

FINDINGS
&
RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

- The problems facing Arab women are not unique and are common to other societies. Therefore the solution requires a constructive intercultural dialogue, an international cooperation and a culturally sensitive approach to promote empowerment.
- The current political turmoil and economic crisis in the Arab world has a negative impact on the status of women.
- Islam as a religion guarantees equal rights and duties to women; it is the misinterpretation of the religion and some cultural beliefs that lead to discriminatory practices.
- The last decade witnessed irreversible improvement in the status of Arab women; however a lot of efforts are needed to ensure social, economic participation and political rights of women.
- Legal reforms are necessary in many countries in order to ensure the implementation of laws that secure women rights.
- There is a need to rectify the image of Arab women in the media through a constructive partnership that will promote a positive image and role models of women.
- Women have a primary responsibility to empower themselves by building their own self confidence through participation in all spheres of life.
- To empower Arab women, there is a need to enhance their education, encourage their political participation, their economic involvement, and institutionalize their rights.
- Issues affecting specific groups of women including disabled persons and older women should be addressed.
- There is a need to Support and encourage civil society and other stakeholders including religious leaders and the family to actively cooperate at all levels to secure women's rights and to prevent all forms of violence against women.
- The role of Arab women organizations is essential for the empowerment of women; they constitute a forum for discussion and exchange of views and a tool for implementing various programs in the region.
- Empowerment is a complex and relative notion, its promotion needs to take into account a holistic approach.

Recommendations

1. Women's participation at the national level: what could be done to overcome existing impediments?

1.1 Ensure access to education: Education is a key priority and an effective instrument in the empowerment of women in Arab countries.

States should design and implement policies to guarantee at least 12 years of mandatory quality education to girls. It is essential to target resources at increasing girls' enrolment, decreasing their dropout rates, and to design curricula that are meaningful and encouraging for girls. Women themselves should be involved in curriculum development. The rights and opportunities of vulnerable groups (e.g. ethnic minorities, migrants, girls with disabilities) should be given specific attention.

1.2 Promote women's employment: Governments have a central role in improving equal opportunities for women in the labour market through legislation. Legislation relevant to labour market participation of women should be reviewed and Governments themselves should adopt and implement an equal opportunity "open doors" policy in regard to employment and career development of women. It is important to exchange good practices in the region

1.3 Enhance political participation and leadership: The current low proportion of women in political institutions and in leadership positions in various sectors calls for special measures such as quotas. In the longer run, measures such as creating opportunities for career development, providing encouragement, role models, and leadership training should be used to open pathways for women to enter leadership positions.

1.4 Innovative approaches to partnerships should be used: partnerships with media, civil society organizations and other agents in the region should be developed to promote the exchange of best practices in the empowerment of women. There is a need to promote positive images of women and to ensure that good role models for women exist.

1.5 Establishing forums or platforms for sharing through partnerships that facilitate dialogue and that involve all stakeholders, civil society, academic institutions, state agencies, private sector, cultural and religious leaders, and men and women should work together to create better awareness, joint understanding, and cooperation to promote the empowerment of women.

1.6 Involving women's organizations to support the building of self-confidence in women and to promote self-development of girls in e.g. schools.

1.7 Use a twin-track approach to address the gender gap effectively: (1) gender equality, non-discrimination and women's empowerment need to be included holisti-

cally in all policies, plans and practices, (2) targeted measures to advance the status of women are also needed to promote their empowerment and to produce immediate effects.

Institutional capacity building for empowerment

2.1. Support civil society to build institutional capacity for gender

empowerment:

Civil society, including NGOs, private sector, academia, religious communities/ leaders, and community based organizations, women's groups and families should be seen as resources to be mobilized for facilitating women's empowerment at local and national levels. More interaction, discussion and collaboration is needed to sensitize all stakeholders.

2.2. Create umbrella organizations or networks of women's organizations or "community centers" to enable women to share experiences and to strengthen their voice in local and national decision making forums.

2.3. Organize gender sensitivity training for managers and employees as well as government staff as part of gender mainstreaming efforts.

2.4. Increase the collection and use of gender and age sensitive data and research: involve the academia in order to generate the relevant data and to develop evidence – based policy design and decision-making.

2.5. Establish or strengthen institutional structures aimed at gender policy and programme implementation and monitoring: Design ways to increase coordination and collaboration e.g. between government agencies to mainstream gender issues.

2.6. Improve institutional structures that are responsible for ensuring women's equal access to justice, property rights, decent work and independent resources.

2.7. Promote the use of modern information technology (IT) including internet for sharing information good practices on empowerment of women.

2.8. Strengthen the production and sharing of information on women's empowerment in Arabic and between Arabic countries. The UN and other organizations should improve and enhance the access to the documentation in Arabic.

2.9. Strengthen laws and institutions that are responsible for preventing and handling cases of violence against women. States and religious leaders should endorse and enforce zero tolerance policies against all forms of violence against women, including cases of domestic violence. .

2.10. Involve men as allies: to change the mind-sets of men and reverse the discriminating and disempowering aspects in the traditional male dominant culture. There is a need for an open dialogue that combines men's and women's interest groups with the view to establish alternative interpretations of men's roles and their involvement in the process of empowering women.

3. Making policy responses more effective.

3.1. Foster the development of political will to support empowerment of women and ensure that policy goals are gender sensitive with concrete goals, targets, time lines and budget allocations.

3.2. Adapt existing and introduce new practical tools, such as Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) and Gender Budgeting as well as appropriate evaluation strategies and techniques to assess policy outcomes.

3.3. Involve academia in the production of gender relevant research to provide evidence for policy design and follow-up including analysis of public information on gender sensitive issues such as violence against women.

3.4. Encourage Arab countries, to develop Arab index (Arab gender matrix) to monitor empowerment of women. Support research institutes in the Arab region to undertake research on this.

3.5. Involve responsible media to inform and engage the public in policy dialogue and follow-up.

4. Issues affecting specific groups (girls and young women; older women, women with disabilities, families with disabled children) need to be addressed:

4.1. Promote intergenerational solidarity and dialogue by ensuring age and gender representation in public policy forums

4.2. Promote universal, affordable health care at the community and local level, among others, as an instrument to foster the health and well-being of girls and the health and dignity of older women.

4.3. Adopt a life course approach that provides targeted programs for groups with special needs e.g. prevention of violence against women, impact of disability on children and older women, and other vulnerable groups.

4.4. Address the specific situation of most vulnerable women and girls. Low income women groups in rural and urban marginal areas should access grass roots skills education and training, coops, internships, and overall good quality education.

4.5. Increase the minimum age of the marriage to 18 in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

5. The concept of empowerment from a gender perspective – political, socio-economic and cultural dimensions.

5.1. Collaboration between all societal sectors is needed to promote the conditions that allow women to empower themselves.

5.2. Gender equality and empowerment needs to be included in policies and practices of all sectors and at levels (“mainstreaming”) in addition to actions targeted to women and girls. These should be seen as essential components of the same strategy.

5.3. Actions targeted directly to empower women and girls remain necessary as they are the effective strategy to get immediate results.

5.4. Empowerment and other related concepts such as gender equality and mainstreaming should be defined and used in ways that can be operational in various contexts.