

**The Human Rights Education Program for Women (HREP)**  
Utilizing state resources to promote women's human rights in Turkey

by Liz Ercevik Amado  
edited by Nancy L. Pearson



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Liz Ercevik Amado has prepared and edited several WWHR–New Ways publications, including *Sexual and Bodily Rights as Human Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: A workshop report*; *Human Rights Training Program for Women (1995–2003) Evaluation Report*; and *Gender Discrimination in the Turkish Penal Code Draft Law and Proposed Amendments*. She also works as a freelance translator and editor, and has translated and edited numerous works of fiction, exhibition catalogues and articles.

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### **WWHR–New Ways**

Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR)–New Ways is an independent women's NGO based in Istanbul, Turkey. WWHR was founded in December 1993, inspired by the success of the international women's human rights movement at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. WWHR–New Ways aims to advance women's human rights worldwide, and to support—at national, regional and international levels—the active and broad participation of women as free individuals and equal citizens in the establishment and maintenance of a democratic and peaceful order.

Through a decade of activism, advocacy and lobbying, WWHR–New Ways has contributed significantly to various legal reforms in Turkey, networking in Muslim societies and promotion of women's human rights at the UN level. Our Human Rights Education Program for Women, which celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2004, is one of the most widespread and comprehensive non-formal human rights education programs in the world. WWHR–New Ways has also initiated and coordinated numerous national campaigns to advance women's human rights and gender equality, including the Campaign for the Reform of the Turkish Penal Code (2002–2004), the Campaign for the Reform of the Turkish Civil Code (2000–2001), and the Campaign for the Adoption of a Protection Order Law against Domestic Violence (1997–1998). On the international level, WWHR–New Ways has successfully worked to initiate a network of academicians and NGOs advocating for women's human rights in Muslim societies. "The Coalition for Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies," the first active solidarity network in Muslim societies, advocates for the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights as human rights. WWHR–New Ways has also actively partaken in advocacy efforts on the UN level, including the ICPD, Beijing and CEDAW processes.

In recognition of its advocacy and lobbying efforts towards the adoption of a protection order law against domestic violence in Turkey, WWHR–New Ways was elected as one of the NGOs worldwide to deliver a statement at the U.N. Global World Conference in March, 1999. WWHR was also awarded the 1999 Leading Solutions Award by the Association for Women in Development (AWID), in recognition of its contributions to advancing gender equality and social justice.

WWHR–New Ways employs a strategic multi-pronged approach to promote women's human rights. We combine and employ a variety of methods in a complementary manner, including advocacy and lobbying; widespread and sustainable human rights education programs for women and various trainings; the production and dissemination of awareness-raising materials and publications; action research; and national and international networking.



July 2005

Dear Friend,

Welcome to the New Tactics in Human Rights Tactical Notebook Series! In each notebook a human rights practitioner describes an innovative tactic used successfully in advancing human rights. The authors are part of the broad and diverse human rights movement, including non-government and government perspectives, educators, law enforcement personnel, truth and reconciliation processes, and women's rights and mental health advocates. They have both adapted and pioneered tactics that have contributed to human rights in their home countries. In addition, they have utilized tactics that, when adapted, can be applied in other countries and situations to address a variety of issues.

Each notebook contains detailed information on *how* the author and his or her organization achieved what they did. We want to inspire other human rights practitioners to think *tactically*—and to broaden the realm of tactics considered to effectively advance human rights.

In this notebook we learn about how effective and beneficial building collaborative relationships with government institutions can be to advancing human rights education. Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR)-New Ways in Turkey gained the support and use of government resources for furthering human rights education of women at the local level. WWHR-New Ways developed a highly successful human rights education curriculum for women but needed an accessible, structured and sustainable way to reach women in need of learning about their rights. They found and developed an excellent partnership through government run, local level community centers. These community centers offered not only professional social workers who could be trained by WWHR-New Ways in facilitating the human rights education curriculum, but also a safe and accessible place for women to learn about their rights. We hope this notebook will provide ideas and insights for others as they seek opportunities for building mutually beneficial and sustainable relationships with government bodies for furthering human rights efforts.

The entire series of Tactical Notebooks is available online at [www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org). Additional notebooks will continue to be added over time. On our web site you will also find other tools, including a searchable database of tactics, a discussion forum for human rights practitioners and information about our workshops and symposium. To subscribe to the New Tactics newsletter, please send an e-mail to [newtactics@cvt.org](mailto:newtactics@cvt.org).

The New Tactics in Human Rights Project is an international initiative led by a diverse group of organizations and practitioners from around the world. The project is coordinated by the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) and grew out of our experiences as a creator of new tactics and as a treatment center that also advocates for the protection of human rights from a unique position—one of healing and reclaiming civic leadership.

We hope that you will find these notebooks informational and thought-provoking.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kate Kelsch".

Kate Kelsch

## Introduction

Since its pilot application phase in Istanbul shantytowns during 1995–1996, the Human Rights Education Program for Women (HREP), developed by WWHR–New Ways, has expanded to 30 cities throughout all regions of Turkey. More than 4,000 women have participated in the program, which is currently the most widespread and comprehensive non-formal human rights education program in Turkey and in the region.

Within the human rights framework the education program explores civil, economic, political, sexual, reproductive and sexual rights, gender sensitive parenting, children’s rights, and violence against women, with a focus on grassroots organizing and mobilization for social change. And through discussions of women’s human rights and violations in relation to participants’ personal experiences, along with workshops on communication skills, the program provides the tools to apply the critical consciousness of human rights to life. In this program a variety of fields—law, education, gender, psychology, personal development and political activism—intersect within a holistic perspective. The methodology of the program, with its participatory approach and closed group format, is a major factor in the success of the program, creating an atmosphere of trust and solidarity among the women.

To maintain and expand this broad outreach, WWHR–New Ways has utilized state resources to implement the program in community centers. The tactic, in fact, emerged as a promising collaboration and came to initial success when we signed a protocol with the General Directorate of Social Services in 1998 to implement HREP in these centers. Through the protocol, WWHR–

New Ways trains social workers as HREP trainers, and these trainers implement the program in community centers throughout the country.

These government-sponsored and supported community centers are set up primarily in socio-economically disadvantaged areas of Turkey. Unlike many other state institutions, they do not run with a hierarchical top-down structure. By aspiring to cater to the community’s needs, they provide an appropriate setting for the implementation of HREP. And as they are state institutions, they are much more accessible to women, who face little resistance from husbands or families for spending time at a community center. The collaboration has thus proved very fruitful in a number of ways.

In this notebook we provide an overview of HREP’s success in promoting women’s human rights on the grassroots level and in serving as a catalyst for social change, and we explore as well the tactic of utilizing state resources for human rights education.

## Understanding the tactic context: women’s human rights in Turkey

Soon after its foundation in 1994–1996 WWHR undertook extensive field action research in Turkey on women’s human rights issues. The research was conducted in various cities, and included more than 1,500 face-to-face interviews with women.

The research revealed that the majority of women had no awareness of their basic human and legal rights, and that they lacked the knowledge and skills to access mechanisms to enforce these rights. An enormous gap thus existed between egalitarian laws on paper and the everyday practices that governed women’s lives. The Human Rights Education Program for Women was developed as a tool to address these problems. It was based on the premise that if women are aware of their rights as defined in national legislation and international documents, and are equipped with the knowledge and skills to realize these rights, they will be able to devise their own strategies to overcome the discrimination and human rights violations they face and to become active agents of social change.

Unique in its region of the world, Turkey is governed by secular law. The founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 brought an end to the Ottoman Empire’s system of parallel laws and established a secular, unified and standardized legal system adapted from the European system of law.

The Turkish Civil Code, adapted from the Swiss Civil Code and introduced in 1926, abolished polygamy and granted women equal rights in matters of divorce, child

People think, she is a woman,  
she should not see or learn anything, and  
her eyes should be veiled. I was not aware that I  
have a personality, that I am myself. I only had duties;  
I was only fulfilling my tasks. The concept of shame and  
prohibitions were ruling my life. During the Women’s Human  
Rights Training process, I understood that I am a person, a woman  
and that I have rights. In the course of the Women’s Human Rights  
Training, I learned communication. I had taken other trainings,  
courses before. Yet, it is with the Women’s Human Rights Training  
Program that all these trainings formed a whole, the concepts started  
to fit in place. During the process, my husband and children also  
changed. They started to appreciate and support me. Both my  
daughter and I are very lucky that I have been through this  
training. After the Women’s Human Rights Training I found  
myself. I am a citizen, an individual; I exist.

*Elif, HREP participant from Istanbul*

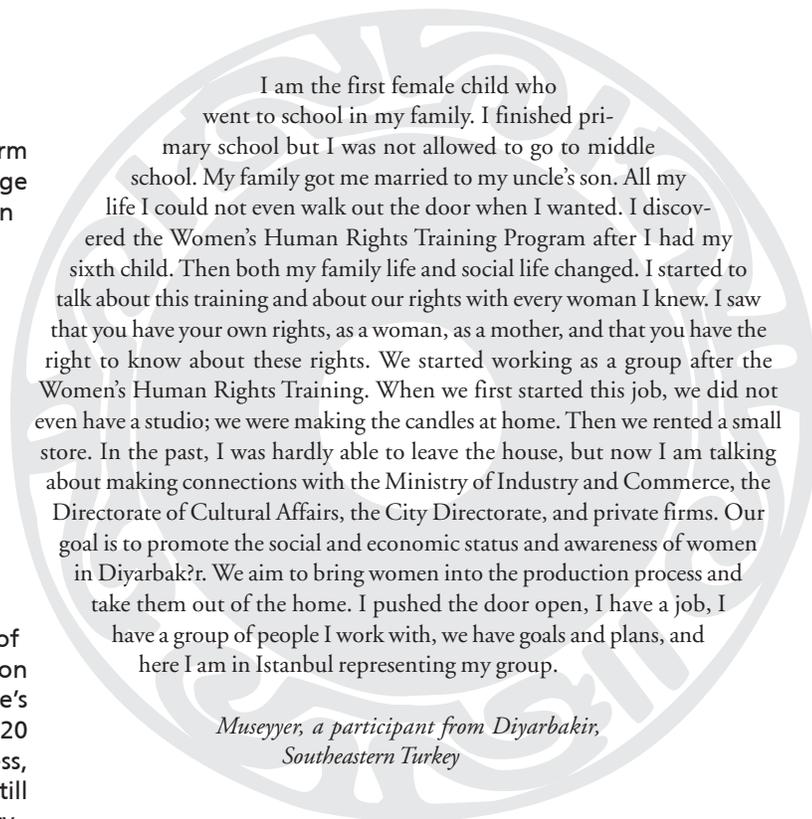
custody and inheritance. The Turkish Civil Code reform in 2001 abolished the supremacy of men in marriage and established the full equality of men and women in the family, a result of an extensive national campaign by the Turkish women's movement. Women in Turkey have had the right to vote and be elected since 1934. Most recently, the 2004 Turkish Penal Code Reform resulted in major amendments safeguarding women's sexual, bodily and reproductive rights, and abolished discrimination against or between virgin, non virgin, married and unmarried women. Many provisions legitimizing women's human rights violations have been eliminated from the new code, another accomplishment of the women's groups.

But despite egalitarian laws on paper and the gains of women in Turkey over the last decade, discrimination against women and girls persists. Even with the state's increased emphasis on human rights over the last 20 years and the impact of the EU ascension process, women's human rights and full gender equality are still not a priority on the state's agenda or in public policy.

Many women are still confined to roles of the "girl-child," "wife" or "mother," restricting their human rights. Furthermore, many customary practices which contradict national legislation and global human rights norms continue to dominate women's lives. Customary practices such as early and forced marriages, honor crimes and bride price continue, and patriarchal social constructs still infringe on women's human rights—the right to education, to work, to mobility, and to bodily and sexual integrity and autonomy.

Although primary education is compulsory in Turkey, official national statistics show that, as of 2000, 19.4 percent of women in Turkey are illiterate. Research conducted by WWHR–New Ways in Umraniye, a shantytown of Istanbul, found that while married women do not legally require the permission of their husbands to work, 50 percent of the married women living in Umraniye cannot work because their husbands do not allow it. And national statistics reveal that women's participation in the labor force and politics is very limited, signifying the challenges to women's presence in the public sphere. Less than 4 percent of national parliament members are women, and women's participation in the national workforce is as low as 18.5 percent in urban Turkey.

Additional field research conducted by WWHR in eastern and southeastern Turkey in 1996-1997 revealed that 51 percent of women had been married against their will, despite the law foreseeing mutual consent as a pre-condition for marriage. Even though the Turk-



I am the first female child who went to school in my family. I finished primary school but I was not allowed to go to middle school. My family got me married to my uncle's son. All my life I could not even walk out the door when I wanted. I discovered the Women's Human Rights Training Program after I had my sixth child. Then both my family life and social life changed. I started to talk about this training and about our rights with every woman I knew. I saw that you have your own rights, as a woman, as a mother, and that you have the right to know about these rights. We started working as a group after the Women's Human Rights Training. When we first started this job, we did not even have a studio; we were making the candles at home. Then we rented a small store. In the past, I was hardly able to leave the house, but now I am talking about making connections with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, the Directorate of Cultural Affairs, the City Directorate, and private firms. Our goal is to promote the social and economic status and awareness of women in Diyarbakır. We aim to bring women into the production process and take them out of the home. I pushed the door open, I have a job, I have a group of people I work with, we have goals and plans, and here I am in Istanbul representing my group.

*Museyyer, a participant from Diyarbakir, Southeastern Turkey*

ish Civil Code foresees equal inheritance rights for men and women, 61 percent of women in eastern Turkey report that customary laws prohibit them from inheriting anything.

WWHR–New Ways developed the Human Rights Education Program for Women to create a comprehensive background for women's human rights issues and legal rights in Turkey, at the same time building a critical consciousness to enable women to realize their rights and put these rights into practice in everyday life, both in private and public spheres.

### **How the tactic was developed: Beginnings, 1995–1998**

The first pilot implementation of HREP took place during 1995–1996 in Umraniye, a shantytown area in Istanbul to which a large number of people migrate, and was in cooperation with the Umraniye Women's Center, the only grassroots women's NGO in Istanbul at the time. WWHR provided trainer trainings and supervisions, and the feedback from participants and trainers was very positive. The preconceived notions that poverty would be an obstacle to the realization of human rights, and that women would not be drawn to the program, were both proven wrong.

A second pilot implementation was conducted in southeastern Turkey, and at the same time the success of the first pilot inspired us to develop a training manual. A team of five experts from different academic backgrounds prepared the extensive publication. The manual, targeting HREP trainers, includes background

information, activities and guidelines for each of the 16 modules, with accompanying instructions for trainers and an appendix for each section containing information sheets for participants. Published in 1998, it has been supplemented by a number of resource materials, including *It's Time to Say No*, a video on domestic violence produced by WWHR; the We Have Rights series, informative illustrated booklets on women's legal, reproductive and sexual rights that are directed at low-literacy women; and action research articles by WWHR–New Ways.

But despite the positive feedback from participants on how HREP transformed their lives, as well as the program's sound content—developed and elaborated over time in response to participant responses—we faced difficulty finding the means to expand and sustain the program. HREP was a 16-week comprehensive program, conducted with intense supervision, and group facilitators had to be intensively trained to lead groups and understand gender perspective. Ensuring that the program could be sustained required immense effort, time and resources from WWHR. Collaboration with NGOs also limited the scope of the program to larger cities, and our partner NGOs faced funding problems that made it difficult to implement the program. Furthermore, our partner NGOs lacked the human resources qualified to conduct intensive group work and the quality of the program was difficult to establish and maintain.

### **Facing the challenge of sustainability: developing a partnership with a state agency**

While seeking a solution to the problems of and expansion, we found that the General Directorate of Social Services was establishing community centers throughout Turkey. Although a state-NGO partnership, particularly with a feminist organization, was not at all common at the time, the Director of Social Services—a progressive social worker himself—expressed interest in HREP.

Before moving forward, we researched and evaluated the pros and cons of such a partnership. We were pleased to discover that the centers are set up primarily in disadvantaged areas, are not run as hierarchical top-down institutions, and respond to community needs.



Top: HREP group in Van, Eastern Anatolia. Center and bottom: A workshop during HREP Trainer Training, Istanbul, 2002.

We determined, then, that they provided a very appropriate setting for the implementation of HREP. They are also very accessible to the women we are trying to reach, as husbands and families are rarely resistant to the idea of spending time at a community center.

Another advantage of the collaboration, obvious from the outset, was that we would be able to train community social workers—who already possessed the educational and vocational background for the participatory group work with disadvantaged groups—as HREP trainers. Working in the centers equipped these staff members with knowledge of women in the community and their needs. And because the social workers remained on staff at the centers, women participating in the program could return after its completion for on-going support. Illustrating the partnership's reciprocal benefits, trainers have found HREP to be very useful in their work, and HREP participants have themselves become actively involved in their community centers.

The existence of these community centers throughout Turkey helped us meet the challenge of expansion. In 1998 we signed a protocol with the General Directorate, and as it applied to all centers, it was feasible for us to identify new centers and recruit new trainers. Approximately 115 social workers have been trained as trainers in the five sessions conducted by WWHR since 1998. As of 2004, the program has been implemented in 30 provinces spanning all seven geographic regions of Turkey, in over 45 centers, and has reached more than 4,000 women. It is the only comprehensive, non-formal human rights education program in Turkey with such wide outreach.

Our collaboration with the General Directorate of Social Services began at a time when a majority social democrat coalition was in government, the state ministry heading social services was led by a minister from the social democrat party, and the appointed director of social services was an expert in the field and had a social democrat profile. As such, the administration and the decision makers looked favorably on the partnership.

Meanwhile, the General Directorate was just starting to establish the community centers, with the director of social services spearheading the initiative. Seeking programs that would support and enhance the centers' activities, he was excited when we approached him about HREP, and interested to hear how we thought the program could contribute to center objectives. It was crucial that HREP had already been very successful in the pilot implementations and that the program was in a fully matured state with written and

visual training materials, including a 300-page trainer's manual.

The signing of the protocol was thus a product of both thoughtful strategies and favorable circumstances. In establishing a partnership with the state it was crucial to take advantage of a relatively progressive political climate and identify the right individuals with whom to initiate such collaboration. And in order to ensure a broad outreach, it was essential to sign the protocol

I started to discuss with my family and friends the things we have talked about and learned in the Women's Human Rights Training; I was also trying to put these things into practice. After the training I regained my self-confidence. I learned that I also have rights, and that I can use these rights. I realized there is no such thing as having to do everything my husband tells me. Today, my ideas and decisions are also taken seriously. When necessary, I argue with my husband, criticize him, even snap at him. My relation with the household has also started to change. Now they respect me, value my thoughts, and help out with the house chores. I have made it my goal to be useful first of all to myself, then to my community. Not everyone comes to get this training. Thus I am doing my best to inform the others. It is definitely great that the Women's Human Rights Training is being offered here in the Onur neighborhood, yet the process of changing our people is a slow one, it takes time. I was not always such an initiating, outgoing woman who knew her rights. As I said, my self-confidence enhanced after the Women's Human Rights Training Program.

I have friends who have experienced domestic violence. I explain to them that they have rights and that they can defend these rights. Some of them have gone to the police station for help. However, the police officer there told these women "spouses have fights and then they make up, we cannot interfere" and sent them back home. The police have certain responsibilities; the woman should be sent to the hospital for instance, she should see a doctor. Everybody should be informed about the duties and responsibilities of the police station. Since we did not know our rights as women, we could not defend them either. This situation changed after the Women's Human Rights Training Program. Now I go to the police station with my friends who were subjected to domestic violence, and I tell the officers there "You people have to do something about this in here; we will demand what is rightfully ours; and you should be guiding us." Now I talk to them in this manner. Today, the officers at the police station are more aware of their own responsibilities.

*Cemile, HREP participant*



with the central governing agency; this allowed us to obtain one comprehensive permission for our work rather than individual permissions for each center. Also crucial was our agreement on the provisions of the protocol (i.e. its time span); on our control of the content, implementation, and monitoring of the program; and on how HREP would be integrated into the centers' programs from the outset.

Following the signing of the protocol, HREP's outreach broadened rapidly. As WWHR–New Ways we conducted intensive ten-day trainer trainings (in 1998, 1998, 2000, and 2002) with selected groups of social workers who then implemented the program in the field on an ongoing basis. The scope of the program expanded in this way, and through time and experience it became more institutionalized.

Through years of implementation, feedback from groups and trainers, and perpetual evaluation by WWHR–New Ways, HREP is now conceptualized in the following five phases.

**PHASE I:  
DEVELOPING THE PARTNERSHIP PROTOCOL**

The initial step of this phase is particularly crucial: identifying the appropriate partner and devising a strategy for a sustainable collaboration. In our case, retaining the program's quality and making certain it reached the target population was as important as ensuring sustainability and expansion. The vision of the General Directorate of Social Services at the time therefore turned out to be very suitable for us. Our long-term partnership with a state agency in local state institutions brought a kind of legitimacy to the program, but we were also able to retain complete autonomy and monitoring power over program content and implementation.

Access to the community centers and social workers via the protocol also contributed significantly to HREP, allowing us to reach both reaching trainers and the target groups. With the program integrated into the services of the community centers, we also had access to appropriate and sufficient space and resources.

I was born and raised in Sivas (a city in Eastern Turkey). Our society, our elders, including my own mother, taught us that we, girls and women, are always second-class citizens. When we moved to Çanakkale (a city in North Western Turkey), I participated in the Women's Human Rights Training Program. During the training, I started to recognize myself primarily as a woman and definitely not as a second-class person. Acknowledging myself as a woman, a human being and an individual had huge effects on my relations with my family, my social circle. Most important of all, this acknowledgment affected my self-reflection. I became a confident, more liberated woman and person. I decided I wanted to have a profession. I wanted to find a job to meet my own needs and desires.

*Senay, HREP participant  
from Canakkale*

**PHASE II: TRAINER TRAINING**

In this phase the WWHR–New Ways team trains social workers and other potential trainers, each of whom is carefully selected. The General Directorate first identifies candidates from the social workers at the community centers; candidates can also be recommended by existing trainers. We review this list, conduct phone interviews with candidates, and obtain references from other trainers and the directorate. Our criteria include a willingness to implement HREP on a long-term and continuous basis, a strong interest in human rights and women's rights issues, and experience conducting group sessions. Following the interviews we finalize the list of participants for the trainer training.

The ten-day training is a condensed application of HREP, and also includes sessions on facilitation, communication, feminism and other topics. Through first-hand experience as group participants, the trainers are acquainted with the program's subject matter and methodology. They learn how to conduct the training by studying their own rights, examining their own experiences, and developing action plans to implement their training in their own community centers. When they receive their trainer's certificate at the conclusion of the training, they are eligible to implement HREP on the local level. They are also expected to make a commitment to implement HREP in the field, on average completing two groups per year.

**PHASE III: FIELD IMPLEMENTATION**

Certified trainers form HREP groups at community centers, creating closed groups<sup>1</sup> of 20–30 local women. Each group meets once a week, for 16 weeks, in half-day sessions on different modules, and participants who complete the program receive certificates. WWHR supplies the groups with training materials, sends a monthly newsletter to link them with each other, WWHR and with the national and international women's movements, and provides supervision and support through site visits and telephone conversations.

<sup>1</sup>In a closed group process, participants are selected at the beginning and no new members are admitted during the pre-determined time period set for the process. Open group processes allow new members to be admitted, and usually are conducted with open-ended time periods as well.

#### PHASE IV: MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation are an integral part of HREP implementation. WWHR organizes periodic evaluation meetings with trainers, in addition to field supervision visits. We also conduct trainings on recent legal reforms and current human rights issues, and update and disseminate our training material accordingly.

#### PHASE V: WOMEN'S GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING INITIATIVES EMERGING FROM HREP

One of HREP's ultimate objectives is to serve as a catalyst for change, mobilizing women to act together and helping them organize on a grassroots level to promote their own self-identified needs. These collective efforts enable a more sustainable and effective means to promote human rights. More than 15 local initiatives in ten cities have emerged so far. To support this work, WWHR–New Ways links participants with other local and national groups, provides support and advice on networking, fundraising, and capacity building, and helps groups integrate into the national women's movement. We also organize regional meetings and trainings for emerging grassroots organizations.

#### LESSONS LEARNED: MAINTAINING SUCCESS

HREP's success rests on a number of complementary factors related to both the program's methodology and its content.

First, the holistic and comprehensive nature of the program—reflecting the indivisibility of human rights—provides a substantial framework in which to promote the human rights of women. And because violations of women's human rights often occur hand-in-hand with discrimination, a comprehensive program such as ours also enables women to overcome the discrimination they face in different spheres.

The program's participatory nature, allowing women to explore their human rights through personal experiences, gives room to link universal concepts and national legislation with private situations and concerns. The length of the program allows participants to develop a feeling of solidarity, and to reach an understanding that the violations and discrimination they face are not unique to themselves—that they are not alone in their struggle to realize their rights.

The weekly meetings and 16-module program also allow women to internalize the knowledge and skills they gain. They have the time and space to apply what they

I was sent as a bride to my relatives. They were living in a village, Karaköçen in Elaz???. It was a desolated place, not one neighbor within sight. When we moved to Izmir, I went to the Community Center because I was experiencing domestic violence. There I started to participate in the Women's Human Rights Training Program. Throughout the fifteen years of my marriage, I endured the physical oppression of my husband and his family.

At work I heard about the activities in the Community Center and came here. I participated in the Women's Human Rights Training. During this training, I started to put up a fight against my husband. In the course of the training I heard about human rights, the Purple Roof Foundation for Women's Shelters. I learned that women have rights too. I said, I have rights, and I do not deserve this violence. I have been married for twenty years and for the last five I have been living like a lady. I struggled to bring about this change myself; I changed here during the Women's Human Rights Training.

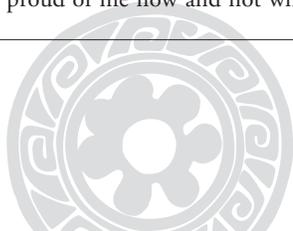
My husband is not the only cause of the violence I suffered; it is related to his surroundings, it is about the whole society. People are influenced by their surroundings. As we talked with my husband, in time everything in our relationship changed. Now, my husband says, "I am proud of you". I ask him, how come you are proud of me now and not when I was doing

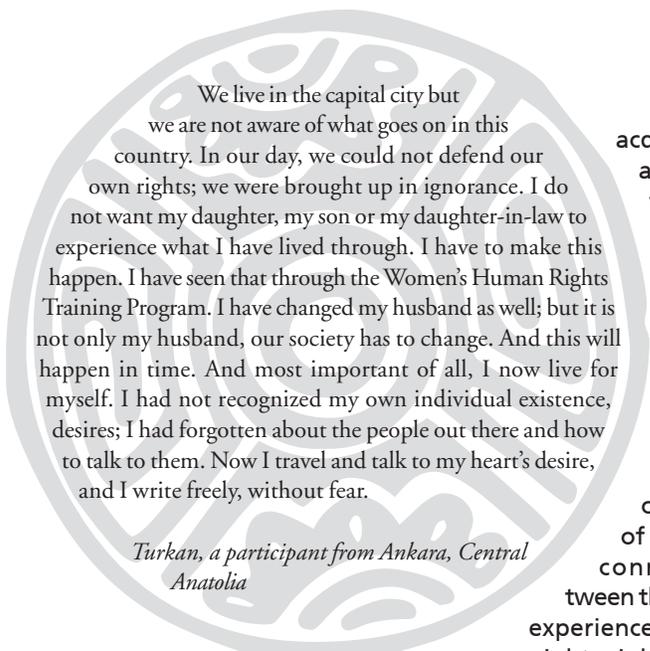
everything you told me, and not resisting your abuses? He understood that I am defending my pride as a woman. He even visited our Women's Human Rights Training group of ten women, and said, "I am proud of my wife, what I have done is wrong".

After the Women's Human Rights Training, my children and I have better communication. We experience beautiful things with my husband. For two years now, he has not touched a hair on my head. To me the old days seem like scenes from a movie. I do not even cry when I recall those times, because I can not believe that I actually lived all those things. If I had the mind that I do now, I would not stand any of that. I would have left, ran away. But I did not know anything then, I was alone.

Now everything is different. I want to live. My husband respects me as a human being, as a woman. I want to partake in every activity that I can, I want to travel. I want to start working again; I am looking for a job. I have been bored because I was unemployed for the last year and a half. Nevertheless, I am peaceful. Because there is no more violence. My children are growing up in a good environment. There is no shouting, no beating, and no blood. I am a different woman now.

*Halise, HREP participant*





We live in the capital city but we are not aware of what goes on in this country. In our day, we could not defend our own rights; we were brought up in ignorance. I do not want my daughter, my son or my daughter-in-law to experience what I have lived through. I have to make this happen. I have seen that through the Women's Human Rights Training Program. I have changed my husband as well; but it is not only my husband, our society has to change. And this will happen in time. And most important of all, I now live for myself. I had not recognized my own individual existence, desires; I had forgotten about the people out there and how to talk to them. Now I travel and talk to my heart's desire, and I write freely, without fear.

*Turkan, a participant from Ankara, Central Anatolia*

acquire in HREP, and to share the results. The group process allows them to express their individual experiences and needs, while acquiring a consciousness of the inherent connection between their individual experiences and the human rights violations experi-

enced by women in general. It also enables them to develop strategies, through the assistance and feedback of group participants, to address their own problems, while listening to and helping others in return. For many women, the first step towards empowerment is the realization that their problems are rooted not in private issues, but in social ones.

As women search for strategies to apply their new knowledge to their lives, they receive support from both the trainer and their fellow participants. They develop common tactics to deal with negative responses from others and to prevent common human rights violations in their communities, and they become conscious of the importance of organized action. Since the program provides time for women to experience changes in their own attitudes and actions, they are able to evaluate such changes within the group and share obstacles and successes throughout. The empowerment process is gradual and substantial, since there is the opportunity to transfer awareness between the group discussions and everyday life and practice.

Our partnership with Social Services and the community centers has also contributed significantly to the success of the program, ensuring its expansion and sustainability, and allowing us to train qualified social workers as trainers. Participants are able to return to the community centers and trainers for further support, and the venues help strengthen relationships with other women and the community. Even at the local level, then, the program does not take place in a vacuum.

The dedication of the trainers has also been a great motivation, and their efforts to involve professionals such as police, teachers, and midwives have further extended the impact of the program.

Finally, HREP's success is connected as well to the close monitoring and supervision provided by WWHR–New Ways. While participants feel that they are part of a larger struggle for women's human rights, they are also able to obtain support and capacity building on a local level. WWHR–New Ways acts as an equal partner through the training and grassroots organizing process, providing participants and groups the space to act, to organize, and to devise their own strategies according to their own needs.

### **Obstacles and challenges in partnering with the state**

Despite the overall success of HREP and positive feedback from trainers and participants, maintaining the sustainability and momentum of such an extensive program over a decade has been challenging. We have, for instance, faced a change in the administration of Social Services, with new government staff and new social workers appointed to key posts. We have also been challenged to motivate our state partners to ensure the continuation of the program, and to continue filling the program's need for significant human and financial resources. Another major challenge we face is that social services is understaffed and social workers are overwhelmed by their workload, but the high motivation and dedication of trainers to the program helps to face this challenge.

Sustaining and expanding HREP and its partnership with the state has been a particular challenge. The program's impact on the local level, however—the transformation it creates in participants, the enthusiasm it raises in trainers, and the contributions it makes in the community centers—has been a driving force, helping the program survive through changes in government and administration. The good relationships we maintain with the mid-level bureaucrats at the General Directorate who are in charge of the central coordination of the Community Centers have led them to stand up for the program, and we have made sure to establish open communication with newly appointed directors to sustain the partnership.

The financial and physical resources contributed by the General Directorate have helped us overcome the challenges of sustaining HREP. With social workers implementing the program as part of their job description, the program utilizes the human resources of the state. The centers also provide space for the program, and the General Directorate pays for the photocopying of extra training materials. Therefore, even though WWHR–New Ways is primarily responsible for the financial cost, implementation and monitoring, the General Directorate and community centers actively partake in and contribute to the program.



Top: HREP Evaluation and Grassroots Organizing Meeting with Trainers, 2003.  
Bottom: Opening Ceremony of the Women's Counselling Center in Canakkale, founded by HREP participants after the program, 2002.

Top: First HREP Trainer Training Closing Ceremony, 1998.  
Bottom: HREP Group in Izmit, Northwestern Anatolia.

## Tactic results: Supporting women's multi-level transformation

### PERSONAL AND FAMILY IMPACT

While it is not common for organizations to commission external evaluations of their programs, we thought that such research would equip us with more concrete feedback on HREP. An external evaluation of HREP was conducted in 2002 with approximately 20 percent of participants, and revealed that the transformation women experienced occurred on many levels.

The evaluation indicated, for example, that participating in HREP increased self-confidence in 93 percent of respondents, while 90 percent reported growth in their problem-solving abilities. In focus group discussions, these results were often articulated as being able to recognize oneself as an individual with human rights and to pursue solutions to problems.

Relationships within the family also transformed greatly. While 72 percent of the participants reported that the attitudes of their husbands towards them im-

proved, 93 percent reported that their own attitudes towards their children improved, in particular with regards to gender-sensitive parenting. Seventy-four percent stated that they now had greater say in family decision-making processes.

Another significant finding was the extent to which women were able to stop or decrease violence in their lives. Sixty-three percent of the women who had faced domestic violence before the training reported they were able to stop it, and 22 percent were able to reduce it. Many women also began to work (30 percent) or returned to pursue their formal or informal education (54 percent) after the training program.

### COMMUNITY IMPACT:

#### HREP as a source and tool for grassroots organizing initiatives

The research also clarified HREP's impact in the larger community. Eighty-eight percent of the women who participated in the program reported that they had become resource people in their communities, providing guiding and advice to other women.



A major outcome of HREP has been the emergence of local grassroots women's organizations. Since collective action and mobilization for social change remains one of the program's central objectives, the fact that so many local initiatives have emerged from the program constitutes a major success. WWHR–New Ways has continuously supported these groups over the years, as they signify the broader impact of HREP on local and national levels.

These grassroots initiatives display a range of diverse aims and structures stemming from local needs and priorities. Some are geared towards women's economic empowerment, while others focus on activities that raise community consciousness and support for local women. And some combine economic, social, and/or political activities to promote women's human rights. Women in Diyarbakir, for example, the most economically disadvantaged region of Turkey, have established a Candle Production Atelier in which they produce hand-made candles and sell them to local stores and a national supermarket chain. They also manage a public kindergarten in Diyarbakir.

The women working on emerging initiatives such as these share their experiences and resources with one other. Women from Canakkale, for instance, have received training on recycled paper production from the Purple Paper Production Atelier in Okmeydani Istanbul, and have started their own atelier. Many of the initiatives (Ankara, Canakkale, Edirne, Aydin) work in collaboration with their local community centers, actively contributing to

the management of the centers, providing counseling and support services for women, and raising funds for the centers.

Most emerging groups organize series of consciousness-raising activities, reach out to women in their communities, and take action around community issues. Women at the Gazi District in Istanbul have founded the Kybele Cooperative, and, in conjunction with their economic activities, run a local campaign to establish a kindergarten. Women who have participated in the program in Van have established the first women's association in Eastern Anatolia, and a women's counseling and training center.



Top: HREP Participants in 8th of March Demonstrations with WWHR–New Ways Team.  
Bottom: Cities throughout Turkey where HREP has been implemented.

One of the best examples of grassroots organizing emerging from the program, the Association for Women's Labour in Canakkale, began as an association to promote women's economic and political empowerment. Over the years its members have held extensive trainings, conferences, and workshops on women's human rights issues, and have established great influence in the local governance. In 2003 they opened a Women's Counseling Center, and in 2005 they hosted the Eighth National Women's Shelter and Counseling Center Summit, bringing together women's NGOs from throughout Turkey.

The grassroots initiatives emerging from the program demonstrate the transformative nature of the program for both individuals and communities. After participating in the program, women are able to stand up together for their rights, to challenge and eliminate discrimination against themselves in a wide range of contexts, and to promote women's human rights and equality on local and national levels. Grassroots NGOs and initiatives that emerge from the program affirm the solidarity between women and extend it to the public sphere, transforming the web of local power dynamics and putting gender on the agendas of decision-makers.

### Transferring the tactic

HREP and our partnership with a state agency to implement a comprehensive and widespread human rights training program have proven successful on numerous levels. As well as transforming women's lives on a personal basis, HREP has also resulted in collective mobilization for social change and the realization of human rights for women.

To implement such a tactic, you need to extensively assess the needs and the feedback of your target group. Doing so will give you credibility, itself a crucial and powerful foundation for engaging and developing partnerships with state agencies. Ideas for ensuring that your program is widespread and sustainable will be helpful as well. Keep in mind, however, that the agency and the individuals you approach must be carefully selected in order to ensure fruitful cooperation. With the frequent shifts in power and politics found in state bureaucracies, this relationship must be continually fostered, nurtured and developed.

In terms of initiating a partnership and envisioning its continuity, you must pay great attention to the provisions in the protocol—the signing of an official partnership agreement—and to each area of cooperation and collaboration. You should be certain that the protocol includes the following: 1) provisions that ensure a long time span—beyond the current administrator; 2) clear

conditions for annulment or alterations by the government; and 3) clear and set obligations for each party. An essential condition of our partnership, for example, was ensuring that the content of the human rights education program could not be altered and that the program must be continuously implemented by trainers.

Collaboration with a state agency requires longstanding, close and continuous relationships with headquarters at the national level and with trainers at the local one. These relationships must be continuously maintained, and strengthened over time. We found that coming together in meetings, social events and awards ceremonies was useful in enhancing dialogue and relationships.

To implement a long-term and sustainable human rights education program, it is essential to sustain the dynamism of the program and the motivation of its groups. This requires a process for constantly revising and updating the program according to current needs and participant feedback, and for reviewing objectives and strategies.

WWHR–New Ways' experience with HREP has indicated that the program is a very important and useful tool in promoting women's human rights on personal and collective levels, in both private and public spheres.

Our partnership with a state agency has created a broad and sustainable outreach for the program, contributing to its impact on the local level. Despite the challenges, the past decade of HREP has shown that such a partnership can be highly beneficial and productive for all parties involved. We have also been able to prove that, when provided with the necessary skills, knowledge and support, women are able to mobilize for their rights and social change. Through HREP, women have been able to exercise their rights as human beings, individuals, citizens and members of organizations.

Once we completed the Women's Human Rights Training Program, we immediately moved to organize among ourselves, as a group of participants. We decided to put into practice the things we have learned during the training and to implement our rights and to be a part of the women's movement in Turkey. As women, we experience discrimination in our own lives and see it happen to other women around us. We have to fight against this discrimination against women. We realized that it is necessary to be organized as a group in order to succeed. Thus we decided to acquire a legal identity and form an association. We aim to ensure that the women in Canakkale actively participate in the social, economic and political spheres. Our ultimate objective is to put an end to the violence against women.

*Gulay, participant from Canakkale, West Turkey*

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