

## **Empowering Palestinian mothers to protect the bodies and brains of their newborns and infants**

### **World Vision Jerusalem-West Bank-Gaza**

*It takes empowered women to bring about change in fragile contexts*

In West Bank, Palestine, World Vision (WV) provides an integrated package of services for mothers and children that aims to ensure holistic child development.

Twenty-one vulnerable communities were targeted through implementation of a female Community Health Worker (CHW) approach. Most of the targeted communities are isolated, with limited or no access to health services. The project equips CHWs with proper knowledge on the First 1000 Days of a child's life, maternal mental health, and Early Childhood Development, which they transfer to the participant mothers through visits to homes and health clinics.

Implementing this integrated approach through female CHWs contributed to improving mothers' knowledge and practices, and therefore children's growth and developmental outcomes. In addition, the targeted mothers became more confident and began to engage outside the home to influence other mothers, and to make their own decisions, especially on issues related to raising their children.

An unanticipated success was the impact on the CHWs themselves. Meetings, observations and interviews with the CHWs revealed the following:

Through their work with this project, the CHWs have been empowered and gained self-determination. They can now move freely in their communities to visit mothers, attend primary healthcare clinics to support clinic activities, and travel outside their communities for regular project meetings. They have taken on leadership roles, provide essential support to the Ministry of Health, and are recognized and respected in their communities. Some have even become community leaders; for the first time, women are serving as members of village councils.



The work of the CHWs also had an impact on transforming social norms. Communities are beginning to accept working women and women leaders. Community members are becoming active and advocating for their health rights, and communities are interacting with and supporting each other.

The positive trends toward valuing the time and workload of women are observed among the CHWs, as the time they spend to implement project activities is valued and recognized by the project participants and their communities. For CHWs with young children at home, their volunteer work with the project is recognized and supported by their own families, as in-laws step in to provide childcare so that CHWs can do their work.

The CHWs use the incentives they receive to make purchases for themselves and they spend their money as they wish. A number used the incentives to finish their education, and a few reported being able to support their husbands in their small business or start a small business of their own.

It is impressive to see this transformation and how it impacts the entire community.