

mouneh. These courses served as a crossing gate for her from the mountain to Beirut, so she defied the traditions and customs facing the «mountain women» by working outside her region. And the Association for Association for Forests, Development and Conservation supported her by transporting the Saj

from the mountain to the «Souk el Tayeb».

At first, she was not bold enough to bake in public, but the encouragement she received and the flow of Lebanese and foreign customers to savor her Saj bread made her very daring. The qualitative shift in Rima's life has changed her

economic situation, and she became the first supporter of her three sons to reach university and become involved in the work market. Rima carries a message to all women about the necessity to enjoy financial independence, and work from home whether in the «crochet, mouneh or cooking.» «Her dream of going to

Beirut has turned into a tour with her Saj in European and Arab countries», to which she gives credit to the association which she joined years ago and which enabled her to tone her social, educational and economic skills.

*Journalist

Municipal Police Women at work to restore dialogue with citizens

Janine Jalkh*

While women in Lebanon still struggle to breach the walls of the political sphere - in which the Parliament includes only six women MPs while the Government four ministers - they are slowly and surely beginning to make their way into municipalities, many of which have opened their doors to women.

The inclusion of women in municipal police units is now rising, as several municipalities have decided to inject their municipal police units with female officers who are capable of earning peoples' trust while protecting and reassuring them. Mayors are convinced of the need to change the traditional methods of suppression and coercion in policing by replacing them with dialogue and engagement with citizens. Based on that, several mayors have opted for an inclusive municipal police, given that women can better play this role in a country where the culture of coercion and violence remains the norm.

The Ministry of Interior and Municipalities and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with funds from the governments of Canada and the Netherlands, support the integration of women in municipal police as part of a larger project which aims at supporting municipalities to strengthen social stability. This was set based on consultations with municipalities with the aim of introducing policing methods that match growing needs for services of the population.

Given that women are more community-oriented, and enjoy better communication and listening skills than their male peers,

female police officers have gradually begun to establish themselves in municipalities such as Bourj Hammoud, Mina, Enfe, Zahle and Antelias, to name but a few.

In Antelias - women-managed to establish themselves in the the municipality's administration- after being recruited in 2017 by mayor Elie Abou Jaoudé. The mayor was extremely satisfied with the productivity of the women he had recruited in admin roles, so he decided to take it to another level by recruiting more women as municipal police agents. «They are simply more rigorous and much more professional than many men on the team,» the mayor explains.

Another asset that these new recruits can rely on is their gender. The cultural norms that force people to respect women and treat them gently, provides them with spontaneous help from the residents, making them eager to facilitate their tasks by showing kindness and greater cooperation.

In Bourj Hammoud, the inclusion of women in both municipal police and administration was initiated a while ago. Women now represent nearly 34% of the workforce and some of them have been assigned to traffic management.

In the beginning, female municipal police faced intimidation attempts and inappropriate jokes, but they have now gained confidence and established themselves in a rather difficult environment. The social context was also difficult for Zahle's 15 female municipal police members who, over the years, have finally earned the respect of the people.

«In the beginning, nobody took us seriously, not only because we were women, but because of the poor perception the citizens had of the municipal police in general,» says Cosette Abdayem, who joined the team almost three years ago now. Over time, she says, she has learned to reconcile firmness and affability, sometimes using gentleness and active listening, and sometimes boldness and confidence when the situation got tough.

«Although very new at this stage, the feminization of municipal police would be more effective when municipalities are given the necessary resources and power to better enforce the law in a country where impunity is still prevalent,» explains an expert who monitors the project closely. According to her, women have an enormous potential that only needs to be revealed and put to good use.

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