



Demonstration against female genital mutilation – The Better Life Foundation for comprehensive development – Egypt

Policy Brief
Addressing Gender Based
Discriminatory Social Beliefs and Practices



CAWTAR

ADDRESSING GENDER BASED DISCRIMINATORY SOCIAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

There is a widespread concern in the MENA region that gender inequity is impeding equal access to resources and opportunities. The practice is perceived as an obstacle against women's increased participation in the economic growth and social development. Reliable reports indicate that social norms, customs and traditions account for this type of discrimination. In 2005, with the financial support of Ford Foundation, the Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research "CAWTAR" launched a regional project, named "The Dynamics of Discriminatory Social Beliefs and Practices and Equity in Access to Resources: Lessons Learnt from the Last Twenty Years in the MENA region".

The project's general objective consists in monitoring and recording successful experiences, programmes, initiatives and projects which focused on gender-based discriminatory social beliefs and practices over the last twenty years in the MENA region and the challenges of addressing such beliefs and practices. On a more specific level, the project set to appraise these experiences and publish literature on successful strategies to be used as models for current and future projects dealing with the same issue. The project also aims at bringing such beliefs and practices to the attention of governments and donors to obtain support for similar projects which seek to combat gender based discriminatory social practices.

SOCIAL DISCRIMINATORY BELIEFS AND PRACTICES ADDRESSED

Within the framework of the project, data was collected on sixteen experiences and initiatives which addressed a wide range of social beliefs and practices prevailing in various areas and sectors in the region. These experiences were conducted by specialists, field-workers, experts, journalists, government agencies, NGOs and regional networks. Relevant Literature on these initiatives can be found on <http://genderequity.cawtar.org>

Nine of these sixteen initiatives focused on discriminatory practices which violate the basic human rights of women and children, while the others dealt with discriminatory practices in the economic and political spheres, access to and exchange of information and voice- building. The following is a description of each initiative included within the framework of the project with the corresponding discriminatory social beliefs and practices studied and the successes achieved .

COMBATING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Discriminatory practices

Country / region

Programme / initiative

Successes achieved

Female Genital mutilation

Minia Province, Egypt

An initiative of awareness raising and advocacy to help combat female genital mutilation, launched by Better Life Association for Global Development in Minia and funded by the Swedish Diakonia Organization and UNICEF.

The initiative succeeded in rallying to its campaign several parties, including local and religious leaders, educators and families, after they were convinced that genital mutilation was a harmful practice.

The initiative also managed to draw up a work plan to ensure a quicker shift in viewpoints and decisions on female genital mutilation and set up strategies to enable women and girls to protect their rights and report eventual cases of mutilation and to encourage doctors and midwives who practise genital mutilation to find alternative sources of income.

Discriminatory practices

Country / region

Programme / initiative

Successes achieved

Social resentment against victims of sexual abuse

Darfur, Sudan

The initiative is launched by SIHA and funded by Oxfam in the Netherlands and Germany, Ford Foundation, the Open Society Institute and UNICEF and aims at raising awareness and building capacity. ..

The initiative managed to break the silence over rape as a war weapon used to sully the honour of the enemy by integrating the project activities in women's day-to-day pursuits and diversifying advocacy tools and adapting them to the local context and the target groups. Part of the success of the initiative resides in the creation of a psychological and social assistance centre for victims of violence and the designing of strategies to ensure sustainability

Discriminatory practices

Country / region

Programme / initiative

Successes achieved

Honour crimes

Bedouin areas in Jordan

The initiative aims at ‘removing’ honour from honour crimes, disassociating it from the woman’s body and behaviour and linking honour killings to poverty and the economic situation of the family in the minds of Jordanians.

Nota Bene: the initiative has not yet been implemented

The initiative treats honour killings from a poverty reduction perspective rather than in the context of respect of social and religious norms. It endeavours to prove that the roots of honour crimes are basically economic and not religious or cultural and to turn the tide of the public opinion against such crimes, contributing to the emergence of a new attitude towards the practice.

Discriminatory practices

Country / region

Programme / initiative

Successes achieved

Social stereotypes depicting street children as criminals

Lebanon, Sudan, Egypt, Morocco and Yemen

This is a regional initiative aiming at protecting street children, launched and mainly supported by the Arab Council for Children and Development,. Contributors also include NGOs, government agencies, and regional and international organizations (AGFUND, UNICEF Regional Bureau, ALESCO).

By adopting a human rights approach and taking on a new perspective, the initiative set to change prevailing perceptions of street children as a social stigma. It managed to sensitize decision-makers to the issue, mobilize a considerable number of NGOs, build its capacities, and offer better services to street children, involving them in designing their own programmes and affording them the opportunity to express their views on the programmes and services provided and to take part in peer education. The initiative also facilitated the children’s reintegration in their families.

Reproductive health

Discriminatory practices

Country / region

Programme / initiative

Successes achieved

Social Taboos around Abortion

The Maghreb region

A research initiative that aims at raising awareness using available reproductive health service documents in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco as a first step towards addressing social and legal hurdles against women’s right to safe abortion.

Based on the findings of the researches and experiences in the Maghreb region and adopting a comparative approach, the initiative set to raise awareness about the risks of unsafe abortion, draw attention to the increase in deaths among mothers as a result of the practice and pushed to amendments of relevant legislation. This is expected to have a positive impact on future policies of health services, but also on community awareness of the need for safe health practices relating to pregnancy termination and child birth. The initiative could also be used as basis for future research analyses about safe abortion.

Discriminatory practices

Country / region

Programme / initiative

Successes achieved

Religion based perceptions of family planning

Jordan

Launched by the Jordanian Family Planning and Protection Association, the initiative aims at raising awareness about women’s sexual and reproductive health and encouraging family planning. The initiative received funds from several organizations, such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation, UNFPA and USAID.

The initiative adopted a human rights approach, based upon the “safe family” concept as a human right. It linked family planning to women’s capacity to take part in decision-making and to the recognition of their right to own and dispose of their bodies to ensure a healthier life for women, their children and husbands. The initiative managed to involve several organizations, maintain and extend its network of partners and diversify its activities and services to include more beneficiaries.

Discriminatory practices**Country / region****Programme / initiative****Successes achieved****Social stigma of STDs****Tunisia**

This is an initiative on adolescent reproductive health launched by the Tunisian Scout Association with the collaboration of the National Office for Family and Population and funded by UNFPA, for the purpose of ensuring a safe sexual and reproductive health for adolescents and the youth.

The initiative aims at raising awareness among young people of both sexes about the need to protect themselves from AIDS and STDs. Thanks to the use of materials produced by young scouts and the extension of the outreach of the programme through peer education, the number of young people joining the educational courses exceeded all expectations.

EDUCATION AND LITERACY**Discriminatory practices****Country / region****Programme / initiative****Successes achieved****Negative Social perceptions of Women's Education****Local communities in Yemen**

A programme of literacy through poetry for women, launched by the Social Fund for Development, Sanaa and funded by the World Bank.

It taps on the Yemeni oral cultural heritage, particularly poetry, to design literacy programmes, creating thus an atmosphere free from the apprehension of textbooks. The initiative managed to attract women and encouraged them to use their capacities to take part in the design of the curriculum. A participatory approach was adopted in all the phases of the initiative, from the creation of the textbooks to the assessment of the programme, involving all the components of the local community.

Discriminatory practices**Country / region****Programme / initiative****Successes achieved****Social traditions against girls pursuing their higher education abroad****The Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya**

A higher education grant programme in favour of girls launched by the Libyan government with technical facilities from the British Council.

Starting with the notion that granting women the opportunity to study abroad will boost their capacity to bring about major changes in their respective local communities, the initiative set to challenge the deeply entrenched traditions which prevent women from accessing higher education and pursuing further studies abroad. Having obtained political support, the programme managed to balance between the sexes in MA and PhD grants.

ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION**Discriminatory practices****Country / region****Programme / initiative****Successes achieved****Social ban on women in certain jobs and male dominance in economy****Qassim, Saudi Arabia**

Micro credit programme in favour of needy women launched by King Abdelaziz Women's Charity Organization in Qassim.

The initiative managed to overcome the obstacles against women's access to credits and opportunities to improve their economic situation by granting them interest free loans and dealing with women directly and not through their male relatives. To reach its objectives, the programme encouraged women to network and exchange feedback on their individual experiences and launched awareness raising programmes in local communities. In result, women have the opportunity to create their own small businesses and to market their own products, contributing thus to the welfare of the families and the development of their local communities.

Discriminatory practices

Country / region

Programme / initiative

Successes achieved

Social traditions denying women the right to own farmland

Kordofan, Sudan

The initiative aims at addressing gender inequity in the right to own farmland under Naihud Cooperative Project launched by Women's Initiatives and funded by IFAD, the Sudanese government, the Sudanese Agricultural Bank and Finland International Agency for Development.

Starting with the notion that inequitable distribution of land and resources has a negative impact on families, given that women usually use their incomes and resources to serve the interests of the households, the initiative adopted a new methodology to address the obstacles hindering a more equitable distribution of resources between men and women. It granted credits and offered integrated social and training services to women and set up income-generating businesses close to their places of residence.

Thanks to the initiative, women's participation in cooperatives and farming activities was boosted and groups of women were formed to apply for additional credits.

Discriminatory practices

Country / region

Programme / initiative

Successes achieved

Gender pay gap

Morocco

This is an independent research initiative addressing pay gap between equally qualified women and men in Morocco and highlighting violations in the workplace.

Based on national surveys, the initiative set to identify the reasons behind gender pay gap and to compare the situation in Morocco and some Arab countries. The initiative made use of a number of theories, including pay as per education and human capital.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Discriminatory practices

Country / region

Programme / initiative

Successes achieved

Stereotypes hindering women's participation in the political sphere

Palestine

Advocacy initiative calling for a more active participation of women in the quotas political sphere, launched by the Palestinian Women's Federation.

Adopting a multifaceted advocacy campaign which targeted decision-makers, civil society organizations and female leaders, the initiative pushed for quotas as a legal strategy to ensure women's representation in the national and local councils and boost their involvement in decision and policy making. The initiative managed to create a nationwide momentum in favour of quotas and more elected women.

COMMUNICATION AND VOICE BUILDING

Discriminatory practices

Country / region

Programme / initiative

Successes achieved

Social norms subordinating women

Mauritania

An initiative aiming at the creation of a website for Mauritanian women, giving them access to various sources of information and offering them the opportunity to express their views without discrimination, launched by ICT and Citizenship.

The Partners/ Allies are : Network on Gender and ICT (Senegal); Women, Solidarity and Development; Cyber Forum of Civil Society; UNDP; GTZ, European Commission; RENAF-NTIC; RINOCEROS (France); FEMNET (international network); Apc-Women (Network for change and empowerment); International platform of gender (Europe); International platform of gender and water (France); AFAL (France).

The initiative came to the conclusion that women's access to ICT depends on their awareness of their rights and duties, their capacity and readiness to interact with others and their ambitions. Many Mauritanian women came to realize the importance of such access, having taken part in online forums and discussions and training courses on ICT, with an emphasis on the Internet and emailing.

Discriminatory practices

Country / region

Programme / initiative

Successes achieved

Social norms and religious views constructing gender relations

Lebanon

An independent research initiative conducting a gender-based study of a selection of literary works to assess the situation of women and their rights locally and nationally under the laws in force and in the social, cultural and economic context.

The initiative resorted to literature to understand how political events can affect social transformations and how literature and arts can be a tool to unpack social relations constructs and strengthen women's ability to control their bodies and make decisions affecting their lives.

Discriminatory practices

Country / region

Programme / initiative

Successes achieved

Social beliefs accounting for the absence of discourse on women's rights

The Gulf countries

A research initiative assessing the role of networking in the formation of a constructive dialogue on women's rights in the Gulf countries. The initiative assessed the impact of women's worldwide networks on platforms and discourses on women's empowerment and rights in the Gulf.

The initiative focused on the interrelation between women's worldwide networks and local NGOs in terms of the uniformity of discourses and social justice and gender equity practices in an effort to assess the capacity of worldwide networks to bring about social changes, create a common culture and adapt their approaches to the different local contexts. The initiative stressed the necessity to explore alternative strategies as agreed upon by women's worldwide networks and local NGOs to design a work programme and elaborate a discourse and messages about women's empowerment and rights.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The experiences and initiatives addressing discriminatory social beliefs and practices compiled under Cawtar Project show that gender-based discriminations come from a variety of sources and that they are sometimes institutionalized by perpetrators of such discrimination and sometimes by society as a whole. They are at times legalized by countries or legitimized through the misinterpretation of religious texts. Discriminatory practices can also be rooted in traditions and customs. The traditional patriarchal family, the cornerstone of male-dominated communities prevailing in Arab countries, contributes to maintaining gender discrimination and inequality. This has a negative impact not only on women but also on the family and society at large.

However, these initiatives confirm that it is quite possible to change discriminatory social practices and beliefs and suggest three types of actions to be taken by decision-makers and donors to support similar projects, programmes and initiatives.

PROJECT PREPARATORY PHASE

WHAT CAN DECISION MAKERS DO?

Create an enabling environment for practitioners to promote their initiatives through the followings:

- Support the project initiators in mobilizing traditional leaders and local communities to lend legitimacy and social commitment to the realization of the project's objectives.
- Negotiate with donors the allocation of special funds and services to benefit women from different large schemes.
- Provide statistics and results of national surveys to NGOs in order for them to program their intervention on scientific grounds.
- Build synergies with NGOs projects to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure effective management of resources.
- Engage in the preparatory phase of NGOs projects.
- Capitalize on findings of projects conducted by civil society in formulation of social policies and mass awareness programs

WHAT CAN DONORS DO?

- Provide funding for NGOs and their core activities to ensure effective implementation and sustainability of the initiatives.
- Provide funding to build regional consortia and leverage networking activities among recipients of grants working on the same social practices.
- Provide technical assistance along with grants to help NGOs prepare and implement their actions plans and to acquire skills in building indicators, reporting and measuring the impact of their activities.
- Conduct consultation with NGOs, victims of gender discrimination and traditional institutions to assess actual needs in order for donors to strategize priorities for their funding programs.
- Consider the special long-term impact of social transformation and policy change in conditioning the use of grants and funds

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

WHAT CAN DECISION MAKERS DO?

- Leverage the project's activities through participating in public meetings and workshops organized to share the project's preliminary results.
- Support the implementation of activities targeting officials in public administration such as capacity building programs.
- Cost-share in funding of programs targeting public establishments such as social clubs and scouts.
- Share information with sponsors and donors about ongoing activities of projects

WHAT CAN DONORS DO?

- Assist recipients to acquire additional funding from other specialized agencies to secure adequate resources so as to achieve long term results and outcomes.
- Allow flexibility in the use of resources allocated to activities to support implementation of strategic activities whose costs have not been initially forecasted at the project's preparatory phase.



ADVOCACY OF THE PROJECT

WHAT CAN DECISION MAKERS DO?

- Capitalize on projects recommendations to introduce legislative changes to penalize non acceptable practices that encourage the non respect of women's human rights and to facilitate women's access to credit and entrepreneurship projects management
- Formulate and/or review social policies and provide necessary resources for recommended programs to ensure the sustainability of project activities such as coaching, counseling and peer education.
- Expand existing national archives to display the project's cultural and educational products. Give support to local communities cultural programs such as public libraries and theatres.
- Set virtual portals in public libraries to exchange views on gender equity in order to poll social opinions of the concept approaches to programs addressing different discriminatory social practices and beliefs.
- Facilitate the digitalization of awareness programs and support the establishment of tele-centers in local and rural areas.

WHAT CAN DONORS DO?

- Provide support to disseminate the project's findings and recommendations
- Build upon findings of projects to provision future funding
- Provide resources for NGOs to measure the impact of their projects at least within two years after the completion of activities