



The Dynamics of Discriminatory Social Beliefs and Practices and Gender Equity in the Arabic-Speaking MENA Region: Lessons Learned in the Last Twenty Years and the Way Forward

**By CAWTAR
2008**

INTRODUCTION

International debate underlines the myopic nature of the understanding that increased access by women to the formal sector and legal rights is in conjunction with economic growth. Instead, it contends that social institutions - laws, norms, and traditions - constitute the key factor determining women's freedom of choice in all domains. Accordingly, it calls upon policy makers and donors to focus on practices of social institutions.

The Center for Arab Women Training and Research (CAWTAR) has launched its project on gender equity and discriminatory social practices in 2005. The objective of the project is to document experiences to learn from what has worked and what has not within the last twenty years. This is basically to capitalize on best practices accumulated over this period to strengthen institutional strategies to effectively implement, measure the impact and ensure the sustainability of other relevant present and future projects. The main components of this project are described below.

The project began with a call for studies based on evaluation of either ongoing or completed programs or initiatives which had addressed certain types of discriminatory social practices or beliefs. The focus of the sixteen assessed programs and initiatives varies: sub-regional; national and local as well as their priority area differs: physical security; education, communication; reproductive health; economic participation and voice building, literature and arts and transformative discourse. The authors of these studies are: consultants, field-workers, university professors, representatives of NGOs including seven members of CAWTAR's Arab Network for Gender and Development (@NGED). The full texts of the evaluation studies are accessible at the project's website <<http://genderequity.cawtar.org>>. In addition, Dr. Hoda Badran, the Scientific coordinator of the project, prepared a conceptual background paper which consolidated the regional lessons learned from the assessed programs and initiatives to illustrate guidelines for better implementation of future projects. The paper is also published in the project's website.

Based on the lessons accumulated from assessed initiatives and programs, the project produced capacity-building materials including: a compendium of best practices and a workbook tailored for NGOs to enhance their knowledge and use of these practices. The copies of these products are available in print as well as electronically accessible at the

1. Types of Discriminatory Social Practices and Beliefs

Despite significant strides in education, health and economy in the Arabic speaking MENA region, the discriminatory social practices and beliefs that intersect gender equity are ever present, to the extent that they render women decline to exercise their own rights or to benefit from social services available to them. These social practices and beliefs stem from a set of principles, norms or customs that are either based on religious grounds or archaic traditions which overtime societies come to believe and follow as if they have religious origins. Gender equity entails fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men. It often requires women-specific programs and policies to end existing inequalities.

This section covers the various types of discriminatory practices tackled by the programs and initiatives assessed by the studies submitted under CAWTAR's project. A background of these practices is important to understand the origins and consequences of these practices in order to identify what is needed to tackle them either by policy makers, donors or regional networks.

1.1. Physical Security

1.1.1 Honor Crimes

By Dr. Yusuf Mansur, Managing Partner En-Consult Group, Jordan (Local)

The submitted case study focuses on a research initiative attempting to address honor crimes committed on girls and women in Jordan. This crime stems from ancient traditions and misinterpretation of religious principles and is committed in the name of the honor of the man, family and community.

According to the study, honor crimes in Jordan are predominantly committed in rural, economically disenfranchised, poverty-stricken areas. Essentially, domestic violence in these areas turns to "honor killings" which penalize women for their defiance of family honor norms. According to official figures, almost 28 Jordanian women are killed annually in incidents related to honor. Such killings often take place in rural and Bedouin areas and are hidden by the families of the victims to avoid social scandals. Moreover, when such a crime is reported, it is usually labeled as an accident, a suicide,

Their obedience is a manifestation of respect of both the prevalent masculine culture and the opinion of the traditional leaders of the FGM a religious order [it is worth noting that religious views on FGM are contradicting and there is no reference to such practices in the Koran]. More alarmingly, the practice becomes a source of income for doctors and midwives and a sensitive social issue to tamper with. The innovativeness of the approach of the Better Life Association program to this social practice is that it exposes the FGM as an act of violence rather than a social norm. From gender equity perspectives, the program looked at both the enabling and disabling factors in relation to health and social services as a way to address the FGM through both deterring and proactive measures. The program has had notable successes in raising awareness at both the social and service-providing level and has rescued over 5000 girls from being subjected to FGM.

1.1.3 Sexual Violence

By Manal Halim, Program Officer, SIHA Network (local)

The case study covers the experience of the regional network SIHA in support of women victims of sexual violence due to the outbreak of civil war in Darfur, in western Sudan. Sexual violence while prohibited by the religion and abhorred by society, has intensified during war as an expression of deeply embedded social notions of masculinity and power relations leading to the treatment of women as a tool to disdain the honor of enemy.

The civil war has subjected Darfurian Sudanese women to serious violations of their human rights such as rape and kidnapping. While sexual violence is apprehended by the society and religion, its exercise is embedded in historical discrimination against women on the basis of their gender. Sexual violence during armed-conflicts is employed as a strategy to gain power through intimidation and dishonoring the enemy tribes with whom they do not share an ethnic origin. As a result, it has an adverse effect on the human security of women. As a consequence of social taboos on sexual relations, women bear the pains due to the social values that give greater deference to reputation of the tribe. Women are prosecuted when reporting their rape cases and face harsh criminal charges. In some instances, the overwhelming feeling of shame dissuades them from seeking the protection of the justice system.

The Arab Declaration (which emerged from the conference on Childhood and Development held in Tunisia in 1986) confirmed that the living standard of family is the main variable when children's economic conditions are assessed. Several studies found that street children were mostly from families that generate their income from informal economic activities. Some also relate this phenomenon to school withdrawals, mainly resulting from limited government subsidy on education services or the absence of a quality education. Other studies relate the situation to family violence or break-up. In addition, there is a lack of accurate data and statistics on the number of street children in the Arab region. Some estimate that in Syria there are 277, in Lebanon there are thousands (including foreigners), in Palestine 63,600, almost none in Jordan, 7,000 in Yemen, 93,500 in Egypt, 85,000 in Sudan, and 234, 000 in Morocco. With respect to their perception socially, street children are considered criminals and/or frowned upon. Accordingly the correctional programs and laws are formulated in a reactionary rather than proactive way, and essentially contribute to the suppression and the high rates of criminality among these children. Due to gender discrimination, street girls suffer twice and subjected to different forms of exploitation by the society and the street children communities. The Arab Council for Childhood Projects for the Protection of Street Children is distinguished in many respects. It aims to address problems of street children through coordinating regional, national and local efforts while benefiting from existing international programs in the same field. In addition, its approach is based on raising social awareness of the problem of street children and building capacities to work with both victims and societies. The Council adopted a participatory approach in the project's planning, implementation, and monitoring using children's rights as the conceptual foundation of its proposed strategies.

2. Reproductive Health

2.1. Controversy of Family Planning

By Dr. Amel Kharouf, Head of Women Studies Program, University of Jordan (National)

The case study focuses on family planning as a controversial social issue on the one hand religious conservative views consider sinful and social policy on the other encourages for effective economic growth.

If a woman has an unintended pregnancy, her decision to resort to an unsafe abortion is heavily influenced by the response of her male partner to her pregnancy, the extent of her financial dependency on him, and her concerns about the survival of her other children. Various social norms discriminate against women and limit their access to abortion services. Such standards are supported by: i) patriarchal practices, ii) constructs of gender and motherhood, iii) restrictive laws and policies, iv) persistent economic inequality, and vii) biased religious and cultural interpretations. The inability to access safe and affordable abortion services undermines gender equity and women's rights in other domains including the right to life, health, security of person, and bodily integrity. Restrictive abortion laws and inadequate services also threaten women's rights to health care. Policies are discriminatory when they impose undue prohibitions based on a woman or girl's age, marital status or ability to pay. Denying women control over their own reproductive decision-making is denial of their full citizenship, by unduly limiting their self-determination and by impeding equal participation in their country's social, political and economic life. The importance of this evaluation of abortion services in Maghreb region lies in the fact that it identifies, particularly in case of Tunisia, promising practices that challenge biased social norms and lay a foundation for future research, policy analysis and activism with respect to safe abortion in the region. This experience may be replicated in other Arab countries.

2.3 Shameful Youth Sexual Health

By Dr. AbdelAziz Zouairi, member of the Tunisian Youth Scout (National)

The case study evaluates the experience of the Tunisian Youth Scout in raising awareness of the risk of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, which happen to be socially apprehended.

Some school-aged children who do not attend school, and slightly half of these are girls, are worst-affected by STDs-- HIV and AIDS. The majority of the 10-24 year olds are not in school and these out-of-school youth are at a disproportionately higher risk to contract STDs and HIV infection. The infected girls encounter difficulties in reporting their cases to health-care providers due to social norms. For the same reason the healthy ones shy away from attending educational programs on these issues. The Tunisian Youth Scout provides out-of-school young girls and boys with accurate information and life skills related to reproductive and sexual health and rights, and how to protect themselves from the risks of HIV/AIDS.

Nonetheless social mores require women to be represented by their male kin; as a result, their real access to justice depends on the character and integrity of their fathers, brothers and sons. When rural women participated actively in the subsistence economy, they enjoyed greater mobility and political participation. Their economic contribution provided them with important safety nets. A monetized economy, urbanism and recently imported conservative religious views reduce women's economic contributions and encourage cultural ideals that favor women's seclusion. These factors, in turn, limit women's access to health, education and economic, political and social empowerment. One goal of this project is to restore women's sense of competence and their willingness to express themselves. The program's accomplishments are numerous. In terms of raising awareness, learners developed a new appreciation for education that is evidenced by their demand for a second year of instruction. They also demonstrated a new interest in their children's education. Some class texts addressed the importance of educating girls. Learners were increasingly comfortable with asking questions and discussing issues of concern. In terms of sensitization of concerned groups: men in pilot communities began to demand education for the women in their families when they saw that adult women could indeed learn to read and write. What is more, all learners reported that their families treated them with increased respect. Spaces and mechanisms adopted by the project to allow target groups to express their views. Learners were encouraged to ask questions and express their opinions. Many responded to national and international events with new poetry. Additionally, in two of the pilot communities, learners initiated health interventions in response to class discussions devoted to health issues.

3.2. Social Gossip and Discouragement of Females Educated Abroad in Libya (National)

By Kathryn Spellman, Syracuse University

The case study evaluated the Libyan Higher Education Grant to encourage Libyan women to study abroad. It focuses on social gossip that these women have to deal with upon return to their home country.

The transformation of gender roles in public life has also been a central feature of Gaddafi's political ideology and the education system played a crucial role in inculcating the egalitarian revolutionary ideas to the Libyan people. Changes in the policies concerning women's legal status, education and behavior were important instruments used to mark the boundaries of the Jamahiriya.

the mortality rate among pregnant women is 74.7% and; 13% of the women own businesses. There is a lack of gender equality in policies and legislation (employment, reproductive health, etc...); there is no strong religious position against women's work or her participation in society. However, the existing mechanisms are generally weak. This is due to the absence of serious efforts that focus on the promotion of the status of Mauritanian women as well as the political decisions which overrule the objective and practical aspects of validation of the existing mechanisms and the absence of qualified human resources in the field of gender equality. Authorized institutions lack the legislative and operational frameworks in order to effectively tackle gender mainstreaming in different sectors. The traditional tribal and masculine society's preparedness to accept equality is slow, as is their understanding of the importance of women's participation. Even though change has occurred in numerous ways since 1984, there is still work to be done. Advancements that have occurred include: the establishment of women's machinery and its strategy to promote women; the appointment of three women in leading governmental positions; a ministerial decree establishing a gender equality task force; women penetrated political domains, lead political parties, and ran elections; women were elected in two chambers of parliament, increasing from 5 to 17, by 2007 and compose 30.37% of the local councils; women's participation in new domains such as legal practice and military services. Even though the Internet was introduced in Mauritania in the mid-1990's, greater access to it by women has occurred after 2002 as civil society realised its importance in facilitating women's participation. The ICT and Citizenship NGO is a pioneer. It set a special website for women to educate them on citizenship issues as key to addressing the social and economic gaps created by discrimination. The beneficiary of this program routinely use ICT to communicate. They took the lead in educating women in rural areas using the knowledge they acquired from the program electronic resources.

4. Economic Participation

4.1 Male Guardianship in Saudi Arabia (Local)

By Aljawhara Alwabli , Director of Women's Charity Association, Saudi Arabia

The case study assesses the experience of the Micro Credit and the Empowerment of Women Program of King Abdel Aziz Charity Organisation. It discusses the ways in which the program attempts to address discrimination justified in the name of religion and social traditions which in effect limit women's access to economic resources and property rights in the Kingdom.

4.2 Discrimination Against Women Small Farmers in Sudan (Local)

By Afaf Azzedine, Sudanese Women Initiative Coalition

The case study evaluates the experience of the IFAD Agricultural Cooperatives project in Nihoud, south west of Sudan. Women in that area, for both religious and social traditions and customs, are denied equitable access to agricultural land and economic resources.

National legislation based on constitutional and customary laws, including gender equality in different spheres, especially in the economic and developmental sectors, was passed. Equal opportunities in the access to property, credits, and political leadership positions are provided. Institutional mechanisms are set, such as the Ministry of Women and Children's Social Affairs and Women Branches in Baraka Bank, Omdurman Bank and Family Bank. The discriminatory social practices are based on customs which are sometimes drawn from religion. Discrimination in the allocation of a women's share rendered an IFAD project to condition 15% of the funds to be directed to women. This percentage was determined on the basis of the project conducted field surveys and needs assessment. It provided full finance of cooperatives coupled with capacity building of their staff to become a medium in delivery of social services and training programs especially for women to benefit from management of their small agricultural projects notably developed close to women's households. The project to contribute to dissolution of prevalent practices and to sustain, it involved different partners in its implementation: traditional leaders, women and men small farmers and other funding institutions including the Ministry of Sudanese Agriculture; Finland International Agency for Development, the Sudanese Agriculture Bank. It targeted small groups of women and male farmers. The project structured a coordination system involving different technical units in charge of the implementation of the project in the Agricultural Bank of Sudan; local agricultural groups in Nihoud; local office of cooperatives registration; and a coordination unit between Nihoud and Khartoum. As a result, the project contributed to social awareness of the negative impact of discriminatory social practices, sensitized authorities in charge, opened spaces for female farmers to enter cooperatives that used to be managed solely by men, it facilitated women's access to the market and mobilized traditional and religious leaders to convey views in support of women's role to extend from the family's self sufficiency to the agricultural productive activities. Hence the project increased participation in agricultural production due to its successes in establishing 227 cooperatives which benefit 23,686 families with women farmers.

The first sample included 381 women and the second, 922 women. Key variables show that the ratio of weekly wages improved in 1999 and this is equally applicable to both men and women in the public and private sector. But that does not necessarily overrule the fact that a wage gap exists in the two sectors. This mainly relates to school withdrawal, a greater demand on polytechnic education, or the low percentage of women and men with a university education. Between 1991-1999, changes began to occur. The wage gap per week during this period was in favor of men. Nonetheless, this gap has narrowed due to the passing of legislation protecting equal pay. When the public and private sectors were compared, the wage gap in the public sector was at 31.5% in 1991 and became 21.8% in 1999. It was less significant in the private sector where it was 37.5% in 1991 and dropped to 33.5% in 1999. After the analysis of data, the results of the study indicate that the recruitment is highly assessed on a gender basis. Compared to men, women tend to have more opportunities in lower paid jobs and their continued work in the public sector is largely due to the social benefits which the private sector lacks. The advancement of the education system and a growing social awareness especially among women is also notable. The growing number of women's coalitions and lobbies is also a key variable in measuring the increase of women's participation in the public sector and the political domain.

5. Voice Building and Rights Awareness

5.1. Second Class Political Citizenship in Palestine (National)

By Khadeja Bargouthi, Expert

The case study assesses the struggle of the Palestinian Women's Federation to legalize the quota system. The discriminatory practices relating to traditions and religious principles are social stereotypes that disapprove women participation in political life in Palestine.

The Constitution and the legislation support gender equality. The Women's movement's struggle for the adoption of the quota in national legislation is considered a key step towards ensuring women's participation in political life. While the notion of quota is to balance power through the equitable participation of diverse social groups, and the introduction of different quotas has been promoted, in the case of women the quota system has been subjected to heated debate.

5.2. Social Taboos Around Power Relations

Arts and Literature in Lebanon, (National)

By Noha Bayoumi, University of Lebanon

The submitted research initiative study illustrates how modern literature, as written by both men and women, portrays gender relations influenced by social norms and religious views in Lebanon.

The study focuses on social transformations that occurred during the civil war era, 1975-1990, and attention is particularly paid to changes that have occurred in Lebanon within the last twenty years. The salient feature of this era is that political conflict in its drastic form, such as war, imposes specific social realities and consequently leads to unbalanced power relations between men and women. Change towards equity for women in the Lebanese system has predominantly occurred in the following two areas: legislations and policies, meanwhile it has occurred at a low pace on the social level. The types of discriminatory social practices which prevail in Lebanon exist in both the private and public realms. With respect to personal matters, discrimination intersects women's rights in marriage, the transfer of citizenship to their children, heritage, abortion and physical security from gender-based violence. At the public level, discrimination has led to low wages in the private sector, the exclusion from leading administrative positions, and inequitable access to education. In addition, economic activities for women are relatively undiversified, there is an absence of mechanisms to monitor the implementation of gender equality provided for in policies and the constitution, discrimination in training is ever present, and there is also a weak promotion of services that empower women's productivity. As a result, a double standard in legislative applications and interpretations exists. The budget lacks resources for programs for the empowerment of women. In addition, there are several obscure discriminatory practices: the men control the women and constrain their mobility; there is masculine violence and unbalanced power relations that are resistant to change; women are emotionally and sexually suppressed; there is a conservative culture which is against personal liberties; the traditional perception of intimate relations is a negative one; and there's a lack of division between love and marriage and the body and emotions. Overall, the legislature's and policy makers' ambivalence towards gender equality could be largely attributed to both religious and social norms. Within the last twenty years several changes have taken place: Lebanon adhered to

The study explores the degree of impact that TFNs have in shaping public agendas and discourse on women's empowerment and/or rights in the Arab Gulf. Like many societies in transition, the six Gulf countries offer good examples of the global forces on the one hand and efforts to preserve traditional conceptions of citizenship rights for women on the other. However, preliminary analysis of print and electronic media indicates that since 2002, the public spheres in the UAE, Bahrain, and Kuwait, for example, have become more responsive to the transnational discourse on equality and empowerment of women in the public arena. How much of this shift in attitude and even policy is in response to transnational discourse and other countervailing global forces mobilizing for women's rights, and/or human rights? And will this shift eventually spill over to the private sphere, or will gender equity come to a halt at the sacrosanct threshold of the private arena? Examining NGO activity in the UAE study is even more compelling given the dearth of research on civil society in the Arab Gulf, particularly with respect to unaffiliated NGOs working on women's issues. Because higher education and academic research are still in their nascent stages, there is very little original or raw social data on the Gulf region (i.e. other than the basic economic indicators). Nonetheless, initial examination of print and electronic media indicates that, since 2002, the public sphere in countries like the UAE, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain has become more responsive to the transnational discourse on equality and empowerment of women in the public arena. In order to understand the extent to which this shift in attitude and even policy is in response to transnational discourse and other global forces mobilizing for women's rights, it is important to first examine the negotiation of discourses on gender equity that takes place between local and transnational NGOs taking the example of the experience of TFNs in influencing the local transformative discourse on social justice and citizenship. The main findings of the evaluation of the contribution of TFNs point to the idea that, in response to the power structures' discursive oppression of subaltern women, transnational non-state actors working at the margins are on the rise. TFNs and transnational NGOs transcend the purportedly binary opposition between theory and activism as many of the members of Transformative Social Movements (TSMOS) adopt multiple identities: academics, activists, lawyers, public figures, etc. The effects of the articulation of local concerns and worldwide norms in the discourse of women's organizations are far-reaching. Pressure to professionalize activist work, which comes from the need for funding, grants, and networking on a wide geographic area, creates distance between NGOs and the local communities on whose behalf they are advocating. The issue of representation in this instance becomes a tricky one. As such, TSMOS/NGOs are often regarded with suspicion and skepticism in the developing world. Gaining greater insight into their function and activity thus counteracts the stigmatization of NGOs as agents or instruments of the West, recruited solely to implement cultural imperialist and neo-colonial agendas.

opinions are readily available to the larger public, they influence not only popular theory but also social practices. In effect, these institutions compared to the formal ones have more leverage to enhance, stop, or reverse any advances towards the eradication of discriminatory social practices and beliefs.

2.3. Customs and Traditions

The submitted case studies, though examining different themes, demonstrated the complexity of eradicating discriminatory social practices. They emphasize that the confusion between the pre-Islamic customs and actual principles of Islam over time led societies to believe that such customs are religiously endorsed. Despite the negative impact of these customs, women themselves have internalised them in order to attain respect and recognition in the eyes of their societies. While advancements in the political and economic domains contributed to social change, such as opening the public sphere for women, these customs downplay the way in which women undertake their role in the public and the private realms. Furthermore, the studies reveal that during difficult economic eras, customs legitimising the role of women only in the private domain re-emerge to justify the retrenchment of women from the labour market. Finally, the studies illustrate that while social life is not static and evolving, the acceptance of customs and traditions has, over time, allowed discriminatory social practices to reproduce themselves in different forms that inhibited women's ability to access the social services available to them and to articulate their own notions of autonomy and their role as social actors. In effect, women's marginalisation shapes itself in different degrees ranging from their inability to control their bodies to their inaudible voices in the decision-making process. Some of the studies referred to the role of the media as dualistic. Paying due deference to traditions and the political agenda of the day has contributed to raising awareness of harmful practices but at the same time, this is exploited as a space to diffuse conservative views of women's roles in the public sphere.

3. Lessons- Learned

While the studies, the conceptual papers, the compendium of best practices and the workbook cover the lessons learned from assessed programs and initiatives the submitted studies put forward and their replicability across different sectors, for the purpose of this publication such lessons are used to learn about what has worked and what has not specific to the themes these studies presented in order to compile recommendations for governments, donors and regional networks to strengthen policy-

3.2. Reproductive Health

The case studies of the Jordanian Association of Family Planning, safe abortion in Maghreb and Tunisian Youth Scout indicate that:

- Previous efforts relied on providing services only to women or men who came forward to seek their help. The assessed programs and initiatives indicated that the approach to controversial issues such as family planning and safe abortion and sexual health in the Arab society can only be successful if programs simultaneously extend their local outreach activities to raise social consciousness of the consequences of discriminatory practices and beliefs with the facilitation of access to both quality information and services.
- Capitalize on the peer education to ensure the continuity of activities after completion of projects.
- Unpack these controversial social issues within human rights/women rights framework to maintain the legitimacy of advocacy campaigns.

3.3. Education

The key concepts to be learned from the three submitted studies under the education could be summed up as follows:

- Previous efforts used educational materials and schedules for literacy programs that did not suit local context of the learners. The assessed literacy programs indicated the success of building on existing competencies of targeted groups and the use of familiar materials (such as poems, stories and arts) as the basis of the information in order to strengthen the interest of beneficiaries in literacy programs.
- Reward and establish national archives for literature, and cultural products on social justice, gender relations and women's success stories.

4.2. Recommendations for Donors

- Conduct consultation with victims and traditional institutions where discriminatory practices prevail to determine actual needs in donor strategic planning for providing funding to programs focusing on these practices.

3.5 Voice Building and Rights Awareness

The assessed women's campaign for legalizing the quota system in Palestine, the transformative discourse in the Gulf, and literature and arts in Lebanon indicate that:

- Diversify lobbying and advocacy strategies serve to enlarge constituencies across civil society and political powers margins.
- Political mechanism such as the quota system may be utilized as a step to claim further demands and rights in different domains.
- Regional networks can fill the gap left by the absence of research and civil society in shaping public agendas and exchange discourse on women's empowerment and / or rights in the Arab Gulf.
- Pressure to professionalize activist work, which comes from the need for funding, grants, and networking on a wide geographic area, distances NGOs from the local communities on whose behalf they are advocating. The issue of representation in this instance key as NGOs may be regarded with suspicion and skepticism. Gaining greater insight into their function and activity thus counteracts the stigmatization of NGOs as agents or instruments of the West, recruited solely to implement Design special awareness programs to leverage NGO's efforts focusing on mobilizing traditional leaders and law-enforcement authorities, as well as coordinate with regional programs focusing on integration of marginalized social groups.
- Specialized government institutions should build synergies with social programs of NGOs through partnership to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure effective management of resources.
- Reward and establish national archives for literature, and cultural products on social justice, gender relations and women's success stories.

- Utilize funding to build regional consortia and leverage networking activities among recipients of grants working on same social practices such that efforts may be strengthened.
- Allow for flexibility in the use of resources allocated to activities to support implementation of strategic activities whose costs had not been budgeted for at the proposal phase.

4.3. Recommendations for Regional Networks

- Contribute to regionalisation of the national activities of members and maintain the culture of exchange of experiences and information
- Assist national and local initiatives in preparation of their programs and interventions
- Mobilize resources to support common issues to be tackled at both regional and national levels
- Support national institutions to maintain the relevance of their programs
- Extend outreach activities in the countries where the role of civil society and NGOs is under explored
- Organize regional awareness campaigns on harmful impacts of discriminatory social practices and the ensuing negative repercussions for social, economic and political development.
- Set and tap into existing virtual portals in order to contribute to the understanding of applicability of conceptual human rights and gender equity approaches to programming to tackle different discriminatory social practices and beliefs.
- Disseminate information about results of national surveys and indicators built by international programs to enrich knowledge and utilization of comparative analysis and statistics by local groups as part of their project intervention and evaluation.