



## SUCCESS STORY

### South Lebanon Villages Exposed to New Ideas



OTI/Lebanon

Workshop participant Nagham Tarhini describes how the training has broadened her outlook on life.

***“When I have children, I don’t want to be just a mother. I want to be able to tell them stories about what I did for my village when I was young.”***

***—Nagham Tarhini, 17  
a student from Ibba***

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**May 2008** – A series of workshops in southern Lebanon is introducing villagers to democratic principles and challenging traditional ways of dealing with community-level conflicts.

In Ibba, a small village near the town of Nabatiyeh, the three-day training equipped 21 local leaders with the tools to act as mediators and change agents in a community dominated by competing political factions.

Ali Tarhini, an independent member of Ibba’s municipal council, said the activity, which exposed villagers to conflict resolution techniques based on dialogue, analysis, and negotiation, was one of the rare events not hosted by a political party.

For Nagham Tarhini, a vivacious 17-year-old, the workshops taught her to think critically. “At least now when we listen to a politician, we know if he is playing on our emotions or not,” she said. “We have the tools, we can study his position, and we don’t take what he says for granted.”

Nagham also has a new vision of her role in a society shaped by conservative social mores. “I can no longer accept that I just have to study and be silent,” she said. “My priorities have changed.” Two days into the activity, Nagham created an online Facebook group to unite young people from her village. She also plans to organize a youth summer camp.

Nahla Kodayeh, a 66-year-old community activist, was encouraged by what she saw. “I’ve noticed the changes in the group’s behavior already,” she said. “For the first time, I witnessed people listening and respecting each other....It’s a great feeling.”

The training was run by the Partnership Center for Development and Democracy (PCDD), a newly formed nongovernmental organization that has been working in three southern villages with support from the OTI Lebanon project. As word of the workshops spread, PCDD received appeals for similar training from three additional villages, and the group is taking steps to respond to the requests.

PCDD Director Lina Alameddine attributed the project’s success to the fact that the group does not have a one-size-fits-all approach. “Each workshop deals with the specific tensions in each village,” she said.