

WORKSHOP

Strengthening Capacities of Women Organisations

AMMAN, JORDAN, 25th October, 2017

Conclusions and Recommendations

BACKGROUND

In line with the [Council of Europe Policy towards Neighbouring regions](#) and the [Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014 – 2017](#), and responding to United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (UN SDG) 5 that aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, the mission of the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe strives for the empowerment of civil society organisations, in particular, women, in the Southern Mediterranean region. Based on a bottom-up approach, the North-South Centre acts as a regional platform for cooperation, dialogue, partnership and solidarity and contributes to strengthen the capacities of institutions and organisations through peer-to-peer exchanges and networks.

On the 25th October 2017, the North-South Centre organised a workshop on “strengthening capacities of women organisations” in Amman, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, in partnership with Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD)-Legal Aid, with the institutional support of the Jordanian National Commission for Women and financed by the Government of Portugal. Representatives of the *Quadriologue* (governments, parliaments, local and regional authorities and civil society organisations) and International Organisations discussed the new challenges for the empowerment of women and shared best practices from Algeria, Cyprus, Jordan, Romania, Tunisia, the European Union and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, in order to encourage a participatory approach in designing and implementing reforms. Together, with input from experts in the region, they put forward recommendations aiming at empowering women civil society organisations to effectively contribute to deepening and broadening gender equality in the European and Southern Mediterranean countries.

CONCLUSIONS

Main Conclusions of the workshop at the regional level issued from different national experiences:

- There is a lack of complementarity between the work of the governments and the civil society organisations. Civil society organisations are often absent in the preparatory phase of national strategies for women's rights and gender equality;
- There are still laws restricting the work of civil society organisations;
- Women's issues are not properly addressed and taken into account in the media agenda;
- Civil society organisations are suffering from insufficient funding, which limits their active participation;
- Youth perspectives and views are often neglected and their needs are not taken into consideration in community issues at several levels from private to public spaces;
- There is no compromise between national strategies of European and Southern Mediterranean countries and Southern Mediterranean countries themselves;
- Despite the measures that have been taken in numerous countries to enhance women's participation, there is still a weak participation in decision making and policy making (at governmental and local level) and an obvious lack of involvement of civil society organisations' in influencing these processes;
- Absence of secular and democratic constitutions;
- The failure in the implementation of political reforms is rarely considered and responded to by governmental authorities from an early phase where it could be more decisive and effective;
- There is a crisis of confidence between the following sectors: government, private sector, civil society organisations and the media: i) Governments from Southern Mediterranean countries tend to consider civil society organisations only through their foreign policy agendas; ii) Lack of transparency in governmental selection processes of civil society beneficiaries; iii) Lack of substantial turn-over of beneficiaries from civil society.

GENERAL RECOMMANDATIONS

In order to promote and implement an effective bottom-up and participatory approach to reinforce women's rights and gender equality, at national and international levels, the governmental, local and regional authorities and parliaments from European and Southern Mediterranean countries are called upon to:

1. Adopt an integrative approach to achieve a legislative and life-based system for women that promotes equality and guarantees justice as well as an effective participation of women "outside the plan" and on the ground;
2. Promote and coordinate dialogue and partnership between civil society organisations themselves;
3. Overcome the problems of distrust and deepen cooperation between civil society and government, as well as to recognize the leading role of civil society and media in achieving gender equality culture. The role of civil society organisations should not be seen only as complementary but as pioneers of the achievements made in the societies;
4. Develop and reinforce collaborative work with all private and public stakeholders (including formal and non-formal educational sectors) to improve the quality of education, promote intercultural dialogue, gender equality and democracy;

5. Decrease restrictions on civil society organisations and support them in building institutional partnerships at the local, national, regional and international levels, as well as fostering the integration of the marginalised civil society as a pressure social force into actions, plans and projects;
6. Initiate joint actions between governmental authorities, civil society organisations and media to challenge the stereotypical portrayal of the roles of women and men and to combat all forms of discrimination and violence to achieve equality and social justice;
7. Work on correction of erroneous religious concepts and promote the religious concepts advocating for women's rights;
8. Take into consideration opinions, recommendations and perspectives of youth in community issues and policy making. The role of youth needs to be highlighted and an enabling environment for their commitment in the organised civil society to support women's rights should be encouraged by building strong youth organisations;
9. Develop sustainable assessment and monitoring mechanisms on concrete women's needs based on accurate and verified information, research work, data collection and interviews operated by civil society organisations on the ground. These mechanisms will conduct the development of national strategies and reforms and include local specificities, contexts and realities to improve the impact on beneficiaries. To this end, a team of activists/experts will coordinate the identification and collection of beneficiaries' needs at the decentralised level;
10. Promote enlightened thoughts to ensure democracy, equality and justice without any exclusion of any category of people in the society in order to change negative attitudes towards women's issues. For this purpose, all community authorities such as local councils, municipalities, religious bodies, educational entities, grassroots organisations and local associations will be involved in all phases of policy development, strategies and plans to promote women's rights and protect women through, for example, public survey and hearing, call for proposals, public manifestation, etc.
11. Following the principles of rights and responsibilities, the role of civil society organisations should also be to assess the effective implementation of laws and regulations under the responsibility of governments;
12. Develop bold women leadership that promotes confidence in women's work and role models.

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