SOWING SEASON
GRANT PROGRAM
STORIES
2014-2015
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SABANCI FOUNDATION
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2014 - 2015
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October 2015, İstanbul

Writers
Hilal Baykara
Gökçe Perçinoğlu
Özen Pulat

Editor
Gökçe Perçinoğlu

Translator
Ufuk Yılmaz

Graphic Design
Murat Özugü

Printing
Görsel Sanatlar Printing

This publication has been developed and published within the scope of the Sabancı Foundation Social Development Grant Program.

SABANCI VAKFI
4. Levent 34330 İstanbul
P +90 212 385 88 00
F +90 212 385 88 11
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Güler Sabancı, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Sabancı Foundation

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Bilgi University Sociology and Education Implementation and Research Center

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THAT’S OUR VILLAGE OVER THERE
FOREWORD

Over the past 41 years, Sabancı Foundation has adopted the principle of my late grandfather Hacı Ömer Sabancı that is “sharing what we have gained from this land with its people.” From day one, our objective has been to make a difference in the lives of people and to contribute to social development. Our purpose was not only reaching out and inspiring a greater number of people with our work, but also ensuring that the results will be maintained.

We have been annually publishing the stories from the Grant Program which brings smiles to our faces even during the compilation process. This year’s book contains yet another collection of inspiring stories from all across Turkey. I believe that by compiling the projects into a book, we make them permanent and contribute to the spreading, development and comprehension of these stories.

Our motivation behind the Sabancı Foundation Grant Program, which inspired this book, is to enable equal and active participation of women, youth and persons with disabilities in society, to find out the obstacles to an equal society and to break down prejudices. To serve this purpose, we support the projects of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) each year, sowing the seeds of further social development as well as building hope for the future.

Based on the experience we have gathered so far with the Program, we have planned our route to help ensure the sustainability of civil society. So far we have engaged in cooperation and shared experiences with NGOs working on a great variety of issues such as putting an end to early and forced marriages, improving the participation of women and persons

GÜLER SABANCI
Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Sabancı Foundation

Witnessing the change and transformation in people’s lives, contributing to social development and knowing that we have supported the youth, women and persons with disabilities in their fight against discrimination gives us strength.

This book contains these stories of change and transformation. Inside, you will find not only problems but also solutions and hope, especially the hope that a different world is possible.
with disabilities in the workforce, achieving gender equality and eliminating discrimination against persons with disabilities and the youth.

Observing how the NGOs we have supported flourished faster than our expectations and how our projects have touched the lives of people encourages us to work even harder. Aware of the significance and value of the seeds we sow, we pay meticulous attention to every one of them. We wake up every morning with the excitement to see our seeds in full bloom.

Along with keeping the seeds alive, it’s equally important to have them thrive in health and bear fruits. We consider each project as a seed that will grow into a more equal society. We believe that if we focus on their sustainability, they will bear more fruits that will benefit society. If we are to achieve this goal, we have to focus on certain issues with much deeper support.

So far, we have supported 119 projects all across Turkey in nearly a decade. We have reached approximately 700 thousand people in Turkey with the projects we have supported. What makes us happy is not only the figures reflecting our efforts but also the positive effects in the lives of people. Witnessing this change and transformation in people’s lives, contributing to social development and knowing that we have supported the youth, women and persons with disabilities in their fight against discrimination gives us strength.

This book contains these stories of change and transformation. Inside, you will find not only problems but also solutions and hope, especially the hope that a different world is possible. I hope that the stories will inspire and breed hope in you as well.
Sabancı Foundation Social Development Grant Program (Grant Program) was launched in 2008 in order to support civil society organizations implementing projects for women, youth and persons with disabilities.

**Why Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities?**
Turkey is home to 38.7 million WOMEN, 12.8 million YOUTH and 8.5 million PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES. Women, youth and persons with disabilities constitute a large portion of the population. However, a variety of indicators such as work, education and political participation show that these groups face problems when it comes to equal and active participation in public life. Groups, subjected to double discrimination as “Women with Disabilities”, “Young Women” or “Youth with Disabilities”, face even greater obstacles.

**Why Civil Society Organizations?**
With the goal of ensuring equal rights and active participation in public life for women, youth and persons with disabilities, Sabancı Foundation decided to support civil society organizations through its Social Development Grant Program.

There are mainly two reasons for this:
1 - Need
2 - Potential for Development

Due to the lack of local organizations or foundations that provide grants to civil society organizations, there is a constant need in the sector. On the other hand, civil society organizations, which are working closely with disadvantaged groups and analyzing their needs, have a high potential in solving some of the social problems.

It was at this point that the Sabancı Foundation, through the grant program, sprang into action to support the projects of civil society organizations promoting equal rights for women, youth and persons with disabilities, and their active participation in society.
SOWING SEASON: SABANCI FOUNDATION GRANT PROGRAM STORIES 2014-2015

330,000
People reached indirectly

72
Cities where Grant Program was implemented

54
Projects in total

46
Completed projects

80,000
People reached directly

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT GRANT PROGRAM MAP
Through the grant program, the Sabancı Foundation provides not only material support, but also technical support to NGOs where the need presents itself. Creating an environment of sharing between organizations and conducting joint projects with them are essential aspects of this process.

- The grant process begins with organizations deemed eligible after a comprehensive selection process, taking their places within the grantee network.
- The organizations become acquainted with other organizations working in similar areas within the grantee network, and become part of various information and experience sharing environments.
- The Sabancı Foundation keeps close track of projects implemented and works collaboratively with the NGOs through frequent meetings, field visits and comprehensive evaluation of reports.
- Following this close monitoring, the foundation provides technical support in the area of need, from communications to monitoring and evaluation.
- In order to keep the public informed on projects being conducted, the foundation also creates vehicles for communication such as a bulletin service, special news and activities.
INITIATIVE OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

ASSOCIATION OF PERSONS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS IN EDUCATION

SOWING SEASON: SABANCI FOUNDATION GRANT PROGRAM STORIES 2014-2015
‘I have had visual impairments since birth. My dream was to become a psychologist, but I had negative experiences during the university exams due to problems caused by exam officials. As a result it ended up being impossible for me to be able to realize my goal.’

A Student with Disabilities

In Turkey, every 4 out of 10 people with disabilities are illiterate; 6 out of 10 never finished primary school; and 8 out of 10 never finished middle school. Overall there are only 23 out of 10,000 university students who are people with disabilities. The number of students with disabilities decreases at each level of education in Turkey, indicating that they face many challenges which prevent them from enjoying their right to education. People with disabilities who complete their basic education and become undergrad students at university end up facing a new set of challenges. Persons with hearing impairments have to attend classes without any interpreters whilst

MÜCAHİT İBRAHİM ÖZTÜRK
Atatürk University, Workshop Participant

The meeting was very helpful. I volunteered at my university for the second meeting and made presentations. I was selected representative for students with disabilities. We held regular meetings with academics. The project contributed a lot to our university.

DEMET BUDAK
Gazi University, Workshop Participant

Following the meeting, we developed good friendships. We were also able to learn about people with other types of disabilities. I am a visually impaired person, but whenever I am at a government office to get a public service, I always ask if they have a staff member who is able to use sign language or if the office is wheelchair accessible.
others with visual impairments have to look for ways to read course materials without Braille transcriptions. Students with physical disabilities have to use university shuttles; cafeterias and libraries which don’t have ramps.

6 years ago a group of people with visual impairments who had worked to excel themselves against all odds joined forces to discuss the barriers they faced during their education. They founded the Association of Persons with Visual Impairments in Education (EGED) in 2013. EGED launched the “Initiative of University Students with Disabilities” project to discuss the obstacles experienced in university education, develop solutions and create solidarity and organized action amongst students with disabilities.

Firstly, the project team reached out to university students with disabilities through announcements. 26 students with disabilities were selected out of the 85 applicants to attend workshops in Istanbul and Ankara, which allowed them to experience many new opportunities. For instance, it allowed a hearing impaired and a visually impaired person to communicate for the first time and it made them realize they had different types of problems. It also allowed them to realize for the first time the value of solidarity and organized action. Following the workshop, students formed study groups to discuss different problem areas they faced, including the attitude of academics and the inaccessibility of course materials. The discussions allowed them to gain a new perspective through creation of a web based platform, which allowed students with disabilities to participate online.
University students with disabilities learned how to deal with their own problems; but there were still not enough awareness of this issue across the country. This initiative has catered to this need as well, as the students sent applications to the Council of Higher Education (YOK) and universities to collect information on the accessibility of universities. Students filled out questionnaires to provide more information about their own universities. The results were far from positive. Only 5 out of a 100 students with visual impairments were able to go to university libraries on their own, whilst only 8 out of 82 universities employed staff who knew sign language. All of these issues and related suggestions were made public in the form of a report which was instrumental in informing public bodies about the current situation.

The Initiative of University Students with Disabilities gave students who experience these issues a chance to be part of the solution. Some of them became representatives at their universities while others engaged with bodies of students with disabilities to help transform their universities. A student in Samsun initiated the amendment of the regulation that governs the needs of students with disabilities during exams. The problem wasn’t resolved but it at least allowed students to be able to say “it is us who have the initiative”. To be able to say this was the first and most important step towards a solution.

AHMET TAYFUR ARSLAN
19 Mayıs University, Workshop Participant

The Initiative of University Students with Disabilities has been an unforgettable life experience for me as a student. Thanks to this project, I have been named the representative of disability activities in 19 Mayıs University where I study. I have worked on practicing what I have learned through the project and also managed to get other friends with disabilities involved in the initiative. Most importantly, I have realized the necessity for us to take action.
The Initiative of University Students with Disabilities gave students who face problems at universities a chance to be part of the solution.
INSTITUTION
Association of Women with Disabilities

PROJECT NAME
Rights-based Struggle of Women with Disabilities

PROJECT PARTNER
Adana Women’s Solidarity Center

LOCATIONS
Ankara, Bursa, Çanakkale, Gaziantep, İzmir, Mersin, Samsun, Trabzon
RIGHTS-BASED STRUGGLE OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

SOWING SEASON: SABANCI FOUNDATION GRANT PROGRAM STORIES 2014-2015
RIGHTS-BASED STRUGGLE OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

“We are the ones marginalized in the society by being women and disabled. We are the ones pushed even further to the outer margins of society. You can’t see us on the street or in public, because we are trapped by our loved ones taking care of us.”

From the Women with Disabilities Meeting in Çanakkale

The Association of Women with Disabilities (ENGKAD) was established in 2011 by a number of women with disabilities in order to combat the double disadvantage of being a woman with disabilities in Turkey. The association’s goal was to assist these otherwise invisible women by giving them the opportunity to express their experiences with discrimination and violence, as well as an opportunity to tell the world “we too, exist”.

FROM THE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS BOOKLET

“Don’t you have someone taking care of you?” is a question that is sometimes directed to men with disabilities, but especially posed to women with disabilities. Because they think as a woman we should be owned. Especially women with disabilities must have some sort of a caretaker. And they shouldn’t leave home without them.

ELİF DOLUNAY
Workshop Participant

This association taught me my rights and that I needed to raise my voice to face these challenges in my life... Later you see the strength within yourself and you realize you don’t need to be stuck at home and that you can join the society. We are everywhere, it’s just that they don’t see us, that they don’t notice us.
In Turkey, women’s organizations often could not reach women with disabilities and organizations for people with disabilities were often dominated by men. In such an environment, ENGKAD was the first organization to focus on women with disabilities.

The project has so far reached 160 women with disabilities in 8 provinces of Turkey. Women with different types of disabilities were reached via announcements made in every province. Women came together for 3 days at workshops and discussed the discrimination they face as women with disabilities. With this newly gained awareness, participants felt the need to include other women with disabilities to act together against the prejudices and discrimination they face on a daily basis and to gain more visibility.

Following the workshop, participants organized events in their own neighborhoods to raise awareness on the problems women with disabilities face. They raised their voice and said “On the street, at work, in every aspect of life, I can exist without anyone’s help.” A Frequently Asked Questions Booklet was put together to make issues more visible. The contents were mostly from questions these women had been asked for a number of years. It was an expression of how society perceives women with disabilities. Women with disabilities freely shared their answers to questions that sometimes offended or troubled them, such as “Is disability a disease? How can I speak to a woman with a disability?”

*You are the barrier to my freedom*
It was presumed that women with disabilities did not have as many instances of being exposed to abuse and violence. To bring attention to this issue, a report was prepared in relation to violence against women with disabilities in the years 2013-2014. It showed that there were cases of violence against women with disabilities at every age. However, women with disabilities could not access public authorities that would protect them from this violence, and even if they were able to access these bodies, they usually lacked the knowledge and ability to help women with disabilities; and record-keeping is poor.

Being different is hard, and it necessitates to fight against society’s prejudices and stereotyping. ENGKAD’s call for joint action started the fight against these prejudices. Despite all the problems and barriers, the strength that women with disabilities receive from being part of this movement will continue. As the women with disabilities group have stated: “We are organized and together, we will continue to fight and take back our power and rights as women with or without disabilities. We will feel liberated when we start to be treated equally and when the stereotypes in people’s minds are replaced with rights of being equal and free.”
We will feel liberated when the stereotypes in people’s minds are replaced with rights of being equal and free.
INSTITUTION
Bilgi University Sociology and Education Implementation and Research Center

PROJECT NAME
Fighting Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities in the Education System

PROJECT PARTNER
Social Rights and Research Association

LOCATION
İstanbul
FIGHTING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

BİLGİ UNIVERSITY SOCIOLOGY AND EDUCATION IMPLEMENTATION AND RESEARCH CENTER

SOWING SEASON: SABANCI FOUNDATION GRANT PROGRAM STORIES 2014-2015
FIGHTING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Approximately 12% of Turkish citizens have disabilities. Despite some recent changes in legislation, individuals with disabilities still face discrimination in education, health, employment, accessibility etc. Discrimination in education especially jeopardizes young students’ chances of participating in social life or enjoying their right to education. This, in turn, further perpetuates the stereotype that persons with disabilities are “weak, inadequate and in need of others’ help”.

MELİSA SORAN
Project Coordinator

According to the “Disability Research in Textbooks”, texts and pictures almost always depict people with disabilities as unable to go outside, cross the street or work without help. The disabilities of people are shown as the reason of this situation. But there is no mention of what needs to be done for them to equally participate in social life. Research confirms that persons with disabilities are seen as second-class citizens in textbooks.
Founded in 2010, the Sociology and Education Implementation and Research Center (SECBIR) of Bilgi University developed the “Fighting Discrimination against People with Disabilities in the Education System” project in partnership with Social Rights and Research Association (TOHAD). To ensure equal access to education and to end discrimination at schools, 25 teachers from various levels and subjects participated in the 1-year project. The teachers then discussed discriminatory practices in education and brainstormed on ways to eliminate them.

Teachers had a crucial role to play in the project. Textbooks, TV, people on the street etc. depict persons with disabilities as incomplete, needy and weak individuals. All of these shape the perception of adults, as well as children. Regardless of whether they have students with disabilities in their class or not, teachers have to challenge the stereotypes in society.

When the project started, teachers first studied rights-based approach to the disability issue in workshops that were facilitated by experts in this area. The workshops looked at different aspects of disabilities, including the perception of “normal”, the history of
disability and government policies on this issue. In order to contribute to these workshops and also to the book that would be published at the end of the project, academics were involved in the project as well.

With the completion of the workshops, the next step was to develop methods to transfer the acquired knowledge and experience to the class exercises. The idea was to shape the way students look at disability and to eliminate discrimination in education through class. To do this, teachers broke up into groups according to the grade level they taught and started collecting materials to add to their curricula. There were abundant materials available: stories, movies, games, textbooks etc. Materials were gathered in a pool and lesson plans for different levels of education were prepared for all teachers to use. The lesson plans were then practiced in pilot classes to gauge students’ reaction.

25 teachers had joined their efforts to carry out lively discussions, conduct research and develop methods. It was important to compile all these efforts into a document that any teacher could pick up and use freely. Therefore, teachers prepared a book that combined the lesson plans and the simplified versions of the articles on disability penned by academics. The following step would be to disseminate this book and to keep fighting until no single individual with disabilities faces discrimination at school.

AYZİN ÇELİK
Teacher

Teachers usually can’t find the chance to discuss the curriculum due to their daily workload. I believe working together with the academics helped us overcome this deadlock. By bringing the teachers and academics together, the project also helped us convene theory and practice.

DİDEM ÇİÇEK
Teacher

I am a teacher. My opinions are valued in the community, especially among my students. I might not be able to change the world, but I can definitely challenge certain perceptions and stereotypes. Instead of giving my students just math and Turkish, I am now trying to fill their minds with a rights-based approach to human rights.
The fight will continue until no single individual with disabilities faces discrimination at school.
INSTITUTION
Hayat Sende Youth Academy Association

PROJECT NAME
Education Without Labels

PROJECT PARTNERS
Teachers Academy Foundation, Agenda Child Association, Istanbul Foster Family Association, Denizli Foster Family Association

LOCATIONS
Adana, Ankara, Antalya, Bursa, Erzincan, Gaziantep, Istanbul, Izmir, Kayseri, Samsun
EDUCATION WITHOUT LABELS

“The new teacher looked at my clothing and said ‘What’s this, don’t you have parents to take care of you?’ I started crying. My friends who saw the situation responded ‘She is from the orphanage.’ I can never forget.”

A Participant Who Was Raised in Government Care

“From the orphanage”, “all alone”, “prone to committing crime”... These are some of the labels that are attached to young people who grow up in government care. These labels shape the attitude with which other individuals approach to these young people, and create a considerably negative impact on their self-esteem. They are stereotyped heavily and face constant discrimination especially during school years. Classmates, families, teachers and school administrators tend to be prejudiced towards them. Therefore, many of them give up and drop out of high school.

A PARTICIPANT WHO WAS RAISED IN GOVERNMENT CARE
From the Analysis Report

I did not choose the “back row” life. When I first came in to register for my school, the principal was very welcoming. Once he found out that I was from the orphanage, he got uncomfortable. He called my teacher in and said “This girl comes from the orphanage. She is in your class now. Find a way.” This had already placed so many gaps between me and the rest.

FROM A LETTER BY A TEACHER WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE TRAINING

Ayşe! After participating in a recent Education Without Labels training, I came to realize how unfair I was to you at times. I noticed how much I offended you when I labeled you in class or came to you with certain prejudices. I realized for the first time that I could be setting a bad example for your classmates.
A group of young activists decided to put an end to this vicious cycle in 2007. The Hayat Sende Youth Academy Association, shortly known as Hayat Sende, was founded by former victims of such labels who grew up in government care themselves. These young people who personally experienced the detrimental effects of the discriminatory language and attitude during their education, believed that the first step towards a solution was to make the discrimination visible and to raise awareness with school teachers. “The Education Without Labels” project started out in 2014 with these goals in mind.

The first effort of Hayat Sende was to make discrimination at schools more visible by gathering data. The research included persons who were raised in government care, social workers and foster families. The findings were striking. 68% of individuals who were raised in government care reported being subject to labeling. 27% of these have dropped out of school and 45% have changed schools 1 to 8 times. These people are routinely discriminated against by their classmates, teachers, school staff and parents. Their individuality and self-esteem are under attack by remarks such as “do not be friends with kids from the orphanage, do not let my kid sit next to kids from
the orphanage, do not invite kids from the orphanage to social activities, those from the orphanage, raise your hands” etc.

Now that the problem was defined, it was time to solve it. The first target group was teachers due to the key role they play within the education system. Hayat Sende and Teachers Academy Foundation jointly prepared a teacher training program which later reached 30 teachers from 10 provinces. The program informed them on: “Who is a child in government care? Which care models are they offered?” etc. They also had a chance to discuss and gain awareness in the effects of labels, offensive language, stereotypes, discrimination and everybody’s right to education.

Some of the teachers who attended the training said “I noticed I had been unfair” while others said “I was also labeled when I was a student because of how impoverished my family was; but still, I failed to see the labels children in government care had to live with.” Teachers were now ready to act and help find a solution to problems. When they went back to their schools, they transferred what they had learned to their colleagues. There are still many teachers to reach but each step means another child coming from the back row to the front; until every child in government care is recognized as an individual with dignity.

ÖZLEM GÖRÜR
Teacher and Training Participant

I believe I owe it to life to have a more meaningful existence myself and to help children in government care gain equal rights. In this journey, I found out that some of our most casual remarks are actually offensive words that wound the other person. Labeling starts in our daily language. We are all either perpetrators or victims of labeling... “A child changes, the world changes.” I hope the education without labels journey will continue in new places, change more lives and build new bridges.
There are still many teachers to reach but each step means another child coming from the back row to the front; until every child in government care is recognized as an individual with dignity.
INSTITUTION
Mother Child Education Foundation

PROJECT NAME
Empowering Young Women in Rural Areas

PROJECT PARTNERS
Adana Women’s Solidarity Center,
Education Department of the Ministry of Food,
Agriculture and Livestock

LOCATIONS
Adana, Mersin
EMPOWERING YOUNG WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

MOTHER CHILD EDUCATION FOUNDATION
EMPOWERING YOUNG WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

As in most countries, in Turkey women living in rural areas are one of the most disadvantaged groups, in terms of their access to education and public services. The fact that public institutions do not have sufficient services in rural areas, and NGOs have more of a presence in urban cities, further deepens the inequality. Women living in rural areas often cannot have access to the services in their own towns. They end up perpetuating the longstanding traditions of the village and never find out about their rights.

The Mother Child Education Foundation (ACEV) has developed a project called “Empowering Young Women in Rural Areas” in 2014, targeting women in the rural areas of Adana and Mersin provinces who had limited access to support and services. The project consisted of two steps. First, women would get information about issues that are relevant to them ranging from child care to sharing household labor,

ZÜBEYDE
Emirler Village, Training Participant

We can earn money, even when we stay at home. We can allow ourselves for more. We’re not destined to live in a box. Even as women living in rural areas, there is no rule that prevents us from having access to the same opportunities.

GÜHER
Kuzucubelen Village, Training Participant

Women go to work as well. We cut trees, we operate electric saws. Then we come back home to cook, clean and do laundry. Everything is dependent on us. But everything we do is neither seen nor appreciated.
and about getting access to services. Simultaneously, governmental and non-governmental organizations in these provinces would increase their capacity of bringing more services to rural areas and working with women in these areas.

ACEV developed the “Up Hill and Down Dale Women Support Program” (Up Hill and Down Dale) which was specifically designed for the needs of women living in rural areas. The program lasted for 11 weeks and reached 1,192 women through 62 courses organized in the villages of Adana and Mersin. Women first got training about child development, child care and correct forms of communication with their babies. For instance, one woman found out that withholding a child’s pocket money was a form of violence, while another discovered how she can spend quality time with her child to support her development.

At the same time, the women were also informed about their rights, including gender equality, right to inheritance and the value of labor in the house etc. They learned that their unpaid labor inside or outside the house is equally valuable as any paid work and therefore they have an equal say in the family budget as their husbands.
In order to assist women living in rural areas, ACEV asked for the involvement of governmental and non-governmental bodies, and from this, identified voluntary trainers who wanted to be involved. The trainers spent a total of 11 weeks with the women. They went to medical check-ups, attended domestic violence and gender equality panels and even visited the mayor together. This way, they observed the needs of the women living in rural areas first-hand and learned how to work with them to meet these needs.

As women became more knowledgeable and as institutions learned how to work with women, things started to change. Women were no longer ignorant about the issues surrounding their villages. Renewing their sewage system, building children’s playgrounds, providing educational courses, and renovation of older buildings were some of the issues identified by women. They visited municipalities to ask for their help in improving their villages. They were able to contact local authorities and demand their rights. Their demands were gradually fulfilled. As women living in rural areas, they solved their issues themselves. They realized they weren’t destined to live in a small box. They discovered solidarity and learned to demand their rights.
Women were able to contact local authorities and demand their rights.
INSTITUTION
Muş Women’s Roof Association

PROJECT NAME
Say No to Child Abuse!

PROJECT PARTNER
Muş Directorate of National Education Counseling and Research Center

LOCATION
Muş
SAY NO TO CHILD ABUSE!

MUŞ WOMEN’S ROOF ASSOCIATION

SOWING SEASON: SABANCI FOUNDATION GRANT PROGRAM STORIES 2014-2015
SAY NO TO CHILD ABUSE!

“Is there anyone you know who got married under the age of 18?”

“My friend was so young that she was still skipping rope. They came to ask her hand in marriage. My friend did not want to get married, but the family married her off anyway. She had one child.”

“My aunt was forced to get married at 13 with her 25-year-old cousin.”

“A 16-year-old girl was married to my 80-year-old grandfather when he was already married. The girl had one child, and my grandfather later passed away. She is now living with my grandmother.”

These are stories of early marriages told by young girls living in Muş. The stories present the current situation in Turkey. According to public records, 1 out of 3 girls in Turkey get married before the age of 18. Beyond official figures are real-life stories from an aunt, a cousin, or a friend who was married off at an early age. To be taken out of school, be exposed to domestic violence, and be at an age where they are.

NURCAN ÇETİNBAŞ
Chairperson

One of the issues that comes up in our work was girls being taken out of school with anyone showing any resistance to it. This is frequent because people think they can’t do anything about it. Some families feel that their first priority is to have their girls married so that they will leave their family in their wedding dress with a perceived honor. Overall, the society does not see any problem with child marriages.

MERYEM ASLAN
Guidance Counselor

Following the training, I visited the girls who had been taken out of school to get married. The girls were either engaged or working in the fields or barns. After speaking to the families, we managed to convince some of them to send their girls back to school.
not mature enough to deal with taking on the role of marriage, as well as to become a parent, are only some of the issues that come with this tradition.

Muş Women’s Roof Association was founded in 2013 by a number of strong women who wanted to stop this devastating tradition. The Association implemented its first comprehensive project “Say No to Child Abuse!” in 2014 and targetted schools as the first place to stop early and forced marriages. Empowering the school guidance counselors on women’s rights, the project reached girls, families and the society in general and raised awareness on the disadvantages of this horrible tradition.

The Directorate of National Education in Muş became a partner in this project. First, 45 female guidance counselors attended a 16-week comprehensive training about women’s rights (the Women’s Rights Education Program) and questioned the gender roles in their society which they had internalized so far. Statements like “Women should stay one step back behind men, men are responsible for the honor of women, the man is the head of his home” were discussed by the guidance counselors until the stereotypes were replaced with equal treatment for all.

1 out of 3 girls in Turkey get married before the age of 18.
The change in guidance counselors had a snowball effect on the girls in the school. They spoke to the schools’ 11-17 year-old female students about the harmful effects of early or forced marriages and ways to protect their lives or the life of someone else they knew from these harmful effects. The workshops have managed to reach 4,200 girls so far. As a result of these workshops, guidance counselors managed to convince the families of 14 of the 20 girls who were most likely to be married off early to continue their education.

Muş Women’s Roof Association also organized billboards, advertisements, media news and produced a short film to draw more attention to the subject everywhere in Muş. They met with representatives of civil and public organizations to speak about the dangers of child marriages. Most importantly, they organized seminars for parents to draw attention to the importance of education for girls.

The “Say No to Child Abuse!” project said “No!” to this centuries-old tradition and tried to make early and forced marriages seen as something not to be accepted in the society. The change started by teachers at school affected the girls, their families and society in general. The project resulted in teachers who say “Girls shouldn’t be married off, they should get an education. I am ready to do anything for this cause” and mothers who decide “Whatever happens, I need to get my daughter an education, as she shouldn’t experience what I have experienced.” The most important thing was that girls of Muş learned how to say no to this devastating tradition that traps them.
The “Say No to Child Abuse!” project said “No!” to this centuries-old tradition.
INSTITUTION
National Down Syndrome Association

PROJECT NAME
Welcome Baby

PROJECT PARTNERS
İzmir Provincial Health Directorate,
İzmir Local Health Authority

LOCATION
İzmir
WELCOME BABY

NATIONAL DOWN SYNDROME ASSOCIATION

SOWING SEASON: SABANCI FOUNDATION GRANT PROGRAM STORIES 2014-2015
“The doctor asked me ‘Are you aware that you gave birth to a child with Down syndrome?’ I was alone and did not know what Down syndrome was or anything else about it.”

Mother of a Child with Down Syndrome

These words belong to a mother whose child has Down syndrome, and in fact, this is a common theme in the lives of families who have children with Down syndrome in Turkey. Families who learn before or after birth that their baby has Down syndrome, experience a major dilemma due to the lack of knowledge and the accompanying trauma, about which hospitals fail to offer adequate support. The longer the trauma continues and the acceptance of this issue takes, the later the medical checks and training required for the mental and physical development of the baby will come.

1 in 800 babies are born with Down syndrome each year, and it is best described as a genetic difference.

DERYA GÖK
Mother of a Child with Down Syndrome

When doctors told me that my baby would have Down syndrome, I was so upset as it was something I had not ever expected. I didn’t understand the concept itself and how to take care of a child with Down syndrome. The project helped me get in touch with the appropriate psychological and physical therapy assistance, and we had an opportunity to speak with families who had gone through similar experiences. To the people who created or worked in the ‘Welcome Baby’ project, we thank you very much for all your assistance. These people lighted our paths and helped us in every way.
This difference causes some physical differences and varied ranges of health problems in addition to some issues in mental development compared to peers. However, with early training programs such as physical therapies and speech therapies, it is possible to have promising results in the development of children with Down syndrome.

In order for people with Down syndrome to access equal rights in every aspect of life, the National Down Syndrome Association was formed in İzmir in the year 2013. It was founded by families who had children with Down syndrome and draws its strength from parents who imagine equal rights for their children and from 2,000 volunteers coming from all across Turkey. They started the “Welcome Baby” project to assist families and to give more information about Down syndrome to health workers in order to build a bridge between the families and the hospitals so that families can get support and start early intervention programs.

The Provincial Health and Public Health Directorates provided information about families having babies with Down syndrome, then a group of volunteers from the Association began visiting them.
Dr. AYHAN İZZETTİNOĞLU
İzmir Director of Health

As a doctor and a director in healthcare industry, I am aware of the challenges that persons with Down syndrome and their families face. We believed that the project had viable solutions, and hence we became part of it. We reached our goal with the help of our volunteer health workers. Through this, we were able reach children who come into this world with Down syndrome as early as possible and provide them the support they need.

DERYA GÖK
Father of a Child with Down Syndrome

Everybody has the right to live and be treated humanely. I would like to thank everyone who made it possible for our children to be accepted by society.

The purpose of the visits was first to make the families feel that they were not alone in their difficulties. Then, a list of paths that they could take were shared. At these points, volunteer families and the psychologist of the project had a critical role to play. Families that required psychological assistance were directed to individual sessions.

Along with the visits to the families, the booklets and brochures were distributed to all of the hospitals and Family and Community Health Centers in İzmir with the support of project partners. They carried out meetings to inform these institutions about the project. This helped include physicians and healthcare professionals into the project. These professionals play a crucial role in the whole process from diagnosing the Down syndrome to following medical reports.

Within a year, the “Welcome Baby” project reached over 600 children with Down syndrome, 250 of which were aged between 0-6. Volunteers visited over 250 families and provided assistance with whatever they needed help with. With the support of the Provincial Health and Public Health Directorate of İzmir, over 3,000 health professionals in İzmir’s 25 districts received information about Down syndrome. Even though the project has finished, the demands from families continue. There are still many more children that need assistance. The National Down Syndrome Association and Health Directorates joined efforts. With the motto “Everybody has the right to live and be treated humanely”, they decided to continue their work.
The National Down Syndrome Association decided to continue their work with the motto “Everybody has the right to live and be treated humanely.”
The “Monitoring Group for Disability Rights” project was launched by the Social Rights and Research Association (TOHAD) to pursue the vision that equal access to education, work and services is not a luxury, but a human right. The project began last year, with the purpose of demonstrating to what extent disability rights are implemented in Turkey by using the data collected from various sources.

The starting point of the project is the fact that Turkey has signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007 and become a party in 2009. The Convention calls upon signatories to introduce wide scale legislation to ensure that people with disabilities have equal rights in accessing various areas of life including education, health and work. In order to meet the requirements of the Convention, Turkey has, to date, passed a significant number of laws. However, people with disabilities still face significant barriers in social life despite the existence of such legislation.
The Monitoring Group for Disability Rights project aims to demonstrate, using the data collected, that people with disabilities still face unequal treatment and discrimination, in order to raise awareness of this issue and remind the government of their responsibilities. Their first step was to make use of the data collected from public bodies in the first year the project was created, and then prepare a video-graphic and public service advertisements to bring light to the importance of disability rights in Turkey. The videos were viewed more than 400 thousand times.

Then, the process of collecting new data for this year started in order to see if any change was noted against the data of the previous year. Formal applications for information were made to public institutions and offices in the fields of education, health, accessibility and work life. More than seven thousand applications were delivered in two years. The data suggested that some changes happened in terms of access to equal rights.
For instance, while the rate of ramps or lifts in municipal buses was 44% in 2013, the figure rose to 75% in 2014. However, the rate of tactile floors in public buildings for the persons with visual impairments rose only by 1% and by 6% in elevators. Overall, the data demonstrated that people with disabilities still had limited access to their basic rights.

Following the collection of all the data, 20 NGOs who were under the Monitoring Group for Disability Rights gathered for a meeting over two days for all the data to be presented, in addition to using real life experiences to enable a fruitful discussion. The Monitoring Group then specified which activities needed to be done in the future, as well as the necessary steps that needed to be taken to encourage state authorities to fulfill their duties. Eventually, all of these efforts started to yield results; public bodies started to take steps for cooperation.

In conclusion, the Monitoring Group for Disability Rights repeated their activities in 2014 and fulfilled the pressing need of assessing the current situation of persons with disabilities in Turkey. Due to the activities of this group, a remarkable amount of comparative information has been collected over the past two years that demonstrates the barriers of people with disabilities in accessing health, education and employment. That said however, their work is ongoing. In order to help persons with disabilities enjoy their equal rights, the Monitoring Group for Disability Rights decided to continue their work by presenting their data and concrete proposals to the government and sharing their experiences in monitoring and advocacy with other NGOs.
In order to help persons with disabilities enjoy their equal rights, the Monitoring Group for Disability Rights decided to continue their work by presenting their data and concrete proposals to the government.
INSTITUTION
Women Center Foundation

PROJECT NAME
That’s Our Village Over There

PROJECT PARTNERS
Siirt and Batman Bar Associations

LOCATIONS
Batman, Siirt
THAT’S OUR VILLAGE
OVER THERE

WOMEN CENTER FOUNDATION

SOWING SEASON: SABANCI FOUNDATION GRANT PROGRAM STORIES 2014-2015
“I cannot believe that you came all the way just to see us” says Aynur. She lives in a remote village in Batman, a province in the southeast of Turkey. She was surprised because there were no organizations that support women in her region. Most women in this region cannot benefit from public services since most of them don’t speak Turkish. The common issue of poverty and lack of resources in the village consistently aggravate the problems that women face, many of whom are already facing oppression in a patriarchal environment. Nobody asks about their lives, what they need or what they demand.

The Women’s Center Foundation (KAMER) has been supporting women in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia since 1997, has adopted the mission to ask women about women to gain more insight. As part of the project “That’s Our Village Over There”, the foundation has made home visits in the villages of Siirt and Batman to listen to women’s problems and to engage public bodies to give support for overcoming those problems.

A WOMAN FROM SIİRT

We have such a heavy burden on our shoulders. We have to tolerate whatever comes our way. My husband beat me up once. My father said “You have to deal with it.” I have to get permission from my husband if I want to do anything... I hope our daughters will not experience the same fate as we do... May God bless you for coming here. At least, you are working to change this mentality.

NEZAHAT KAPUCİ
Batman Field Coordinator

When we knocked on the door of a woman and told her about KAMER, the young woman said “How nicely you put it. Nobody should assume that women are alone”. I realized that her husband was in the next room and she was speaking to us while looking at him.
KAMER was aware that simply working with women in the villages would not suffice. As a result, they decided to inform key people who could provide support to these women. Thanks to governors and district governors, the foundation reached out to the headmen, imams, teachers and the gendarmerie of the village. Meetings were held in each district; whereby lawyers informed officials in the village about the civil code and women’s rights, representatives from the office of the mufti informed them about violence against women and honor killings, and social service specialists talked about services for women. A total of 1,742 participants from two districts attended the meetings.

Some imams realized that they had been committing a crime by officiating the marriage of young girls whilst some headmen admitted that they didn’t know where to refer women to for certain situations. They were now willing to take a step further and be part of the solution. Some teachers reported incidents of violence to KAMER and tried to learn how they could help the victims.

“We believe that we have opened a door. We want such doors to be opened everywhere and remain open.”
Following this meeting, KAMER started visiting villages for the first time in its history. The visits were carried out by women from Siirt and Batman who went from door to door in the villages. Following their contact with local women, they found that many of them were not able to benefit from public services as they did not speak Turkish. Thus, they found it hard to ask for support when they experience bouts of violence. Moreover, they were not aware of their rights, for example their right to legal aid or inheritance. The foundation reached out to a total of 3,621 women in 467 villages.

Data collected through the visits showed that the majority of women from the villages of Siirt and Batman were subject to violence; did not have access to their inheritance; and had usually been married off before the age of eighteen. The results were then shared with public institutions and the press.

KAMER has become a support mechanism for all the women in the villages they visited. Representatives of KAMER talked to families who had taken their daughters from school since they were against the idea of a boarding school and encouraged them to enroll their daughters in open education institutions. Victims of domestic violence were also supported as many of them were in a situation where they did not know how to respond and gain the benefit of free legal aid. They knocked the doors of houses nobody bothered to visit and showed women that they were by their side. In their words: “We believe that we have opened a door. We want such doors to be opened everywhere and remain open too. We want everybody to say ‘That is our village over there.’”
KAMER has become a support mechanism for all the women in the villages they visited.