking ahead:**

•   What is Kayan's role in the support and accompaniment of women who were elected as council members?

•   How can Kayan through partnerships with other women and civil society organisations, identify women groups who are committed and motivated to participate in politics?

•   How can Kayan respond creatively to different kinds of women groups, who are interested in participating in politics?

كــيــان – تـنـظـيـم نـسـوي
**Kayan** - Feminist Organization

**Kayan Feminist Organization** envisions a secure and just society free of gender-based discrimination, in which Arab Palestinian women in Israel enjoy full and equitable opportunities for self-actualization and take a leading and active part in society through realizing their individual and collective rights. Kayan works towards this vision by consolidating an active, systematic, nationwide Arab Palestinian feminist movement that actively effects social change through contesting the root causes of gender-based discrimination, defending and promoting the rights of women, and ensuring their integration in decision-making positions in general.

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Empowers women.
Opens up perspectives.

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