



**Addressing Discriminatory Social Practices and Beliefs Hindering Gender Equity:**

**The Road to Women's Empowerment in the Arabic Speaking MENA Region**

**A Workbook for Implementing Effective Programs**

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## Introduction

It has become widely understood around the world that reducing gender inequality “in all its facets and manifestations and transforming gender stereotypes and gender relations” is possibly the most effective strategy to advance human rights, further sexual and reproductive health, reduce poverty, and promote development. Thus, empowering women requires efforts that promote gender equity in all facets of life and in all stages of development programming. However, despite the attention and efforts paid to empowering women in recent decades, data and research show that women still lag behind in all spheres compared to their male counterparts. Such trends indicate that established institutional structures and service programs that aim to address empowerment do not unpack the social and cultural beliefs and practices that discriminate against women will not bear fruit. Therefore, programs with the ultimate goal of empowering women need to confront the underlying and root causes of gender discrimination to result in concrete benefits for women. Addressing discriminatory social beliefs and practices is a complex and intricate process that requires long term commitment and resources. It also requires methods and approaches that are evidence-based and effective.

To unpack discriminatory social beliefs and practices that impact on the disempowerment of women in the Arab region, CAWTAR in collaboration with the Ford Foundation launched a project to assess the situation and progress made in the region in order to identify good practices from existing programs.

This Workbook is one of three key outputs of this project.

### ***Purpose of the Workbook***

This Workbook serves as a guide to users implementing projects that address negative social practices hindering gender equity in the Arabic speaking MENA region. It provides the lessons learned from existing projects on how to develop, implement, evaluate, and document projects that successfully addresses discriminatory social practices against women in different spheres. It is based on the lessons learned from the projects featured in the focused studies commissioned by CAWTAR.

### ***Methodology for compiling the Workbook***

The Workbook is based on a systematic and extensive review of CAWTAR commissioned studies from various countries in the Arab region, and covering a wide array of projects (economic, health, education, etc.) that address discriminatory social beliefs and practices in the region. Input and comments were solicited from CAWTAR staff, partners and authors of the commissioned studies.

This Workbook is intended to be concise and user-friendly, and designed to be used as a how-to guide as well as a reference for users as they are implementing their programs.

***How the Workbook is organized***

The Workbook is organized into modules. Each module describes a stage or practice in the different phases of a project cycle. Based on international and regional standards and the good practices and lessons learned from the CAWTAR studies, each module will outline what NGOs need to consider to ensure their programs are effective. Furthermore, each module will present concrete examples from the studies commissioned by CAWTAR.

The Workbook can be used by the staff of NGOs to assist them in the process of developing and implementing a project. The modules can also be used as the basis for training material to build their capacity.



## Module I:

# **Transforming Social Practices to Promote Women's Empowerment: A Theoretical Framework for Addressing Discriminatory Social Beliefs and Practices Hindering Gender Equity**

## Module I: Transforming Social Practices to Promote Women's Empowerment: A Theoretical Framework for Addressing Discriminatory Social Beliefs and Practices Hindering Gender Equity

This module provides a framework for defining gender and the discriminatory social beliefs and practices that can be applied to all phases of your project. Each country, region, and community may have a different definition and understanding of how gender plays out. This framework will attempt to assist you in constructing the attributes specific to your country and region that will influence your project.

Spending time at the beginning of the project to define and understand your framework is important for a few reasons: 1) It will help all staff and stakeholders to begin the project with a unified vision and shared values; 2) it will help prioritize objectives and activities of the project; 3) it will help in evaluating the impact of the project on promoting women's empowerment and gender equality.

### 1) Defining the Gender Concepts

**Gender** refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female in a particular social setting at a particular point in time<sup>(3)</sup>.

**Gender equity** signifies fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men<sup>(4)</sup>.

**Gender discrimination** indicates any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of socially constructed gender roles and norms which prevents a person from enjoying full human rights<sup>(5)</sup>.

**Gender equality** implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life.

Equality between men and women does not mean denying differences. Differences may have emanated from biology, but they have been consolidated and exaggerated by inherited culture to the benefit of men. Respecting such differences in their proper context, without exaggeration or understatement, is necessary for achieving equality between the sexes.

AHDR 2005

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3- Definitions taken from WHO. Training Curriculum for Health Programme Managers – Transforming Health Systems: Gender and Rights in Reproductive Health. WHO,

4- Ibid

5- Ibid

Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses; enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions. A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Women's empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all<sup>(6)</sup>.

**Gender mainstreaming** is defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)<sup>(7)</sup> as: the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in any areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic, and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. (E.1997.L.O. Para.4. Adopted by ECOSOC 17/7/97).

Gender mainstreaming should be both “a strategy and a process” at all levels of institutions and organizations in agenda setting, decision-making procedures, policy-making, planning, budgeting, implementation, and evaluation.<sup>(8)</sup> It includes the following components:

- a political process, which requires ensuring political will and commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment as well as shifts in organizational cultures and ways of thinking
- a technical process, which requires the development of and implementation of goals and structures
- specific resource allocations to implement such processes.

Gender mainstreaming is therefore not an objective or an end in itself (as is sometimes incorrectly assumed in some programs), but it is a means to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women<sup>(9)</sup>. A policy or program can not be considered successful or effective if it has not led to transformatory practices that contribute to gender equality. It is imperative that gender mainstreaming efforts not just be rhetorical but must be put into practice.

6- UNFPA website. Accessed at: <http://www.unfpa.org/gender/empowerment.htm>.

7- ECOSOC is the United Nations organ facilitating international cooperation on standards-making and problem-solving in economic and social issues.

8- Ireen Dubel, “Challenges for Gender Mainstreaming: The Experiences of Hivos,” 2002.

9- Mariama Williams, Everjoice Win, Gerd Johnsson-Latham and Joanne Sandler. Gender Mainstreaming: Can it work for Women's Rights. AWID Spotlight, Number 3, November 2004.

As an organization that has a mission to address gender inequality, it is therefore important to ensure that your organization integrates gender into its mandate and activities. First and foremost, this must be clearly indicated in the mission and objective of the organization. In addition, the organization should have a clear strategy and plan of action for gender mainstreaming in its objectives, training of staff, and programming cycle.

In addition to integrating gender into all activities, gender mainstreaming also means having targeted programming to address specific areas of concern that perpetuate gender inequality, such as efforts to address gender-based violence and facilitate access to education for girls. Specific programming is essential to ensure that women's needs are met. Such initiatives allow mainstreaming efforts to reach the ultimate goal of gender equity.

## **2) Defining a model for working on gender equity and the empowerment of women in the Arabic Speaking MENA Region**

Women's groups and organizations working on gender issues in the Arab region are very diverse in terms of the context they operate in and their work mandates. With activities ranging from advocating legal reform to providing health services for women, the ultimate priority is to improve the conditions of women in the region. However, the success of these programs in impacting women's lives is dependent on the extent to which they can effectively play a role in social transformation of beliefs and practices that empower women. Although there may be numerous groups and organizations that claim they work on empowering women, upon closer examination of their activities, one finds that their efforts overlook addressing women's needs from gender equity perspective.

The model below illustrates the connections between social beliefs and practices and attaining gender equality and women's empowerment. Discriminatory beliefs and practices inherent in the socio-cultural, legal, and religious environments in the society require strategies and programs that promote gender equity and human rights of women. Such effective strategies and programs targeted to address equity and women's rights concerns in different spheres – economic; reproductive health; information, education, and communication; governance and decision-making; and gender-based violence – will lead to promoting gender equality in these spheres.



## A. Social Beliefs and Practices

### *Socio-cultural*

Social norms that support male superiority and patriarchal attitudes frame the moral and socio-cultural constructs that impact the lives of women in the Arab region, as in many other parts of the world<sup>(10)</sup>. Women, due to legal, financial, or cultural reasons often find themselves having to conform to these established constructs losing the ability to exercise their cardinal right to make decisions about their lives. For example, women are not able to determine whether and when to have children and how many to have. Social norms therefore uphold power inequities between men and women, and sustain societal tolerance of the violation of women's choices, bodies and rights.

Men's experiences and perceptions are considered the norm and policies, laws, programs and resource-allocations are made from a male outlook. These patriarchal structures are first "experienced" at the family level and are then reproduced at other levels of society.<sup>(11)</sup> In most Arab countries, patriarchy is: i) learned and perpetuated through gender socialization within the family, ii) legitimized through pervasive ideologies of inherent male superiority, and iii) institutionalized through the legal, political, economic, religious and cultural spheres.<sup>(12)</sup> Women therefore do not have access to the conditions and resources conducive to their well being nor do policies, programs and budget allocations address their needs. The consequences of this patriarchal order are that those experiences unique to women do not benefit from appropriate policies or adequate resources.

The stigma faced by women who do not conform makes it difficult for women to change patriarchal norms and thus perpetuates the discriminatory practices and inequities faced by women in the Arab region. Stigma is defined as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting," and one that serves to distinguish between "us" and "them," or the non-stigmatized and the stigmatized<sup>(13)</sup>.

10- For definitions in this section see Hessini L. Achieving gender equity in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia: Is the ability to safely terminate a pregnancy important? CAWTAR, 2007

11- Ibid.

12- Inhorn, Marcia. Infertility and Patriarchy: the cultural politics of gender and family life in Egypt. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 1996.

13- Goffman, E. Stigma, notes on the management of spoiled identity. UK: Penguin Books, Ltd. 1970.

Social networks, community groups and extended families help shape group values and expectations and are central to efforts to change gender-discriminatory policies and practices. The onus is on women to reconcile social and familial expectations with the realities of pregnancy, childbirth and childrearing in an increasingly harsh and challenging economic and social environment.

### *The Role of Religion*

Religion plays an important role in the public and private spheres of women's lives in the Middle East. For the most part, however, religious law is interpreted from the points of view of men in power. Religious ideology and practices have thus helped institutionalize the idea of male dominance in all decision-making. How this plays out in reality for women in the region varies greatly and depends on how religious laws are adopted in the public sphere and the role of religion in the women's private sphere.

In many countries in the region, the women's public sphere (education, labor, political participation) is governed by secular laws while the private or "family code" laws (e.g. marriage, divorce, inheritance) regulate private life. The opportunities and challenges that arise from this dichotomy should be addressed in assessing social beliefs and practices that impact on gender equality.

### *Legal*

Legal systems play an important role in framing values and defining what is considered normative behavior. In a patriarchal structure as that found in the Middle East, laws and policies most often reflect the needs of those in power and thus women are often negatively impacted and sometimes effectively punished and criminalized by laws. For gender equity to be achieved, the legal system has to protect the rights of women.

## **B. Towards Gender Equality**

Discriminatory social beliefs and practices are manifested in society as inequities between women and men in a multitude of ways such as differences in education, income, and political participation. Gender equality is often measured for example in the economic sphere through indicators that look at the differences in income level between men and women. The framework of this workbook will explore five spheres deemed the most relevant to the priorities of organizations in the Arab region working on gender equity.

- i. Economy
- ii. Reproductive Health
- iii. Information, Education, and Communication (IEC)
- iv. Raising Voices of Women/Voice Building and Autonomy
- v. Gender-based Violence

The workbook calls for innovative practices and tools within each sphere that lead to the transformation of social structures to empower women.

### *Economy*

Global research has shown that income earned by women is much more likely to improve the social status, health and standard of living of families, than income earned by men. The ability of women to access economic opportunities ultimately leads to gender equality and empowerment. However, discrimination against women greatly impacts their contribution in national economies be it the formal or informal sectors. The situation varies significantly between and within countries in the Arab region with considerable gains in some places while dire for many women in other places. The Middle East and North Africa compared to other world regions continues to show the lowest rates in employment of women (26.6%)<sup>(14)</sup>.

Even for women that are employed, there are huge differentials in the pay that women receive compared to men and the types of jobs women have access to and retain. These inequalities arise from objective factors such as level of education, experience and skills, and hours spent working, and “unexplained” factors which are considered due to discrimination.<sup>(15)</sup> However, the circumstances that place women at a disadvantage in receiving the education, skills, and time to work most often are also indirectly linked to discrimination. It is therefore imperative to address the social beliefs and practices that perpetuate discrimination against women in the economic sphere.

### *Reproductive Health*

A critical gap in fulfilling the promise of gender equality and women's empowerment lies in the area of reproductive health and rights.<sup>(16)</sup> The critical importance of reproductive health to development has been acknowledged globally including through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

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14- International Labour Conference. Equality at work: tackling the challenges. Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. International Labour Office, Geneva. 2007.

15- Ibid.

16- UNFPA Draft Strategic Plan 2008-2011, pg. 3.

17- UNDP, Regional Bureau of Arab States. The Arab Human Development Report 2005: Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World. UNDP, 2006.

The maternal mortality rate in Arab countries averages 270 deaths per 100,000 live births. The average fertility rate is high (3.81%) compared to other developing regions, and women face many problematic consequences of unwanted pregnancies leading to unsafe abortions and other physical and emotional consequences.<sup>(17)</sup> Because reproductive health issues touch on socio-cultural, legal, and religious issues, they can be addressed successfully only through the improvement in the status of women.

### ***Information, Education, and Communication***

The Arab region has the highest illiteracy rates among women in the world.<sup>(18)</sup> The gender gap in education persists despite widespread efforts advocating the importance of education and the factors that constrain female educational achievement. Even though the data demonstrates girls' academic achievements at all levels of education, discrimination against them limits their access to knowledge.

The trend, to a large extent, is due to the competing structures that govern women's lives: the social and economic position on one hand, and the dynamics at the household and state levels that influence decisions about investing in the education of women, on the other. Addressing discriminatory social beliefs and practices that constrain women's attainment of knowledge is therefore a critical component to empowering women.

### ***Raising Women's Voices/Voice Building and Autonomy***

A fundamental pre-requisite for gender equality is women's exercise of their citizenship rights through the involvement in political and decision-making processes and positions. In the Arab world, the extent of women's participation in governance is limited or token even where there are constitutional and legislative guarantees of women's right to political participation. Inconsequential or rhetorical representation has been of little aid to women in a cultural and social environment inimical to women's acquisition and free exercise of their political rights<sup>(19)</sup>.

### ***Gender-based Violence***

Gender-based violence is deeply rooted in societal norms - including gender roles and expectations - and codified in legal systems that privilege male authority over women in the domestic and public spheres. Violence is defined as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life"<sup>(20)</sup>.

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18- Ibid.

19- Ibid

20- General Assembly resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993, Article 1

Despite the prevalence, severity and cost of all forms of violence against women, the silence attributed to the social sanctioning of the practice has made it difficult for women's and right's groups to research the problem, develop effective interventions, and advocate for legal and societal change. Measures are needed to raise public awareness, protect women, prevent crimes and change the social norms that ignore or condone such violence.

### **C. Arab women are not a homogenous group.**

In the Arab world as with other regions, women do not constitute a homogeneous group and there are social discriminatory beliefs and practices that marginalize certain women more than others. The situation of urban, rural, and Bedouin women varies widely in the region. Efforts focused on the empowerment of women thus need to ensure that policies and programs instill non-discrimination against any person based on their class, religion, economic status, age, and sex. The needs of women from different regions, rural, adolescents, migrants, and those marginalized based on any social or cultural basis must be taken into consideration in all efforts to end discriminatory social beliefs and practices.





## Module II:

### **The Situational Analysis: Assessing the Environment to Identify Factors that can Support or Impede Gender Equity**

## Module II: The Situational Analysis: Assessing the Environment to Identify Factors that can Support or Impede Gender Equity

A situational analysis should assist in identifying immediate, underlying and root factors and causes of gender inequity in the region being examined. The situational analysis<sup>(21)</sup> phase is thus a critical step to identify the social beliefs and practices that will influence a project and should be taken into account by any work in order to be successful.

It is important that to broaden the research to understand what instruments and documents can support the work at not only the national level but also international levels. Collect information that can support in understanding the causes and finding solutions to the issue at hand. There should also be a focus on how each factor supports or impedes efforts. Based on the framework defined in Module 2, the following should be examined more closely:

- 1) Gender equity in the legal and policy context
- 2) Gender equity in the socio-cultural context

### 1) Gender equity in the legal and policy context

**International and Regional Instruments, laws and policies.** There are numerous documents and instruments that have been developed at the international and regional levels that can be useful in contextualizing the issues that one should be aware of to understand and address the area being worked on.

- Legally binding instruments are particularly useful if advocating for a change in policy or law in a country. If the country has ratified the treaty or convention, then this gives an entry point for instilling policy makers to adhere to the terms and conditions of the document. However, if the country has not ratified the document, a basis for advocating for policy makers to support ratification of the document is provided.
- Treaty monitoring mechanisms often allow for the engagement of civil society in the reporting process which can be an opportunity for organizations to partake in such efforts.

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21- There are many and varied tools available to help you in conducting a situational analysis (See Annex on Resources).

## Addressing Legal and Policy Context to Improve Reproductive Health: An Example from the Maghreb

*Leila Heissini*

IPAS, Morocco

One of the key strategies used by women's groups across the Maghreb to promote gender equity is challenging discriminatory policies, including personal status codes (family laws), penal, labor, and national laws. Reforms to personal status codes are critical to women's reproductive health for various reasons. Increases in female age of marriage can be linked to lower fertility rates, better maternal health, increased educational opportunities and greater power within the household. Challenging discriminatory codes serves to redefine patriarchal social norms by placing the family unit under joint responsibility, and promoting equality between men and women. These changes enhance women's ability to participate on equal terms in public and family life and enable them to have greater control over their sexual and reproductive health. After years of advocacy by women's organizations, both the Moroccan and the Algerian governments enacted changes to their personal status codes in 2004 and 2005.

Several lessons can be learned from the Moroccan experience. The new Moroccan code is based on progressive interpretations of Islam and support for gender equality. Key changes include: increasing the age of marriage for women from 15 to 18; establishing the right to divorce by mutual consent instead of by the man alone; mandating that husband and wife jointly carry responsibility for family matters and acknowledging children's right to paternity in cases where marriage has not been officially registered.

Advocacy activities bridged activism on a global, regional and national level. Women's groups lobbied for changes at the international level during the reporting process of Maghreb governments to the CEDAW committee; regionally women came together to strategize and publish common analyses and reports; and locally alliances were built across different groups including political parties, religious organizations, policy makers and human rights organizations.

Religious, social and legal justifications for reforms were developed; public discussions were encouraged and the media was strategically used through radio shows, talk shows and symbolic courts. Comic strips were used to raise community awareness and promote popular education.

- Even if the program is not focused on advocacy, international documents often have Programs of Action that can help local communities and organizations set priorities and standards for providing services and raising awareness. This ultimately promotes gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment by ensuring that international policies are implemented at the grassroots level.

Instrument	Is your country party to this Instrument	How can instrument be useful to your work
<b>INTERNATIONAL</b>		
For example:		
1. Conventions: CEDAW, CRC		
2. Programmes of Action: ICPD, MDGs		
3. Special Rapporteur reports		
<b>REGIONAL</b>		
For example:		
1. The Arab Charter on Human Rights		
2. The African Charter on Human and People's Rights		
3. The Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (this is the only human rights treaty that specifically refers to women's reproductive rights)		

## National Legislation and Policies

Undeniably, the national and local context that will be operated in will have direct impact on the activity or the project. Often existing mechanisms are weak. This is due to the absence of serious efforts that focus on the promotion of the status of women in the political sphere. Political decisions often overrule objective and practical needs of women. Authorized institutions lack the legislative and operational frameworks in order to effectively tackle gender mainstreaming in different sectors.

- In addition to reviewing the existing laws and policies, it is important to determine who is responsible for addressing gender equality in decision making positions. What authority do they have to develop and implement programs<sup>(22)</sup>.

### Examples of the type of information to collect on National Legal and Policy environment

- The Constitution and whether it addresses gender equality and how
- Family laws for example on marriage, custody; divorce; polygamy
- Labor laws: maternity leave; safe work conditions; equal pay? Do laws apply to private sector?
- Nationality laws (e.g. to children of women from the country)
- Inheritance laws
- Family planning and abortion laws
- Gender based violence laws

22- See Fatima Bint Alkory. An Internet Site for Mauritanian Women: A Way of Using Information Technology for the Empowerment of Women. CAWTAR, 2007.

## 2) Gender equity in the socio-cultural context

As an organization working to address discriminatory social beliefs and practices, you undoubtedly have a clear understanding of socio-cultural factors in your community that are impacting gender equity. However, it is important at the beginning of the project to collect all the evidence available from research, interviews, and media to describe in detail what the issues you are dealing with are. This is important for many reasons:

- 1) it ensures that the social issues are understood in a concrete way and not just anecdotally;
- 2) it ensures that all those working on the project have a unified understanding of what the issues are and how to address them (as sometimes different people have different perceptions of social and cultural issues);
- 3) There is a heightened ability to prioritize which issues can be dealt with as part of your project; and
- 4) It is possible to guarantee that the messages and methods are based on evidence and build on previous efforts.

■ ***Most significantly however understanding the social and cultural factors at play confirms that any interventions are culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate.*** This is important as sometimes the reality of women in a specific area maybe different from what is considered the norm. For example, in many parts of the Arab region, rural women and poor urban women who lack access to services may have more mobility and greater opportunities to earn income than middle class and elite urban women who may be more secluded (because the cultural ideal is seclusion). Accordingly, completely different strategies may be needed to empower urban and rural women.

### Sources of Information

- 1) National Surveys and Statistics
- 2) Reports and documents from institutions in the region working on women's issues
- 3) Reports from international organizations such as UNFPA, UNIFEM, and UNICEF that provide country data and information
- 4) Regional reports such as the Arab Human Development Reports and the Arab Women Development Report
- 5) Media and literature in the chosen region
- 6) Conducting one's own research (through surveys, workshops, and interviews)

- It is also important for organizations working in this area to begin to document their experiences so as to build an evidence base on the best practices and tools to improve the status of women.
- Rather than importing or inventing new frameworks, those working on social issues can borrow from the existing frameworks applied internationally or in other countries while framing their agenda in terms of their existing value and belief systems.<sup>(23)</sup>

#### **Examples of the type of information is useful to collect:**

- The changes that have occurred in the society (at least within the past 20 years) that impacts the status of women. Who are actors behind the changes that have occurred?
- Status of women in customs, norms and traditions
- The women's movement, coalitions and lobbies
- Education structures and illiteracy among women;
- Cultural traditions that support or impede women's role in the public sphere (e.g. Must women get male guardian's consent to work?).
- Women in government
- Women's health status
- The discourses on gender in the education curriculum, media etc.
- Status of women's access to freedom of expression, and access to public spaces

23- De Vriese, L. Countervailing Forces Shaping Transformative Dialogue on Citizenship Rights for Women in the Arab Gulf. CAWTAR, 2007.

## ■ **RELIGIOUS FACTORS**

The interpretation of religion varies widely in the Middle East and assessment of the religious constructs is important to effectively address discriminatory social beliefs and practices. Most often, the influence of religion is closely interlinked to cultural and social norms in the region.

■ The role of religious leaders in social transformation projects cannot be stressed enough. Targeting religious leaders in the project and ensuring their participation will aid in the ultimate goal of reaching the community.

### **Examples of information you should collect:**

- Composition of religions and religious sects in the area
- Religious attitudes in the community you are working in
- Status of women (in terms of working in public sphere, role in society) in religious discourse of the country for the different religions, sects, and communities
- Religious verdicts and laws passed in relation to your topic
- Religious leaders and advisors to the community you work in

## **Literacy through Poetry in Yemen: The role of religion**

Women's sung poems and poetic expression in rural Yemen are an important potential source of empowerment. Traditionally, they provided women with culturally accepted ways of expressing their opinions on issues ranging from the personal (e.g., their opinion of a prospective suitor) to the political.

Neither the Zaydi nor Shafi'i sects of Islam, most popular in Yemen are very conservative with respect to women. Historically, sexual segregation was rare in rural communities, and most rural women did not veil. However, exposure to Wahhabi influences in the past 30 years has negatively impacted women's mobility and women's voice. These imported conservative religious views target mixed gender socializing (the traditional norm in rural Yemen), women's mobility and their traditional songs and stories. Increasingly, one hears the expression, "sawt al-mar'a 'awra", an expression that was rarely invoked 20-30 years ago. The Project in Yemen using traditional women's oral poetry to teach reading and writing to rural women was successful by affirming the positive aspects of the local tradition. A key aspect of the project leading to its success was ensuring the participation of the leaders in the community in all aspects of the project.

In conclusion for this module, as one collects information it is suggested that it is organized in such a way as to help you in the next phase of setting objectives. The table below is a broad structure of how you can tabulate your information.

**Analyzing the information:**

	Instruments, Strategies, and Policies at Different Levels:				Does this Support OR Impede Gender Equity? How?
	International	Regional	National	Local	
Legal					
Social and Cultural					





## **Module III:**

### **Programming: Focusing Objectives and Types of Programming to Address Discriminatory Social Beliefs and Practices and Gender Equity**

## Module III: Programming: Focusing Objectives and Types of Programming to Address Discriminatory Social Beliefs and Practices and Gender Equity

Effectively addressing negative social practices that underlie women disempowerment and inequality requires innovative tools and approaches. Social change requires long-term commitment by all stakeholders and sufficient resources that are made available for the time needed to produce positive changes.

- It is imperative to think innovatively when setting objectives for programming. Experience has shown that programs are most successful when they are multifaceted and comprehensive targeting different levels of the community and using multiple methods (e.g. raising awareness of the community on the social problem and providing direct services to those targeted by the program).
- The ultimate goal should be to empower women in culturally appropriate ways (“approaches that make intuitive sense to the target beneficiaries rather than appearing foreign imports”<sup>(24)</sup>) and that affirm the positive aspects of local culture.

### The Guiding Principles of Any Project\*

1. **Participation** of stakeholders and community in all aspects of the project to ensure appropriateness of activities to all those involved.
2. **Equality and Non-discrimination** to ensure that all members of the community especially those vulnerable and marginalized have access to services.
3. **Transparency and Accountability** at all levels to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation of the project.

\* Adapted from UN Common Understanding of a Human Rights-Based Approach

To set objectives and methods, these questions are important:

1. What is the type of discriminatory social practice handled by the project?
2. What are the most effective approaches for addressing the objectives?
3. Have they been addressed before? If not, why? If yes, how?

24- See Adra N. Literacy Through Poetry in Yemen. CAWTAR, 2007.

## Working with the Community to Identify Objectives: Launching a Program to Address Female Circumcision in Egypt

*Maher Bushra*

Director of Better Life Association

The Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development in Minia has been working since 1995 in the eastern Nile provinces. During its multitude of activities in the region, the organization noticed the high prevalence of Female Circumcision which drove it to begin thinking of ways to address this issue. The organization continued to work in the region building collaboration and trust with the community. To initiate work on female circumcision, the organization began to hold meetings and discussions with the women and men in the community to identify ways to address the problem and to write proposals for funding.

The organization then applied for funding and received resources from UNICEF to work in 8 communities in the region to address female circumcision. The steps in the development of the project preceding the design of the project involved:

1. Conducting a baseline study
2. Identifying local organizations and sectors to partner with in the project
3. Discerning the target groups for the project
4. Distinguishing best practices from other projects that are applicable to their context
5. Building the capacity of the partners on importance of addressing female circumcision. This included training of:
  - 4 local NGOs
  - Association for promoting the rights of women and girls
  - Language teachers and school principles
  - Midwives
  - Religious leaders (Muslim and Christian)
  - Local leaders and journalists
  - Volunteers and project coordinators

This was followed by steps to design project activities through a participatory process with all the stakeholders who now had a clear understanding and commitment to dealing with the issue of female circumcision in their communities.

## *Types of programs to address discriminatory social beliefs and practices*

In this module we will outline the different types of programming efforts that can be employed to implement projects to address discriminatory social beliefs and practices that have been proven to be successful. However, as was said, some programs may require the application of more than one of these approaches to meet their objectives. It is imperative that once the objectives are set, the most effective approach for implementation must be identified.

### 1) Capacity Building

Improving capacity is a key strategy in addressing social determinants of gender inequity.

'Capacity' must include the human, economic, and organizational resources to take action. Often groups and individuals that are directly or indirectly involved in gender programming do not have the information and resources to respond appropriately to the underlying social practices that may undermine their work.

Capacity building programs should be directed to:

1. government and civil society groups working in the field
2. program implementers

Capacity building exercises should focus on:

1. Sensitizing programmers, stakeholders, and partners on negative social practices
2. Skills building on program development, management, and monitoring and evaluation to integrate assessment of negative social practices.
3. Increasing stakeholders' capacity for implementing different approaches to advocacy, networking, and building partnerships<sup>(25)</sup>.

In addition to skills on addressing social beliefs and practices, capacity building should provide resources that promote:

1. Responsibility and leadership
2. Authority
3. Access to and control over resources.

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25- See Halim M. Gender-based Violence and Civic Education: Combating Violence in Darfur. CAWTAR, 2007.

## 2) Provision of services

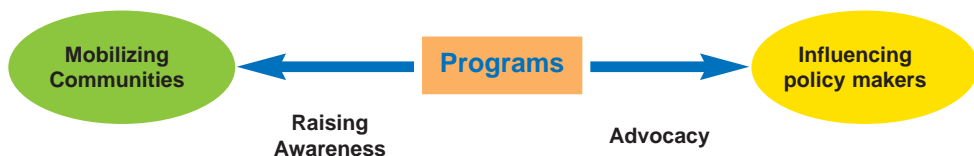
The direct provision of services such as family planning services or counseling for victims of violence is a challenging process. This is due to the fact that services are often provided in a complex and often adversarial social and cultural context. In addition, it is very difficult to find qualified and well trained personnel who can provide services. For the program to be successful, it has to reach those most in need in the community who are often not aware of the services being supplied or are afraid to access them. Finally, these types of services are often not well funded and even when a program is launched it is difficult to find resources for sustainability.

More specifically, you should ensure that your program addresses the following:

Examples of Service Provision Programs for Women in Different Spheres*	
Sphere	Service
<b>Information, Education, Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scholarships and grants to allow women to go to university, study abroad, etc.</li> <li>• Adult literacy classes through innovative teaching methods that help in strengthening customary beliefs and traditions that empower women (traditional poetry)</li> <li>• Workshops to train women on accessing information technology and using emails and so on.</li> </ul>
<b>Gender-based Violence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services for victims of violence: medical, psychological counseling, legal counseling</li> <li>• Referral services to specialized facilities</li> <li>• Services for street children: education, health, income generating activities; legal and human rights</li> </ul>
<b>Economy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Micro-credit loans</li> <li>• Social services to women in formal and informal sectors</li> <li>• Child care services</li> <li>• Legal counseling</li> </ul>
<b>Raising Voices/ Voice Building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal counseling support to women running for office</li> <li>• Education and training on leadership skills</li> </ul>
<b>Reproductive Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer education on sexual and reproductive health issues</li> <li>• Family planning services</li> </ul>

\* These examples are from CAWTAR commissioned studies

1. The program has to be participatory in the way it's developed and implemented. Efforts have to be undertaken to ensure that local community and its leaders are supportive of the program.
2. The Program should be based on the principle of non-discrimination. Services should be provided to all without discrimination as to race, religion, etc. Those most vulnerable and in need of services must be consulted on how to ensure that services reach them.
3. The Program must make efforts to ensure that services will be physically accessible to its clients and that services are free or affordable.
4. The Program must have a clear method to ensure that clients and the community are aware of services and can access them (an information strategy must be included in planning).
5. Services provided should be made available in sufficient quantity to serve the targeted community. For example, if it is the provision of health services, there must be a functioning health-care facilities with all required goods and services.
6. In planning and designing the program, efforts should be made to ensure that services are provided in a culturally acceptable manner.
7. The services being provided must be based on scientifically and medically appropriate standards and guidelines.
8. It is imperative that the quality of the services are maintained by personnel trained to run the program and that the content of the materials and services provided are based on international and national standards of care.
9. Services should be comprehensive. Often services are needed to prevent an issue and also provide treatment to those already affected. For example, if setting up a counseling service for women suffering from violence, a complementary approach is to provide services that will lessen violence amongst women and also provide services for the victims of violence.



*The Connection between Advocacy and Raising Awareness*

## Advocacy - Programs to Advocate for new Law or Legal Reform:

Advocacy is a cornerstone strategy for social transformation of discriminatory beliefs and practices. Advocacy at different levels is important for several reasons: 1) it raises awareness of those in power and decision-making roles of issues affecting women; and 2) it demands change in the laws, policies, and structures that negatively impact women.

Often organizations use advocacy strategies in their work even if this is not part of their agenda. This helps to define your advocacy efforts to make them more concrete and effective.

Advocacy requires asking three questions upon commencing the initiative:

- **What?** What the policy or law is and the impact of it on women and the community (this could also include unwritten policies and laws). Remember: involve those affected by the policy or law in discussions to understand the extent of its impact.
- **How?** How the policy or law can be improved. Remember: Suggestions for improvement should ensure non-discrimination for all.
- **Who?** Which individuals or sectors influence this policy or law. Remember: you need to be specific about which individuals hold accountability to be focused on your advocacy.

## *Quota System*

Khadeja Bargouthi, Expert, Palestine

In 2002, the Palestinian Women's Federation launched a campaign to promote the adoption of a 20% quota for women in the Legislative Assembly and Local Councils. Some of the lessons learned in successfully launching such an advocacy effort included:

### ***1) Lessons Learned on how to mobilize actors to form coalition and campaign or coalition***

- Putting together a Coordinating Body that works to mobilize different women's groups on a common agenda and ensure effective communication between the different groups.
- Putting together a clear and Common Vision for the groups working together.
- Setting clear targets for accomplishing the objectives of the groups.

### ***2) Lessons learned on how to work in partnerships***

- Ensuring there is clear differentiation in the roles of the different groups and that roles are complementary and supportive of each other.
- Avoiding internal conflicts between coalition partners by ensuring there are no mechanisms or activities that create an environment of competitiveness deviating from the common goals and objectives.
- Building on general ideas and commonalities to create momentum to implement the common goals, and not focusing on differences among groups.

### ***3) Lessons learned on how to influence key actors***

- It is important to identify key actors of influence on the campaign and try to advocate to them through different means and activities such as holding meetings, and writing petitions
- It is important to monitor events and activities to ensure that the campaign stays abreast of important developments in the arena. This ensures that the campaign responds quickly and effectively to new developments.

### ***4) Lessons learned on how to respond to challenges***

- Reviewing the law and legal means to respond to any setbacks
- Increasing direct advocacy to supportive elements and constituents.
- Negotiation

## Raising Awareness

Raising awareness is another key strategy to transformative changes in society to address discrimination and inequity. Informing the public, decision makers, NGOs, and other actors on the importance of the issue you are addressing will mobilize the community to address the issue and garner the political will needed to implement the project. Raising awareness dispels misconceptions that often impede the support of the community to the programs, and provide a sense of ownership among the community to the project which will ultimately ensure its sustainability.

- Although closely linked to advocacy, raising awareness focuses on mobilizing the community to consequently advocate for change, however it is important to differentiate the two as they require different tools and strategies.
- There are many tools as part of information, education and communication (IEC) models for raising awareness.
- It is really important that the team working on the project fully understand the concepts and topic area that is being worked on. Often even within the same organization, members have different values and understanding of what distinct concepts such as nondiscrimination and equality mean. Prior to the implementation of the project, it is therefore really important to conduct meetings and trainings within the organization to ensure all those involved in the project understand and apply the same values and principles.

Raising awareness requires a multifaceted approach that combines evidence-based strategies and innovative tools that can change mindsets of the community:

- 1) Conduct preliminary information gathering to demonstrate and prove beyond doubt the root causes of discriminatory practices to be targeted by the program.
- 2) Disseminate findings on a wide scale through forms of communication that will reach targeted groups such as media and will alter existing perceptions and increase supporters to the issue.
- 3) Entrench new mindset through targeted and more focused programs such as educational seminars at universities, the creation of a website, and more focused TV programs. Before they are aired, media messages should always be pre-tested among a sample of the target population.

## Removing the Honor from “Crimes of Honor”: A Project to Change the Jordanian Mindset

*Yusuf Mansour,*

E-Consultant Group, Jordan

According to official figures, almost 28 Jordanian women are killed annually in incidents specifically attributed to honor. However, independent groups stress that this number is much greater because such killings often take place in rural and Bedouin areas and are hidden by society to avoid social scandals. Crimes of honor or "honor" killings are legitimized de facto by Article 340 (No.16, 1960) of the Jordanian penal code. The code states that "he who discovers his wife or one of his female relatives committing adultery and kills, wounds, or injures one of them, is exempted from any penalty".

This project seeks to show that women who are murdered in the name of honor are victims of a crime that is based on poverty and ignorance, not on moral, societal, or religious grounds.

The overall goal of the project is to remove the "honor" ingredient from so-called "crimes of honor" and replace it in the Jordanian psyche with a "poverty" emblem, thus making the crime simply a crime of economics and eliminating the false moral underpinnings of the label. Both society and the person that propagates such crimes will come to view the crimes as shameful acts which derogate, not enhance social status. Ultimately, society and its institutions will increase the punishment for the crime. Just like any other crime committed against society, the community, whether in the local or national context, will first condemn such acts, and then punish their perpetrators rather than justify and abet their actions.

The project will be conducted in two phases. The first phase will execute empirical data collection, modeling, and the dissemination of documented findings to stakeholders, community leaders, and relevant government organizations, NGOs, and international organizations. The second stage of the project will be the launching of a national media campaign to change the mindset of the Jordanian public with special emphasis on rural areas.

A message that the producer considers clear may be misinterpreted by members of the target population. Such misunderstandings can hinder the successful implementation of a project.

Examples of Advocacy and Raising Awareness Programs for Women in Different Spheres	
Sphere	Service
Information, Education, Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conduct analysis of traditional and modern literature to assess the existing patterns of social relation</li> <li>- Establishing an Internet Site that serves as a forum to discuss women's issues</li> </ul>
Gender-based Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Capacity building of organizations to recognize violence in their work</li> <li>- Creating networks that work collaboratively on violence</li> </ul>
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disseminate positive examples of successful women's projects to mobilize communities to support women's projects</li> <li>- Sensitization and capacity building of authorities for increasing women's participation in development projects</li> </ul>
Raising Voices/Voice Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Launching campaign to promote adoption of quota for women in government</li> <li>- Using state-sanctioned institutions (such as universities) to integrate gender issues</li> </ul>
Reproductive Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Awareness programs for men</li> <li>- Disseminating information to break the silence on issues such as abortion and gender-based violence.</li> </ul>





**Module IV:**

**Strategies for Effective Implementation of Projects  
to Address Discriminatory Social Beliefs and Practices**

## Module IV: Strategies for Effective Implementation of Projects to Address Discriminatory Social Beliefs and Practices

### 1) Identifying and Mitigating Challenges of Program Implementation

When designing and implementing the project, it will be based on the priorities you picked after the analysis stage, once the goals and objectives are set, and there is sense of the resources and partners. In the design stage, the outcomes or results that are necessary should be considered. There are tools that are useful at this stage of your project (e.g. Results-Based Management – RBM – used by some UN agencies such as UNFPA).

One important point that must be kept in mind during the design phase is that the amount of time required to achieve social change and transformation is often longer than the time and resources available for a single project. It is therefore critical to assess how the activities (or inputs) of the project will impact longer term change.

At this stage the key questions to ask are: who should be involved in the implementation stage and what is their role? What activities will need to be undertaken to meet each of the program objectives? What indicators will be used to assess inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impact of the project?

Throughout implementation, flexibility is critical for success as unexpected hurdles will undoubtedly arise and the project's activities will need to be adapted. Some of the challenges that can be faced in implementation include:

- **Overcoming lack of political will.** This is one of the most daunting challenges facing organizations working on sensitive issues that impact social and cultural context. Being steadfast and mobilizing the community and stakeholders on the importance of the issue should help improve political will.

*Fatma Alkhory,*  
Women Internet, Mauritania

In Mauritania, the organization ICT and Citizenship faced many political challenges in setting its first website for women. The organization encountered constraints in gaining official recognition and support at the national level. In addition, the government provided limited funding. The main strategy for facing this challenge was to insist on self reliance, refusal to adopt political, religious, or ethnic agendas and working on building team spirit.

■ **Choosing partners.** Sometimes it is extremely difficult to find partners to work with in the field particularly if you don't have the resources to build the capacity of your partners before beginning the activities of the project. It may be best to set some preliminary criteria for choosing partners such as: the organization has some expertise of working in the field; is well established and respected in their community; located in a geographic region where the issue being addressed is prevalent (thus not requiring staff to travel extensively); have human and/or financial resources to contribute to the project.

■ **Agreeing on objectives and activities among different partners:** This requires openness and honesty in sharing views and willingness to learn from one another. This challenge is overcome by setting a framework for working together that is put together through a participatory process. In order to succeed, it is vital that differences are respected, focus is placed on issues shared rather than those which divide and that the collaboration and dialogue is built on the strengths of different stakeholders instead of on their weaknesses. Furthermore, it is important that the dialogue takes place in an action-oriented context. If it is initiated simply as an exercise for a search for common ground without any ambition to implement or to act together, the level of achievement, then, is likely to remain lower. It is easier for all to remain steady within their own agendas and not to engage into a true dialogue, which would build common reality, without an action-oriented approach<sup>(26)</sup>.

■ **Recruiting and retaining qualified personnel:** Lack of permanent staff is often one of the main challenges that face projects. This is a huge challenge particularly in the face of limited funding. As a starting point, it is important that staff are appropriately compensated based on local and national standards of pay. In addition, their participation in all the stages of the project and ensuring their voices are heard in planning and development will help increase commitment and sense of ownership to the project.

*Manal Halim,*  
SIHA

The SIHA (The Horn of Africa Women's Initiative Network) works in Darfur, Sudan to provide services for victims of gender-based violence. One of the main challenges that the Center faces is the lack of specialized human resources. The Center works to provide services on two fronts: arranging psychological services and providing general counseling and referrals to women in general. To address this challenge, the Center is currently evaluating its services to determine how best to define its mandate and accordingly seek funding for appropriate human resources

26- Helsinki Process. Mobilising Political Will: Report from the Helsinki Process on Globalisation and Democracy.  
[http://www.cmi.fi/files/HP\\_report\\_HG.pdf](http://www.cmi.fi/files/HP_report_HG.pdf).

To the extent possible, their roles should be clearly defined based on the project's objectives and activities so as to avoid confusion (see example). Finally, there should be constant activities that provide information to staff on the status of projects and continuous professional development and opportunities for learning.

■ **Mobilizing the community and building trust.** Addressing hesitancy of targeted groups and those that will be affected to collaborate in the project due to their doubts about the project is a challenge faced by many organizations. It is important to ensure the principle of participation of all stakeholders in all phases of the project.

*Nagwa Adra,*  
Consultant

In Yemen, men in the community expressed their resistance to the literacy project for women by looting the classrooms. Local leaders were asked to talk to the men allowing them to air their concerns. Once the project and its goals were explained to them and the looting stopped.

■ **Resource mobilization and funding.** Funding is one of the biggest challenges facing organizations across the board. Often, funding is received for one phase of the project and in cases where a project is funded, organizations find themselves identifying ways to continue with activities beyond the life of the project. It is therefore critical to think of sustainability strategies from the onset and build them into projects in the design stage. Another way to overcome funding challenges is partnering with other organizations that can provide complementary services. Another strategy is to organize fundraising campaigns and concerts that can be coordinated by volunteers.

## 2) Partnerships and Networking: How to promote partnerships and networks to collaboratively address discriminatory social beliefs and practices

To meet the sometimes daunting aims of gender equality and women empowerment requires the coordination and collaboration of different partners at multiple levels. Building partnerships is a difficult exercise. However, the success or failure of partnerships in a project can influence the way policies and programs are implemented in their region, and challenge and alter the outcomes of projects. The value of building partnerships can not be stressed enough.

The ICPD Programme of Action states that “in recognition of the importance of effective partnership, non-governmental organizations are invited to foster coordination, cooperation and communication at the local, national, regional and international levels and with local and national governments, to reinforce their effectiveness as key participants in the implementation of population and development programmes and policies.” Goal 8 of the Millennium Development Goals states the aim to: ‘Develop a Global Partnership for Development.’

- Effective partnerships cement ideas and concerns that are based on a shared vision and strategy and therefore will impact the long-term success of any policy or program.
- In addition, through partnerships the sharing of knowledge and information is facilitated particularly with those with little access to information.
- Partnerships must be built to create a critical mass through the engagement of the public sector and government agencies, the private and business sectors, and civil society organizations.
- Unrelenting commitments to accountability and transparency are key components of effective partnerships.

The following are elements for establishing effective partnerships<sup>(27)</sup> :

**Identify who potential partners are: who is working locally, regionally, and internationally on the specific topic being worked on.**

- International NGOs: IPPF, IPAS, Care, etc.
- International development agencies: UNDP, UNFPA, UNIFEM, World Bank., etc.
- Bilaterals: USAID, Dfid, CIDA, etc. Government
- National and community level NGOs

**Define the relationship and expectations with each potential partner.** Before getting started, carefully consider the type of partnership and define what is likely to be the type of collaboration that will be mutually beneficial for all partners? Is the partner a funding agency? Are their policies and missions in line with your organization?

**Strategic Planning for long-term partnerships.** Develop plans based on the understanding that it takes time to build true partnerships. A strategic joint plan for cooperation can be often put together for periods of 3 – 5 years. Give careful thought to how long-term plans are best implemented.

**Build capacity for effective collaboration.** Value the skills that are needed for effective collaboration, and give careful thought to the project's non-technical components. For example, do not underestimate the need for a strategic communications plan. The abilities to build trust and communicate with sensitivity are as important to a project's success as scientific, technical, and organizational skills. Include impact planning, monitoring, and assessment as elements in the design and evaluation of research projects and programs.

**Joint Management.** Collaborate on management issues, for example preparing the research agenda of the project or program, budgeting funds, and designing organizational structures, such as committees.

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27- Adapted from Canadian Coalition for Global Health Research. Knowledge Dossiers - Introduction to Building Partnerships for Research in Global Health. Available at: [http://www.ccghr.ca/default.cfm?content=dossier\\_bp\\_intro&lang=e&subnav=dossiers](http://www.ccghr.ca/default.cfm?content=dossier_bp_intro&lang=e&subnav=dossiers). Accessed on: October 17, 2007.

### 3) Strategies for Ensuring Sustainability of Projects

Sustainability of the project should be discussed, planned for, and incorporated into the projects objectives and initial phase. Often the priorities of funders change annually or based on the agency's strategic plans. It is therefore important to continue to meet with funders and understand how to align different stakeholders strategic visions and objectives.

- Effectively monitoring and evaluating activities will be important to help in planning for your next phases and ultimately for the sustainability of the project. For example, monitoring can help keep track of women that have not returned for services. Understanding the reasons behind their lack of participation will assist in revising activities and ensuring that retention rates are higher.
- It is therefore very useful to put together a strategy for sustainability. The strategy for sustainability should address some key aspects such as<sup>(28)</sup>:
  - i. Maintaining comparative advantage of the project. Thus keeping abreast of what others are doing and determining the value-added of your project. This is particularly of importance in projects to provide services that find competition with the public and private sectors.
  - ii. Expanding and maintaining the network of partners. Ways can be found to collaborate, share costs, and find strategies for jointly raising funds.
  - iii. Expanding activities to include more recipients of activities or services.
  - iv. Recovering some costs through selling products and including token fees for services. It is important however to ensure that the costs incurred for services should not limit access to services or the quality of services provided.
  - v. Investing some of the organizations income through different and appropriate investment opportunities.
  - vi. Establishing and continuously improving the information database and documentation systems.
  - vii. Instituting criteria and guidelines for maintenance of quality of activities and services.
  - viii. Ensuring staff and partners are continuously in communication about activities (challenges, quality, etc.) through regular meetings and surveys.
  - ix. Instituting effective supervision and accountability structures that include internal evaluations for technical and management arms of activities.

28- Alkharouf A. Experience of the Jordanian Reproductive Health Association. CAWTAR, 2007.

## 4) Setting monitoring and evaluation structure to assess changes in social beliefs and practices

Monitoring and evaluation is one of the key activities of any project. Monitoring and evaluation requires the setting up of input, output, and outcome indicators to assess progress and effectiveness of activities. There are many existing tools and publications on how to set up monitoring and evaluation structures for projects. However, monitoring and evaluation can be a challenging process for projects that address

social beliefs and practices which are hard to assess and measure. The impact of the project on transforming social constructs and norms may require long periods of time that go beyond the resources available to an organization. Below are some of the issues to be aware of as you determine your indicators for monitoring and evaluation for projects to address social beliefs and practices and gender equity.

**Participatory monitoring and evaluation:** It is important to make sure that the target groups and stakeholders are involved in the monitoring and evaluation activities. This allows for activities to be continuously amended based on the needs of the community. It is also important to measure the extent to which target groups have been impacted by activities.

**Using Existing Indicators.** There are many international targets, tools, and indicators that already exist to assess gender equality. These can be used or amended to apply to your local context or as a means for analysis and comparison. For example, the ILO gender equality indicators (in the box below) include assessing “labor force participation rate”. However, some economists are beginning to question this criterion.

### Millennium Development Goals

#### Goal 3:

Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

#### Indicators:

- Share of women in non-agricultural wage employment
- Share of women in single or lower houses of parliament

The Arab Project for the Protection of Street Children used a comprehensive and participatory approach to address the issue of street children. To evaluate the extent to which the project addressed needs of its target group, indicators were integrated that assessed the extent to which:

- the skills of the children were developed
- they were engaged in project activities
- their awareness was raised on social and health issues
- they were involved in income generating programs

A young mother with several children is contributing to development but is not in formal labor force, and it may even be exploitative to encourage such women to join the labor force. Therefore, this indicator alone may not be sufficient to assess gender equity in labor force. Measuring process and quality of activities. It is important to go beyond monitoring outcomes of the project and include activities that ensure the process of implementation is sound and effective. This is particularly important for several reasons in projects and activities that ultimately aim to bring about transformations in behaviors and practices: it will be easier to become aware of challenges that arise as they happen and fix them before it is too late; it will ensure that all those involved in implementation follow procedural and ethical standards and thus promote accountability; and it will be better evidence as to the impact of the project on ultimately improving women's empowerment. Another important aspect is the quality of your inputs, outputs and outcomes. It is not sufficient to measure that an activity (e.g. a training has taken place) or policy has been put in place, but to ensure that the content of the training and policy are appropriate. For example, although an output indicator maybe the number of workshop trainings conducted for women in a community, a process indicator is that training was open to all women of the community and that the materials of the training were pilot tested for cultural appropriateness.

### Examples of Indicators for working in the Economic Sphere

ILO indicators<sup>(29)</sup> used to evaluate gender equality that you can use in your project:

- labor force participation rate
- employment and unemployment rates
- female share in both “non-agricultural and total paid employment”
- female shares in legislative and managerial positions
- gender pay gap

These can be linked to indicators to measure social practices and beliefs such as:

- **Socio-cultural:** division of parental duties between mothers and fathers in the home; women need to obtain the consent of men to work; negative perceptions of women's ability to effectively work in certain fields or to take leadership positions; perceptions towards women's education
- **Legal:** laws that limit agency of women; laws on maternity leave; laws on safe working conditions; laws on equal pay
- **Religious:** the religious practices that can support or impede women's participation in economy; who the moral authorities are for women.

27- These are ILO global indicators to assess gender equality.





## Module V:

### **Documentation: Sharing Knowledge and Best Practices**

## Module V: Documentation: Sharing Knowledge and Best Practices

### Why is Documentation Important?

It is important to keep track of a project's activities. This is particularly important for projects that are addressing issues that are as fluid and subjective as social beliefs and practices. Documentation is critical for various reasons for the organization and others working in the field. Organizations often find themselves expending large amounts of resources recreating projects because there is no documentation of the methods and processes undertaken in the past. The know-how evaporates with changes in leadership and staff or from project to new project. Documentation therefore allows for continuity in the life of projects and for constructively building on past experiences and good practices.

#### Documenting processes will help an organization to:

- avoid obstacles in the future
- adapt projects to changes and needs
- inspire ideas for new projects and interventions
- build on previous projects and knowledge
- promote sustainability
- save on time and resources in developing new projects
- have the confidence to make timely decisions that are backed up by evidence

Beyond the work of the organization, documentation of projects serves as an important vehicle for sharing knowledge and best practices with other organizations and institutions. As we have seen, partnering and networking is a key strategy in efforts to address social discriminatory practices. Documentation allows for sharing of knowledge between organizations in order to replicate good practices and avoid the challenges of implementation. Experience has shown that often, more so than the outcomes of a project, the process of implementation serves as a better indicator of why a project was or was not successful. Capturing the processes will therefore prove more useful for others wishing to undertake similar efforts.

Documentation also serves as an excellent advocacy tool. Most often those resistant to social change can refuse supporting programs and allocating resources on the basis that there are no positive examples on the effectiveness of a particular method or strategy. Therefore building the evidence on the effectiveness of different methods and tools to address gender discrimination in the Arab region will support activists, the media, and policy makers for demanding changes in policy and increased funding.

## What Are the Different Types of Documentation?

There are two types of documentation that an organization can do:

- i) Documentation for project implementation
- ii) Documentation for sharing knowledge and good practices

There are different ways of going about these two different types of documentation.

### *Documentation for Project Implementation*

In designing and developing a project, you have to consider how information for different purposes will be collected, stored, and used. The key steps in documentation are at the situational analysis stage and monitoring and evaluation. For the situational analysis, document the context being worked in to understand the gaps and how the project will be an added value. This information is collected from existing material (literature reviews, statistics, reports, etc.) or through new research that your organization will put together (surveys, interviews, workshops, etc.).

Monitoring and evaluation also requires a clear system of documentation to ensure information on activities are collected in a timely and accurate fashion.

### *Documentation for Sharing Knowledge and Good Practices*

To promote sharing of knowledge and good practices with others working in the field requires a system of effectively documenting and keeping track of information. It is not sufficient to have a good system for only storing information but it has to be effective for retrieving and sharing information. While there is a need to be thorough in documenting best practices, final products that are shared with others need to be concise and practical. This means that the criteria need to be clarified – what is considered a best practice and why? Some criteria for consideration include:

- the methodology of the project is innovative and evidence-informed
- the project is participatory in all aspects
- the project has effective monitoring and evaluation structures
- the project is sustainable
- there are activities that promote social transformation
- the project presents lessons for replication
- the project was successful in meeting its objectives through sound processes

## Criteria for an Effective Documentation System

- Setting a structure and plan for documentation at the beginning will ease the process and make it less onerous for staff. This includes planning for resources needed for documentation and budgeting for it in project development.
- It is important to set up a documentation system that may include a database (using basic software such as Microsoft Access or more specialized software depending on the needs and capacity). The database should be flexible, not complicated, and conforms to known standards. It must be useful for storing, retrieving, and sharing information.
- Staff must be aware of the importance of documentation to their work, and should be trained on how to store and retrieve information from documentation system. This ensures that information is collected correctly and staff know the value added of documentation and do not feel that it is an unnecessary task.

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# Workbook Team

Prepared by Shahira Ahmed, consultant

## Reviewers

Dr. Soukeina Bouraoui, Director of Project  
Adila Abusharaf, Project Coordinator

## Cobtributors

Miss Sara Mohamed, York University  
Mrs Salwa, Ghaouani, Journalist, CAWTAR

## Authors of Workbook Background Empricial Studies

Dr. Yousif Mansour, Managing Partner Econsultant Group, Jordan  
Dr. Najwa Adra, Independent Consultant, USA  
Mrs Fatma bint Alkory, Executive Director of ICT and Citizenship NGO,  
Mauritania  
Mrs Noha Bayoumi, Lecturer, Univesity of Lebanon  
Mrs Katheryn Spellman, Lecturer, Syrcuse University and SOAS, London  
Mrs Manal Halim, Coordinator of SIHA African Network in Darfour, Sudan  
Mr. Mahir Bushara, Director of Better Life Association, Egypt  
Mr. Bassam Aicha, Consultant  
Mrs. al Jawhara Alwabi, Director of Women Organization, Saudi Arabia  
Mrs. Afaf Azzeddine, Consultant, Sudan  
Mr. Sami Zouari, Lecturer University of Sfakis, Tunisia  
Mrs Khadeja Bargouti, Expert, Palestine  
Mrs Leila DeVriese, Zayed University, UAE  
Dr. Abdelaziz Zouari, Tunisia Youth Scout  
Dr. Mrs Leila Hessini, IPAS, Morocco  
Dr. Amel Kharouf, Head of Women Studies Program University of Jordan