

Challenges for women's economic rights in light of the rise of radical Islamic movements

The Collective for Research and Training on Development-Action (**CRTD.A**) organized a Regional Seminar for five countries (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia and Morocco) on 19 and 20 November 2012 in the YWCA center (Ain Mreisseh – Beirut). This Regional Seminar was part of a project aiming to strengthen sustainable economic opportunities for women (SEOW2 – funded by Oxfam Novib) and was attended by 46 participants from women organizations and development associations working in the areas of women’s economic empowerment and participation.

The seminar addressed the political developments and general trends prevailing in the five countries and the extent of women's participation in political life as well as critical economic issues arising in relation to women’s economic rights and participation. Participants shared their countries experiences on women’s status, their achievements and the challenges they face (in particular in countries that have seen political changes and revolts) and have noted many similarities and common approaches. Several sessions were dedicated to definitions and discussions of relevant concepts, mainly women’s invisible, household, formal, informal and care work.

The seminar dedicated a whole day to discuss the changes after the revolutions of the “Arab Spring” with regard to women’s rights and especially their economic rights. Participants discussed the new economic opportunities both at the local and regional levels, the opportunities and challenges they face. They observed that new governments were still implementing liberal economic policies established by previous regimes, favoring privatization and having as major consequences the decrease in women’s access to sustainable employment opportunities with no strategy to improve women’s economic status. With the accession to power of political Islam, the dominant discourse is hostile to women and confines them to their reproductive role within the private sphere. In fact, current policies seem to further increase the informality of women’s work as well as their isolation from the formal employment sector. Several participants also raised the issue of achievements and rights that were obtained by women in the

past through their struggles and that were currently being reconsidered by the political forces in place.

Participants also suggested new strategies to assess women's economic contribution and ensure women's rights which should be translated by new policies and practices.

It should be mentioned that this seminar is the third meeting organized within the SEOW2 project. The Collective for Research and Training on Development-Action has organized two workshops (in Egypt, June 2012 and in Morocco, July 2012) to highlight women's work and their participation in economic life as well as the ideologies that define traditional indicators of women's work and the use these indicators to measure women's economic contribution and their economic rights.

The workshop has issued a series of recommendations among which: the need to support the role of non governmental organizations, claiming women's rights in general and particularly their economic rights; setting up indicators for measuring women's work in the informal sector; and claim and protect domestic workers' rights.

Beirut in November 21, 2012