

SEOW 2
REGIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP
BEIRUT 19 & 20 NOVEMBER 2012

CONCEPT NOTE

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1. Background

Since 2003, CRTDA has been working on promoting economic empowerment of women as part of its commitment to mainstreaming gender into economy. Despite a relative gain in social entitlements to health and education (notwithstanding regional and other disparities), the level of women's economic participation is poor.

Positive changes in education and health have not been translated into economic participation or public and political leadership for women or for that matter at the level of gender based oppression and discrimination. Indeed, women's participation in the formal economy remain globally low and by and large invisible with very little advances made. In addition, there is a persistent inequality in access, opportunities and benefits for women in both the formal and informal sectors such as for example at the level of wage gaps, opportunities for advancement, as well as representation in the higher echelons of the formal economy.

Several factors have concurred to create and reproduce this situation, namely the fact that, overall, policies in Arab countries have not created sustainable work opportunities for women with existing jobs mostly available for men who are perceived as breadwinners. This has been further compounded by high unemployment rates and the fact that women remain outside the job market and are mostly perceived as carers.

Parallel to that, mainstream approaches to women's economic empowerment have not challenged the root causes of women's disenfranchisement from economic power as well as the critical impact and obstacle caused by the gender division of labour. In fact, many interventions have reproduced the perception of women's role as unrecognised and invisible carers involved in sustaining their families.

As such, CRTD.A observes that the main approach taken is a 'direct assistance' approach where the initiatives are devised on local, problem-by-problem, short-term basis, aiming to solve given problems as they come. However, there has been no holistic and right-based approach that has tried to look at the 'whole picture', i.e. at women in the economy from the individual level but also from the household, the institutional and the macro-level, with a vision to changing gender relationships in the long-term and engendering of the economy and addressing the issue of gender and economic rights.

SEOW (Sustainable Economic Opportunities for Women) program was a regional four-year initiative which ended in 2009. It was supported by the European Union (EU) with the aim of increasing individual and community awareness of the issues involved in promoting and building women's economic participation. The initiative's main objectives were to provide a sustainable framework to assist and support women in five countries: Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Morocco and Algeria. New funding from Oxfam Novib

has been granted for the continuation of the program which focused, in the first stage, on Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Jordan (SEOW2)

One learning from SEOW1 is that women's participation in the economy is unaccounted for in national statistics and lacks social value and recognition. Since women working in the informal and care economy are not to be found in national statistics, they are rarely targeted by formal development projects, thus seldom benefiting from any public investment (in training, education or health), although NGOs are largely active with them, especially at the micro level. On the other hand, because of their "invisibility", these women tend to largely be left behind by women's advocacy NGOs, who generally take up more visible causes. Moreover, laws need to be reviewed and reformed in order to guarantee and protect women's economic rights from discrimination and to reinforce women's economic rights and programmes.

SEOW2 rationale argues that addressing and promoting women's role in the economy is crucial for challenging gender inequalities and for contributing to women's sustainable livelihoods. In addition, SEOW2's key assumption is that women are able to change and reform the economy by being active, visible and recognised participants enjoying equal access to economic opportunities and benefits as well as by having voice to bring in and enforce their own suggestion and ideas to reform the economic paradigm towards a system that is more equitable, just and fair.

SEOW2 aims at highlighting women's invisible economic participation in order to contribute to the recognition and valuing of women's work in both policies and practices.

Promoting women's economic rights and participation is addressed through:

- Action oriented research: data collection and monitoring developments and changes in policy, union's work, women's struggles
- Direct capacity building interventions at the grassroots and community levels: training on women economic empowerment, networking and policy dialogue methods
- Policy Dialogue with governments and international institutions, knowledge exchange between various stakeholders leading in a latter stage to regional campaigning and advocacy
- Communication and knowledge dissemination: e-newsletters, country and regional issue briefs.

2. Purpose of the Capacity Building Workshop

This regional capacity building workshop is the culmination of more than a year of local encounters, preparations, dialogue and local capacity building in Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco and Jordan during which participants zoomed in on key issues of interest in which they would like to gain further insights and learning.

In addition, and as the SEOW2 two progressed throughout 2011 and 2012, we have been able to monitor the radical changes in the region in the aftermath of the various revolts that have, and still are, taking place and the increased challenges to women's economic empowerment.

As such, this regional capacity building workshop was planned so as to pull together regional analysis, priorities and efforts into a collective action on women's economic rights.

Thus, the aim of this Regional Workshop is to put in place a regional networking of partners sharing the same aim namely shedding the light on women's real economic participation (visible or invisible), enhancing the recognition and value attributed to women's work and translating this recognition into practices and policies. This could be considered within a potential third phase of the SEOW program.

The key objectives of the regional SEOW2 capacity building workshop are the following:

- 1) Share experiences, knowledge, observations and insight on key contextual changes and trends in the region with emphasis on the role of women and issues pertaining to women's economic empowerment;
- 2) Share information on the progress of SEOW2 in each country and according to each of the programme areas and discuss and review what are the possibilities for regional collaborative actions;
- 3) Learning and exploring key themes related to women's economic empowerment, informal economy and mechanisms for visibilising women's work and which have been suggested by participants in earlier SEOW2 workshops;
- 4) Discuss and think through on how to move towards a regional collaboration in order to strengthen and consolidate common areas of work and interest and investigate potentials for collaborative advocacy.

3. Participants

The participants invited to take part in this workshop are essentially the SEOW2 Partners from Egypt, Morocco and Lebanon as well as sister organizations from Jordan and Tunisia.

The profile of participants includes feminist and women organisations, community development organisations working with women especially in issues related to economic participation and empowerment.

4. Methodology

The Regional Capacity Building Workshop will be facilitated by CRTD.A team members with sessions presented by Dr. Tina Wallace and Ms. Benedicte Allaert.

The first day will be devoted to exchanges and building common grounds for a collaborative next phase. The second day will be devoted to learning and will include PPT presentations, plenary discussions and possible group work.