

Project Information

- **Country:** Palestine
- **Project Name:** Project for Improving Reproductive Health with a Special Focus on Maternal and Child Health, Project for Improving Maternal and Child Health and Reproductive Health (Technical Cooperation)
- **Cooperation Period:** 2005 - 2012
- **Implementing Organization:** Ministry of Health

1. Background and Project Summary

People's movement and access are controlled by the separation wall and many checkpoints within the West Bank of Palestine, and in some cases women cannot continue to go to the same hospitals or clinics because of new separation walls or checkpoints. Many women go to various medical facilities for prenatal checkups, delivery and immunizations of their children because of the restriction of movement and economic reasons.

Medical facilities are operated by various organizations such as the Ministry of Health (MOH), United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), NGOs, and the private sector. As their maternal and child health services were provided in different ways and the means of recording varied, it was difficult for mother and child to receive a continuum of care.

To improve access to the medical facilities for mothers and children as well as continuous maternal and child health care, the Project started development of the first Arabic Mother and Child Health Handbook (MCHHB) in 2005. The MCHHB contains essential information and records regarding pregnancy and pregnancy-related health checkups, delivery, postnatal care, immunizations, childcare, and family planning. During Phase II of the Project, development of utilization system of the MCHHB, utilization and dissemination of the MCHHB across Palestine, and technical trainings to maternal and child health service providers were supported.

2. The Functions of the MCHHB

(1) Portable medical record

To ensure the continuum of care even if a mother and child go to different medical facilities for perinatal care, the general policy of "each pregnant woman in Palestine receives ONE MCHHB" is taken. It is important that each woman receive only one MCHHB, not two or more, during her pregnancy.

(2) Standardized tool

The MCHHB has now been endorsed and utilized by MOH, UNRWA, and NGOs as the national common tool for promoting the continuum of care

and improving the health of mother and child. The National Coordination Committee for the MCHHB was established in 2009 to facilitate coordination and collaboration between these organizations for effective implementation.

(3) Health education tool

The MCHHB contains health education information about the course of pregnancy, delivery, family planning, childcare, reproductive health and nutrition. Health care providers use the MCHHB as a communication tool to provide health education and counselling to pregnant women/ mothers, fathers and close family members. The MCHHB also promotes interactive communication between health care providers and women by encouraging women to ask questions and thus receive information regarding important issues related to perinatal care. The MCHHB also provides health information to family members, which will promote involvement of the family in all stages of pregnancy to perinatal care and strengthening of family support to women.



3. The Impacts of the MCHHB from the Gender Perspective

(1) Women's participation in decision-making

Pregnant women/ mothers can use the MCHHB as a self-learning tool to improve their knowledge of perinatal care and childcare thus empowering them to participate in making decisions related to their own health and the health of their children. There were few chances for women to discuss family planning, with traditional values of preference for many children. The MCHHB provides women an opportunity to discuss the timing of their next child and/ or family planning methods with their husband.

(2) Male participation

Illustrations of a father together with a mother and child are drawn on the front cover as well as in the contents of the Palestinian MCHHB. Since the MCHHB was introduced, more fathers now take their children to immunizations and/ or health checkups. In one case a husband bought nutritious food for his pregnant wife after reading the MCHHB.

The MCHHBs are also distributed and utilized in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan by UNRWA. The MCHHB protects many lives of women and children through the cross-border continuum of care. The MCHHB is called a "Passport to Life".