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Voice and means: two essential tools for making gender policy responses more effective

While there has been some relative progress in terms of creating normative and institutional frameworks for the advancement of women, we have fallen short in furthering the goal of gender equality.

The 2009 Arab Human Development report recognizes that there have been some achievements but they haven't been even across the region...

- One third of Arab countries have achieved gender parity in primary and secondary education enrolment in 2005, many have not.
- For example, only 60% of women in Egypt and 35% in Yemen have acquire basic literacy skills.
- In 2008 women constituted only 33% of the labour force, this being the lowest rate in the world.
- There are high unemployment rates among the youth.
- Efforts to promoting sexual and reproductive health continue to be considered against traditional values.
- There is a persistent high incidence of violence against women.

How do we address these gaps?

Two fundamentals...

- Voice
 - Promoting women's representation at all levels of decision making.
 - Supporting women's organizations.
 - Enhancing women's greater involvement in holding governments accountable.
- Means
 - Adequate financial resources.

Institutional capacity

- Voice
 - Women continue to be underrepresented in all areas of decision making.
 - In the Parliament while the world average of women's representation in the Parliament is 19%, in the region women's share of seats in the Parliament is only 11%.
 - In 2005 women in the judiciary did not exceed 15% .
 - Promoting women's full and equal participation and representation in all areas of decision making

Promoting women's organizations

While evidence from the region may be limited, elsewhere women's organizations have demonstrated to be effective in ...

- lobbying and advocating for Women's rights.
- Disseminating information to help women overcome the gender challenges and succeed in their various demands.
- Networking aiming at harmonizing and strengthening agendas and activities and ensuring synergies.

Enhancing a greater involvement of women in holding governments accountable

- ✓ Support and elect a candidate.
- ✓ When knowing their rights and understanding how institutional mechanisms operate, women can:
 - Demand from their governments.
 - Assess accomplishment .
 - Use the power of vote.

Why voice matters?

- Women's representation in the Parliament has demonstrated effectiveness in passing and reinforcing laws in gender issues, for example in equal pay for equal work, parental leave, etc.
- Women in the judiciary are critical for example in terms of ending impunity for violence against women.
- Women's organizations have played a critical role in influencing policy formulation to advance the gender equality agenda.
- Raise Public Awareness – at local, national and global levels.
- Speak with a common voice fostering dialogues and build partnerships.

Means

The gender equality work is often hampered by a lack of human and financial resources. How to address this gap?

Adequate financial resources

Domestic resource mobilization:

- Sound gender sensitive economic policies.
- Align policy commitments on gender equality with resource allocations.
- Investments in basic gender-sensitive social and economic infrastructure.
- Promote women friendly credit schemes beyond microfinance.
- Promote business frameworks that are sensitive to the gender implications of their undertakings .

Mobilization of international resources for development:

- A holistic gender-sensitive approach to financing for development.

Institutional capacity: an important aspect of this means is the development of human resources capacity....

A twin-track approach:

- Gender mainstreaming.
- Targeted elimination of gender-based discrimination and women's empowerment.

Through developing human resources capacities.

- Generating gender expertise for critical technical support on women's rights, empowerment and security.

Some available tools:

- Gender analysis.
- Gender data disaggregated by sex and age.
- Sector-specific gender surveys.
- Gender sensitive studies, guidelines and checklists for programming.
- Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation.
- Gender sensitive budgets.

Why does means matter? Because with these resources...

- Systematic and predictable allocations of resources.
- Systematic assessment of resource allocations for promoting gender equality.

Monitoring actual delivery of results in the area of gender equality and the advancement of women.