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NEWS & ARTICLES

GENDER ACTIVISM

Tunisia Activists Must Reclaim a Co-Opted Movement

As in Egypt, Muslim fundamentalists in Tunisia have tried to use 2011's opening to impose their own repressive agenda. The challenge today is to effectively counter that fundamentalist agenda in non-violent and rights-respecting ways. Democratic forces need international support to achieve that.

Fundamentalists have tried to use 2011's opening to impose their own repressive agenda. Activists must counter this in non-violent ways.

Since late July, activists have protested peacefully at the Constituent Assembly in Tunis. The upheaval began after the assassination of politician Mohamed Brahmi, which many blamed on the growing climate of extremist violence fostered by the ruling Ennahda party. Now, the opposition is launching the *Irhal* (leave!) campaign - borrowing from an anti-Mubarak slogan - that calls for replacement of the Ennahda-dominated government by a time-limited technocratic government that will organize free elections. *Irhal* has widespread support, including among women's rights advocates, thousands of whom marched recently for "a Tunisia that progresses and does not regress." To read the entire article follow the link <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/08/14/is-this-the-end-of-the-arab-spring/democracy-activists-must-reclaim-a-co-opted-movement>



How to challenge the patriarchal ethics of Muslim legal tradition

One lesson from the 1979 Iranian revolution and the 2011 Arab revolutions is that activists seeking to promote women's rights, human rights and the transition to democracy must challenge patriarchy from within the Muslim legal tradition.

Islam's textual sources (the Qur'an and Sunna, the practice of the Prophet) are the source of Muslim ethical values and norms. They have been articulated, since the beginning, mainly by Muslim scholars. Central to these values, and to the philosophy of law in Islam, is justice, which the classical jurists endeavoured to translate into legal rulings. But the rulings that have come down to us rest on pre-modern conceptions of justice, gender and rights, which entitled individuals to different rights on the basis of faith, status and gender.

These rulings continue to be regarded as the established interpretations of the Shari'a. In the course of the 20th century they came to be confronted by modern conceptions of justice and rights, and the ideals of universal human rights, equality and personal freedom. In this encounter some Muslims came to see these rulings as unjust and discriminatory, and the textual sources on which they were justified as hypocritical, or at best contradictory.

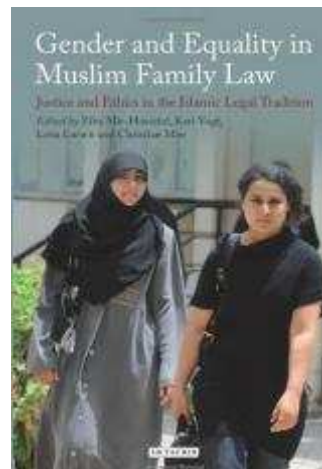
A widening gap has opened between contemporary ideas of justice and those that informed the jurists' rulings and dominant interpretations of the Shari'a. This is nowhere more evident than in the area of Muslim family laws, which are imbued with a strong patriarchal ethos and continue to be the source of family law in Muslim contexts. For instance, take these two statements:

" The fundamentals of the *Shari'ah* are rooted in wisdom and promotion of the welfare of human beings in this life and the Hereafter. *Shari'ah* embraces Justice, Kindness, the Common Good and Wisdom. Any rule that departs from justice to injustice, from kindness to harshness, from the common good to harm, or from rationality to absurdity cannot be part of *Shari'ah*."

" The wife is her husband's prisoner, a prisoner being akin to a slave. The Prophet directed men to support their wives by feeding them with their own food and clothing them with their own clothes; he said the same about maintaining a slave."

Both statements were made by the same scholar, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, a 14th-century jurist and one of the great reformers of his time, who became the source of inspiration for many 20th-century Islamists. But through modern eyes the two statements seem poles apart. The first, which depicts the ideal of Shari'a as the divine and just law, speaks to all contemporary Muslims, and both advocates of gender equality and their opponents often use it as an epigraph. The second statement reflects how marriage and gender relations came to be defined by medieval jurists. The idea of a wife as prisoner or slave of her husband seems incompatible with a law that embraces justice, kindness, and wisdom. Consequently, Muslim legal tradition and its textual sources have come to appear hypocritical or at best self-contradictory.

This faces those who struggle to reform Muslim family laws with difficult questions: What really is the notion of justice in Islam's sacred texts? Does it include the notion of equality for women before the law? If so, how are we to understand those elements of the primary sources of the Shari'a that appear not to treat men and women as equals? Can gender equality and Shari'a-based laws go together? Such questions are central to the on-going struggle for an egalitarian construction of family laws in Muslim contexts, and have been vigorously debated among Muslims since the late nineteenth century. They are at the core of a new book - *Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Laws* - that offers a new framework for rethinking the old formulations so as to reflect contemporary realities and understandings of marriage, justice, ethics and gender rights. Based on fieldwork in family courts, and illuminated by insights from scholars and clerics from Morocco, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan and Indonesia, as well as by the experiences of human rights and women's rights activists, the book identifies several approaches that resolve and transcend what many still regard as an irreconcilable conflict of ideas and practices. To read more of this article follow the link



<http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/ziba-mir-hosseini/how-to-challenge-patriarchal-ethics-of-muslim-legal-tradition>

Gendering authoritarianism in Iraq

Women in Iraq bear the brunt of increasing levels of gender-based violence, inadequate infrastructure and poverty. Yet women activists recognize that their struggle for equality and social justice as women cannot be separated from the wider struggle against authoritarianism and sectarianism.

The recent wave of violence and political tensions in Iraq has been overshadowed by the daily gruesome news about atrocities, violence and deaths in Syria as well as the protests and brutal crackdown by the police in neighbouring Turkey. Clearly, the escalating situation in Syria has a direct impact on Iraq, at the same time as sectarian tensions and divisions within Iraq play out on Syrian soil as well.

However, one of the ironies and paradoxes of the situation in Iraq today is that we almost seem have come full circle in terms of an authoritarian, highly militarized regime that is employing force, violence and intimidation to limit dissent, and eliminate political opponents. Nouri Al-Maliki is emerging as the new über-patriarch in a highly divided society, instrumentalizing - now frankly unrealistic - fears of a Baathi come back. While the government's wrath is targeted at all political opponents, the regime's wider tone, discourses and policies have been deepening sectarian divisions. Sunni opposition groups, including some extremist militias and Islamists, are regrouping and talking of their "Arab Spring." One can only hope that those ready to take up



arms once again and engage in devastating bombing campaigns, mainly targeting Shia civilians, are in too small numbers to further unsettle an already unstable and precarious situation. We are painfully reminded when we listen to the news about car bombings, that even small numbers can have devastating effects.

Clearly, a decade after the invasion, security - or rather the lack thereof - is again on everyone's mind in central and southern Iraq. In addition to the general on-going lawlessness and insecurity, the Iraqi government is failing to counter the increase in gender-based forms of violence, ranging from a high incidence of domestic violence, forced marriages, forced prostitution and trafficking, as well as FGM and honour-based crimes and killings. There is very limited political will to either criminalize gender-based violence , or even more importantly, to implement existing laws. Meanwhile, women bear the brunt of the extremely inadequate basic services, ranging from electricity, access to clean water, sewage, health care and education. A decade after the invasion, the Iraqi state has been unable to provide a proper infrastructure and sufficient employment opportunities, with large numbers of Iraqi men and women still being unemployed. The high number of female-headed households and widows without proper support accounts for the increasing feminisation of poverty. To read more about women's rights activism follow the link <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/nadje-al-ali/iraq-gendering-authoritarianism>

The Uprising of Women in the Arab World: Sally Zohney on Sexual Harassment in the Middle East

Despite the continuing efforts of individuals and organisations, the fact remains that to be born a woman in the Middle East presents a set of challenges, problems, and often dangers. We got in touch with Sally Zohney, a founding member of The Uprising of Women in the Arab World, and asked her to tell us a little about the organisation and what it works to achieve.

The Uprising was founded in October 2011 as a spontaneous reaction to the fear that the aims of the Arab Spring - in regards to women's rights - would be aborted. Yalda Younes created the web-page in Lebanon, and quickly contacted Diala Haidar (also Lebanese), Sally Zohney in Egypt, and Farah Barqawi in Palestine to truly make it a cross-border movement.

Now it has expanded to include admins from all over the Arab world, and has over 115,000 supporters on Facebook.

The movement defines itself as "an Intifada which is a free secular space for constructive dialogue and fearless listening about women's rights in the Arab world." Sally emphasises that it is secular and doesn't aim to infringe on any beliefs or religion; "all members have the freedom and right to their beliefs, so long as they don't try to impose them on others".

As well as being a grass-roots movement, it works towards the civil and legal advancement of women, and so demands the full application of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for women as well as men. This declaration, says Sally, comes before and goes beyond any state, culture, tradition or mentality. Recently, the movement has sent their manifesto to the UN Human Rights Office in order to try and secure International legal backing.

On top of legal action, the movement largely aims to empower women, to give them strength and a feeling of solidarity. Since its creation, the uprising has carried out three campaigns, using their online resources both as a way to access and speak to women who would otherwise be silent, and as a tool for organising on-the-ground action.

The first of these campaigns is a photo-campaign, which asks both men and women to send a photograph of themselves holding a placard beginning with the phrase "I am with the uprising of women in the Arab world because..." According to Sally, this has been an overwhelming success; not only can everyone see the very real results here, but for her it shows a significant psychological change in the women affected: "all over the Middle East, women are standing up and finding a voice; many have personally thanked the movement for giving them the courage to speak," she explains.

Between late November and early December 2012, some seventy women sent their stories to the movement during its second campaign, 'Tell Your Story', which was a call for women to share their experiences of violence, assault or discrimination. It was intended as a vent for anger and a form of therapy, and again to nurture solidarity and unity among women.

But Sally also stressed that this campaign was about "opening everyone's eyes; forcing them to see the unpleasant reality that nobody wants to face." As much as it was about helping women, this campaign was also aimed at men, to educate them and change their attitudes; Sally is adamant that without reaching men, the problem cannot be solved. Again, this has been successful, but what these women are trying to do is a continuous uphill struggle.

Most recently, the movement organised the 'Campaign against Sexual Terrorism'. This campaign coordinated marches across the Middle East on February 12th 2013 in condemnation of sexual assault as a political tool, where it is used to disperse and discourage female protesters. Sally sounds proud, and rightly so, when she says that there was a huge turnout in thirty-five different countries; "this is as important as any legal gain, because it proves the amount of popular support for women. As a result of these protests, the world must recognise sexual terrorism as a reality and work to end it."

When asked, Sally seems hopeful for the future; Egypt has another chance at writing a fair constitution, and hopefully movements like this will keep enough pressure on those in power to ensure that women are protected and represented. However, there are other problems for women, among them is a media that doesn't see these problems as important, that prints victims' names without permission, and that always points to the woman as the guilty party.



More worrying still is that when asked if women see the police as protectors, Sally seems surprised that I needed to ask; "no, of course not. Never", she states. In light of this, we must consider ourselves lucky that Sally and her colleagues are working to change these problems faced by women every day. You can read their harrowing experiences here, or learn more about the cause through their Facebook page. To read the article from its source follow the link <http://www.cairo360.com/article/citylife/5935/the-uprising-of-women-in-the-arab-world-sally-zohney-on-sexual-harassment-in-the-middle-east>

Social Media Training for beginner users of Lebanese NGOs working for women rights

A Social Media Training for beginner users of Non Governmental Organizations was organized by the National Commission of Lebanese Women (NCLW) in Lebanon, on August 2013, 13 and 14. The training is part of the Program aiming at enhancing women's role in local governance, organised by the National Commission of Lebanese Women (NCLW) and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) in partnership with the Italian Cooperation in Lebanon.

The training's scope is also part of the National campaign launched by the First Lady of Lebanon Wafaa Suleiman on women's international day 2012, aiming at empowering women political role in Lebanon. The trainer was Rita Chemaly, blogger and author of a thesis about Social Media's impact on political systems. She used a participatory approach based on group exercises scrutinizing existing campaigns, showing their pitfalls and observing their strategy.



The training focused also on the use of micro-blogging platforms such as twitter, and social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn. The 40 participants came from different NGOs working for development and women issues in Lebanon. As per the participants request, and the program work plan, these first sessions targeting beginner users, will be followed by advanced and practical sessions related to Facebook, LinkedIn, using blogs, analytical tools and Twitter. More information is available on NCLW website <http://www.nclw.org.lb/NewsList/62>

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Underage Girls as "Summer Rentals," Vacation "Wives" in Egypt

Each summer, wealthy male tourists from Gulf Arab states flock to Egypt to escape the oppressive heat of the Arabian Peninsula, taking residence at upscale hotels and rented flats in Cairo and Alexandria. Many come with their families and housekeeping staff, spending their days by the pool, shopping, and frequenting cafes and nightclubs. Others come for a more sinister purpose. In El Hawamdia, a poor agricultural town 20 kilometres south of Cairo, they are easy to spot. Arab men in crisp white thawbs troll the town's pot-holed, garbage-strewn streets in their luxury cars and SUVs. As they arrive, Egyptian fixers in flip flops run alongside their



vehicles, offering short-term flats and what to them is the town's most sought-after commodity - underage girls. Each year, in El Hawamdia and other impoverished rural communities across Egypt, thousands of girls between the ages of 11 and 18 are sold by their parents to wealthy, much older Gulf Arab men under the pretext of marriage. The sham nuptials may last from a couple of hours to years, depending on the negotiated arrangement.

"The girl may have 10 siblings, so the family considers her as a commodity." -- Sandy Shinouda, a Cairo-based official at the IOM's Counter-Trafficking Unit "It's a form of child prostitution in the guise of marriage," Azza El-Ashmawy, director of the Child Anti-Trafficking Unit at the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) tells IPS. "The man pays a sum of money and will stay with the girl for a few days or the summer, or will take her back to his country for domestic work or prostitution." The girl is returned to her family when the marriage ends, usually to be married off again. "Some girls have been married 60 times by the time they turn 18," says El-Ashmawy. "Most 'marriages' last for just a couple of days or weeks." The deals are hatched in El Hawamdia's myriad "marriage broker" offices, identifiable by the conspicuous presence of air-conditioners in a ramshackle town with intermittent power. The brokers, usually second-rate lawyers, also offer a delivery service. Village girls as young as 11 are brought to the Arab tourists' hotel or rented flat for selection. Arab men travelling with their wives and children often arrange a separate flat for such purposes. The temporary marriages offer a way to circumvent Islamic restrictions on pre-marital sex. "Many hotels and landlords in Egypt will not rent a room to unmarried couples," explains Mohamed Fahmy, a Cairo real estate agent. "A marriage certificate, even a flimsy one, allows visiting men to have sexual liaisons." Engaging in sexual relations with minors is illegal in Egypt. Brokers can help with that too, forging birth certificates or substituting the identity card of the girl's older sister. A one-day mut'a or "pleasure" marriage can be arranged for as little as 800 Egyptian pounds (115 dollars). The money is split between the broker and the girl's parents.

A summer-long misyar or "visitor" marriage runs from 20,000 Egyptian pounds (2,800 dollars) to 70,000 Egyptian pounds (10,000 dollars). The legally non-binding contract terminates when the man returns to his country. The "dowry" that Gulf Arab men are prepared to pay for sex with young girls is a powerful magnet for impoverished Egyptian families in a country where a quarter of the population subsists on less than two dollars a day. A NCCM-commissioned survey of 2,000 families in three towns near Cairo - El Hawamdia, Abu Nomros and Badrashein - found that the hefty sums paid by Arab tourists was the main motive for the high rate of "summer marriages" in these towns. Some 75 percent of the respondents knew girls involved in the trade, and most believed the number of marriages was increasing. The 2009 survey indicated that 81 percent of the "spouses" were from Saudi Arabia, 10 percent from the United Arab Emirates, and four percent from Kuwait. The International Organisation of Migration (IOM) too has been studying these "marriages". "The family takes the money, and the foreign 'husband' usually leaves the girl after two or three weeks," says Sandy Shinouda, a Cairo-based official at the IOM's Counter-Trafficking Unit. "The unregistered marriages are not recognised by the state and afford no rights to the girl, or any children that result from these unions." Shinouda, who formerly ran a shelter for victims of the trade, says most of the young girls come from large families that see marriage to an older, wealthier foreigner as a way to escape grinding poverty. "The girl may have 10 siblings, so the family considers her as a commodity," she says. Parents may seek a broker to arrange a marriage once their daughter reaches puberty. In about a third of cases the girl is pressured into accepting the arrangement, the NCCM study found. This can have a profound psychological impact on the girl's mental health, says Shinouda. "The girls know their families have exploited them...they can understand that their parents sold them," she says. "Reintegration is a big challenge because in many cases

if you return the girls to their family the parents will sell them again.” Egypt’s 2008 Child Law criminalises marriages to girls who have not reached the legal age of 18. Another law prohibits marriages to foreigners where the age difference exceeds 25 years. But the laws are poorly enforced, concedes NCCM’s El-Ashmawy. Anecdotal evidence suggests the trade has grown since Egypt’s 2011 revolution as a result of worsening economic conditions and an ineffectual police force. “It’s not simply about poverty or religion,” she asserts. “It’s cultural norms that support this illicit trade - people believe it is in the best interest of the girls and the families at large. And brokers succeeded in finding common ground with families in order to exploit young girls.” For more information follow the link <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/08/underage-girls-are-egypts-summer-rentals/>

Also in Afghanistan, Fathers Barter Daughters to Settle Drug Debts

Darya was a green-eyed, 12-year-old schoolgirl who enjoyed playing barefoot in the sand. Her childhood was cut short when her drug dealer father sold her to a smuggler 34 years older than her.

My fingers trembled as I dialed the number her mother gave me. We met in summer 2003 in a dusty village in Afghanistan. Darya was a green-eyed, 12-year-old schoolgirl who enjoyed playing barefoot in the sand. Her childhood was cut short when her drug dealer father sold her to a smuggler 34 years older than her. Her father was in debt to traffickers in the country, which supplies 90 percent of the world’s opiates. He did what thousands of Afghan fathers are doing -- he bartered two of his daughters into marriage to relieve his debt, without the daughters’ consent. I was in her village doing a story on the burgeoning \$65 billion opium trade, and she was a casualty of this illegal business. In the last 10 years since I met Darya, the number of opium brides has risen across Afghanistan, based on anecdotal evidence by activists and journalists there. Thousands of young Afghan girls are being bartered into slavery as second and third wives or trafficked across borders as prostitutes. The last decade’s government eradication has made the problem worse. Farmers whose crops were destroyed chose to sell their daughters to pay back loans to traffickers. The skyrocketing addiction rate -- more than one million in a nation of 30 million are dependent on opiates -- further propels the sale of children. When addicted families no longer have the money for their habit, they sell their daughters and sometimes, also their sons. Mrs. Parwanta, who did not want her first name mentioned for safety reasons, has been working on drug prevention and education in Afghanistan for three years. One family she talked to sold three daughters so the father could feed his addiction. “When a member of the family begins abusing drugs, everything from economic to social status breaks down. Usually, when men in the family have no other resource to fund their addiction, they prostitute and sell their children, boy or girl,” she said. Najibullah Quraishi, an Afghan journalist and filmmaker, said he met at least 100 families who sold their daughters to pay off traffickers. His award-winning 2012 documentary *Opium Brides* chronicles several of the girls’ heartbreaking stories and the debts farming families fall into when the government eradicates their poppy farms. In the wake of foreign troop withdrawal and the potential return of the Taliban to parts of Afghanistan, some analysts predict another opium boom. Already nine provinces that declared to be poppy-free two years ago are cultivating the plant again, mainly because of a jump in opium prices, according to United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime. The drug trade is a business dictated by supply and demand, but it’s also run by mafias that flourish in violent and impoverished areas. Many farmers who returned to poppy-planting cited insecurity and a lack of agricultural options in the 2012 UNODC Opium Survey. Fading international aid and interest in Afghanistan also threaten hard-fought laws to protect women, although the United States recently pledged another \$200 million for women’s development. Activists are afraid conservatives in Afghanistan’s Parliament will revoke the ban on child marriages. Under the law now, families can be

prosecuted for marrying daughters under age 16. "But I have yet to meet a girl who is willing to press charges against her own father," said Manizha Naderi Parand, the executive director of Women for Afghan Women. The organization provides shelters and opportunities for Afghan women seeking safety. Bartering girls in marriage to pay off loans -- and not just drug debts -- has been practiced in the region for centuries. But it has increased exponentially due to poverty brought on by 30 years of war. Parand said no opium brides have reached out to her group for help. These young girls mostly live on the borders of the country, where trafficking is rampant and access to foreign aid and NGOs limited. That leaves many of these girls having to submit or resist on their own. Some of them commit suicide. Nasima, a member of a women's council in Helmand province, seized a guard's gun and shot herself at one of the council meetings in 2006. Some run away and may end up in prison or in one of the few women's shelters in the country. The majority succumb to their fate as the property of smugglers. And others, like Darya, may ask aid workers or journalists to rescue them. The 22-year-old Darya picked up her cell phone after the sixth ring. Her voice was louder, more confident, more patient. She had been expecting my call. We asked about each others' families and well-being. Then I apologized for failing to rescue her from the life she had feared, from Haji Sufi, the man who had become her husband and father of her children. There was a pause. "I waited a long time for you to come and save me," she said. "But this was my destiny. I'm used to it now," she said, letting out a 10-year sigh. In 2003, when I first met Darya, her father Touraj had disappeared to avoid traffickers hunting him down. Even after selling two of his daughters, he remained in debt to smugglers. The older daughter's husband never showed up to claim his bride. But Darya's husband, who already had another wife and eight children, wanted to take the young girl from Herat to Helmand. He spoke Pashto. She spoke Farsi. But every time Haji Sufi came, Darya cursed her husband and ran away from him. Darya looked to me for support, knowing I had a different code of ethics and access to the outside world. One sizzling summer afternoon, I interviewed Sufi while Darya sat beside me. She grabbed my coat and trembled. "Please don't let him take me," she whispered in my ear. That was the last time I saw her. She had come barefoot to my guide's house after I left that summer, asking that I return and free her from a forced marriage. I reported the case to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, whose members did nothing. Afghan authorities told me she was one of thousands. They said that if she didn't go with her husband, her mother and five other siblings would suffer the consequences. I wrote a story about her that was syndicated in several different countries, and readers sent money to her family. The following summer I delivered the money, but it was too late. Sufi had taken her to Helmand, and her mother asked me to go find her. She was afraid Darya would self-immolate, a tragic form of protest that's somewhat common among girls who share her fate. In 2005, I went undercover in a burqa, with my guide and a photo of her husband, to Sangine, Helmand, which was the frontline of war then. We knocked on doors and showed people his picture. Taliban sympathizers quickly figured out I had come from the West and threatened to imprison me, but my guide, who was from the area, talked them out of it. I didn't find Darya. I returned to the U.S. feeling guilty for allowing a child bride to be forced into slavery. Darya became the heroine in my book, *Opium Nation*. While writing the book, I searched for her from the U.S. by calling everyone she knew. Her mother Basira finally had a phone number in Marjah, Helmand, an area the U.S. had bombed and was now reconstructing with roads, phone lines, and schools. She had been there all along. Darya's uncle had given me the wrong district when I went looking for her. Marjah survived on poppy farming before the U.S. takeover, but now crops like cotton, corn, and nuts were being farmed. Darya lived in a closed compound with 20 of her in-laws. Her husband and his family grew poppies until the Americans seized the district. My first phone conversation with her was very emotional, as if I had known her all these years, even though she had remained a mystery for a decade. She

recounted her life as a wife and mother with a mix of humor and tragedy. She considered herself unlucky, but luckier than opium brides who did not have the honorable title of wife. Darya knew other girls like her have been trafficked to become drug mules and prostitutes. Darya's life has turned out better than I had imagined. She's the younger wife and has become the matriarch of her compound. "Now they give me a lot of respect," she said. She had cried for a year after arriving in Helmand, and she resisted by arguing with Sufi's first wife. Sufi beat her for disobeying. When she stopped rebelling and completed her chores, he stopped the beatings. "Now my *hambaq* (husband's other wife) and I are friends. He no longer sleeps with her. I tell her 'you send him to me now that he's an old man. I have no use for him,'" she said, laughing.

She quickly learned Pashto, but it took her four years to get pregnant. At 18, she had a son, and he became her reason to live. She spent her days baking bread in a clay oven, cooking, doing laundry, and looking after her child. Twice a year, Sufi took Darya to Herat to visit her mother. Her father came out of hiding after he paid his debt in full. He still deals drugs though, she said. On one of her trips to Herat, Darya confronted her dad



for selling her to Sufi. "He told me I should be grateful because my husband can take care of me. If he had left me to the young boys in Herat, I would've become a drug addict's wife, which is worse." Touraj gave her the cell phone she was using as a way of making peace. Darya has forgiven her father, but not his deed. "He should've found another way. What he did to me was wrong," she said.

During the first years of her marriage, Darya only left the Marjah compound to shop with her husband or to go to the doctor. Until the U.S. arrived with the Afghan National Army, women could not go out on their own because the Taliban demanded that male kin accompany women in public. One morning while Darya was busy with her household chores, Sufi took their 18-month-old outside the compound to play in the nearby creek. She heard Sufi scream, and then she saw her dead son in his arms. The toddler drowned in the creek because Sufi had failed to watch him. "I had lost a lot until that point, but the worst pain hit me after I lost my child. I can never forget his loss," she said, choking up. After her firstborn's death, she had a second son, Barat, who is now 2, and a daughter, Zahra, now 8 months old. She can roam the bazaar in her burqa with the other women from the compound. There are now fewer moral restrictions, but the night raids and house searches were a regular part of life for her family. American troops, who have left control to Afghan authorities now, searched their compound five times in the last three years. Darya has met many other opium brides in Marjah on her outings. A network of Helmand farmers and smugglers interact with traffickers in Herat, and bartering brides is a regular part of business for this network. To read more about this story follow the link <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/07/in-afghanistan-fathers-barter-daughters-to-settle-drug-debts/278217/>

And in Syria ... Refugees struggle to protect their daughters from exploitation

When I met them in early June, Abu Nizar, his wife and their three daughters – aged 22, 18 and 14 – were perched on threadbare mattresses in a rundown house in Ramtha, Jordan,

where they survive on charity from the local community. Blankets covered the windows to keep out the mid-afternoon heat. Inside, a musty darkness hovered.

Abu Nazir pays almost 300 Jordanian dinars per month – nearly \$424 – for rent and utilities. Alone, he and his wife could rent a room for 70 dinars. He said to me, only half-joking, “Of course my daughters need to get married – it will lift the burden off of me!”

A doctor from Dubai asked to marry Abu Nizar’s 22-year-old daughter, Rima, and he seriously considered the proposal. “He’s related to people who live upstairs. He’s a doctor, he has studied,” Abu Nizar told me. Ultimately, Abu Nizar refused the offer. With her identity documents left behind during their flight from Syria, Rima would not be granted the passport and authorization to accompany her new husband to Dubai, leaving her vulnerable to becoming a so-called “pleasure” wife, abandoned after a short stint of marriage.



“A lot of women ask us here in Jordan if we want to marry our daughters,” Abu Nizar said. “We say no because we can’t guarantee her rights here.”

The focus on Syrian refugee women and girls has largely centered on accounts of forced and early marriage as a coping mechanism. Yet during investigative missions to Lebanon and Jordan by Human Rights Watch in March and June, I found that many Syrian families remain determined to protect their daughters from violence and exploitation.

While there are some reported cases of early or forced marriage, we have not found evidence that marriage patterns differ substantially from those in pre-conflict Syria. However, inadequate international assistance and the threat of ongoing poverty could eventually lead refugees to desperate measures, including exploitative marriages.

In early July, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) reported that over 1.7 million registered Syrian refugees are living in neighboring countries; more than three quarters are women and children. UNHCR estimates that urban and rural host communities – rather than camps – house 77 percent of Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey.

Refugee sites I visited are overcrowded, lack resources and are underserved. The expanding refugee population is straining already scarce water, food, housing and employment in receiving countries, causing rising tensions with host communities.

Refugees reported apprehension about seeking assistance from local police and security forces, some of whom, they believe, may be corrupt, abusive or unwilling to help. Scant support for generating income or rent and insufficient humanitarian assistance are creating heightened desperation as refugees seek to sustain their families and escape long-term dependence.

Women and girls are particularly vulnerable. Aid agencies say reports of domestic violence have increased since the refugee crisis began, a common outcome amid the stress, disruption and idleness of refugee settings and poor access to resources and services for women and girls. Social constraints and fear limit their mobility, restricting their access to income-generating activities or health and other critical services.

Whether based in fact or rumor, refugees’ belief that women and girls face danger outside the home creates a very real barrier to using facilities, from clinics and schools to latrines. Yasmin, in her thirties and living in Jordan’s Zaatari camp, said: “We make a bathroom in our tent to use at night.” A new UN Women assessment says that male relatives restrict women’s movement in Jordan’s urban refugee areas to protect them from harm.

In interviews in Lebanon and Jordan, aid agencies and refugees confirmed that refugees remain largely unaware of available services, especially outside of camps. Services are often out of easy reach, and women must secure transportation or child care to use them. Aliyah, 20, described trying to register for humanitarian aid when I met her in Beirut in March: “I would have to go [to UNHCR] all day, take the children with me, wait three months for an interview. That’s what happened to my sister-in-law.” Aliyah said the cost of a shared taxi prohibited her from going to the local branch of an international non-governmental organization to seek assistance.

The inability to sustain a household and access key resources makes women – in particular, those who head households – vulnerable to high-risk situations, including exploitative work or housing arrangements, dependence on others for food and other necessities, and early or forced marriage. To read more follow the link

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/08/07/syrian-refugees-struggle-protect-daughters-exploitation>

Women drivers dealt with firmly in Saudi Arabia

Authorities in Saudi Arabia are in the midst of a new crackdown on female drivers after several women in the conservative Gulf kingdom were caught behind the wheel.

Traffic officials in the Eastern Province city of Al-Qatif said that any females caught driving would be dealt with firmly on the back of three arrests in recent months, Saudi Gazette reported

Sunni Muslim Saudi prohibits women from driving, instead making them rely on private drivers or male guardians.

A spokesman told the newspaper that any woman caught driving would be fined SR900 (\$240) and made to sign a legal document that assures authorities they will not do it again.

One case in recent months was that of an unidentified 47-year old woman, traffic cops said, who had filmed herself driving while accompanied by her father and brother. The video, in which she talked about why women should be given the right to drive, was then posted on YouTube.

Another involved a Turkish woman who was arrested despite holding an international driver’s licence, which Saudi authorities say they do not recognise.

In 2012, more than 600 women petitioned Saudi’s King Abdullah to allow women to drive in the country, a year after a group of women’s-rights activists launched the Women2Drive campaign.

Prominent figures such as Princess Ameerah Al Taweel have also spoken in support of women lobbying to overturn the driving ban.

Women’s rights in the Gulf’s most populous country, which practises an austere version of Sharia Law, are a frequent topic of discussion in the world’s media.

Females in Saudi Arabia are prohibited from taking up employment or leaving the country without a male guardian’s permission.

In recent years though there have been indications that absolute monarch King Abdullah has pursued a reformist agenda in terms of women’s rights.



In 2011, it was announced that women would be permitted to vote and stand in municipal elections from 2015, while in January 2013 30 women were appointed to the country's legislative Shoura Council.

Some female members of the Shoura Council have said they will lobby for the driving ban to be lifted, although there is not yet a timeframe for when the issue will be discussed.

It was also recently announced that women would be allowed to practice law in a professional environment for the first time. To read more about this issue follow the link <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentid=20130824178018>

GENDER & HUMAN RIGHTS

Tunisia's Amina quits Femen and accuses group of Islamophobia

Amina Sboui, a Tunisian activist who was detained for nearly three months, said on Tuesday she had left the radical women's protest group Femen, accusing it of Islamophobia.

"I do not want my name to be associated with an Islamophobic organisation," she told the Maghreb edition of the Huffington Post.

"I did not appreciate the action taken by the girls shouting 'Amina Akbar, Femen Akbar' in front of the Tunisian embassy in Paris," Sboui said.

Those chants were a parody of Allahu akbar (God is greatest), a phrase frequently used by Muslims to express their allegiance to and praise of God.

Amina also criticised the burning of the black Tawhid flag, which affirms the oneness of God, in front of a mosque in Paris. "That offends many Muslims and many friends of mine. We must respect everyone's religion," she added. The Femen protests took place as Sboui was being held in pre-trial detention for painting the word "Femen" on a cemetery wall in protest at a planned meeting of radical Muslim Salafists in May in the central city of Kairouan.

She was finally released at the beginning of August pending her trial for desecrating a cemetery. The young woman also criticised the lack of financial transparency of Femen, the movement founded in Ukraine and now based in Paris, which has become famous for its topless protests against dictatorship in support of women's rights.

"I don't know how the movement is financed. I asked (Femen leader Inna Shevchenko) several times, but I didn't get a clear answer. I don't want to be in a movement supported by suspect money. What if it is financed by Israel? I want to know."

Amina, who now calls herself an "anarchist", sparked both scandal and a wave of online support earlier this year after she was threatened by Tunisia's increasingly assertive hardline Islamists for posting topless pictures of herself on Facebook.

At the end of May, three Femen activists -- two French and a German -- were arrested, and eventually freed, for bearing their breasts outside the main Tunis courthouse, in a demonstration of support for Amina.

At beginning of August, Sboui published a new topless picture of herself on the Internet lighting a petrol bomb with a cigarette. To read more about this issue : <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/Aug-20/227979-tunisia-amina-quits->



More women work in Mena corporates

Women in the Mena region are increasingly making a greater presence in the region's corporate world. The number of women entrepreneurs is also on the rise in Mena.

The total number of working females in the region has increased at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 3.7 percent to 16.8m in 2011 from 11.2m in 2000. Rate of female participation in the labour force was up strongly in Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain and Oman in the GCC region, a report released by Alternative Asset Management Institution Al Masah Capital noted.

There is a general perception that female/women entrepreneurs in the Mena region run small firms employing fewer than 10 workers. This was proved wrong by a World Bank survey that found that more than 30 percent of women entrepreneurs in Mena owned large firms employing more than 250 workers.

Looking at sector specifics, female-owned firms were much like male-owned firms, with nearly 85 percent in manufacturing and 15 percent in services compared to 88 percent of male-owned firms in manufacturing and 10 percent in services.

The report noted that banks in Mena are targeting SMEs and women for growth. SMEs are targeted as they have high growth potential and have been offered much less banking support in the past. Banks consider women as an important customer segment. In recent times, women have been making their mark not just in education but also at work.

Women in the Mena region also hold significant amounts of wealth. Saudi women own 10 percent of the real estate and 30 percent of the brokerage accounts in the kingdom. They also own 40 percent of the family-run companies.



“There are no reliable estimates of the total amount of wealth controlled by Mena women. However, according to a report by Boston Consulting Group, women in the Middle East controlled 22 percent, or \$500bn, of the region's total Assets Under Management (AUM) in 2009. A majority of these ultra-wealthy women live in the oil and gas rich countries of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar.”

Contrary to general perception, oil is not the main source of wealth creation for Mena women. The main source of their wealth generation is from the finance and banking sectors or from industries.

The report noted that at business places, women are mainly seen heading companies in sectors like banking and finance, construction, retail, media, transport, IT, telecoms and real estate. Out of 100 most powerful Arab women, a significant 42 percent are business women.

Mena women's participation in decision-making is growing, but remains relatively small. Women hold a mere 1.5 percent of boardroom seats in GCC countries. Kuwait and Oman have the highest female representation in boardrooms, with a share of 2.7 percent and 2.3 percent respectively. Dubai was found to have the third highest proportion of female

representation (1.2 percent), followed by Bahrain (1 percent), Abu Dhabi (0.6 percent) and Qatar (0.3 percent). To read more <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar-business/249240-more-women-work-in-mena-corporates.html>

Predicaments of Being a sportswoman in Iran

Ahmadinejad is leaving, but the memories of his era linger, bitter mostly, for some more than others, none, perhaps, more bitter than those of the Iranian sportswomen, athletes whose challenge begins way before the starting gun and ends... well it never really ends. Here, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, whatever the name, discrimination is the game.

And eight years of Ahmadinejad has only made it worse.

Take as one example a recent official 'party' to celebrate the achievements of Iranian footballers. The ceremony was held at Tehran's main stadium; five men teams were invited, and the women Futsal team. The whole thing was most probably planned as yet another publicity stunt for the President in his last days. It ended, however, as but one more telling tale of what sportswomen have gone through in the past eight years.

The Women Futsal team were invited because they had made history, had come second in the 2013 Asian Indoor Games in South Korea. It was the first time a women team from Iran won a medal in a ball game in Asia. They had lost only once, in extra-time to the Champions, Japan. And so they were invited to the ceremony, only to be embarrassed. None were allowed to leave the CIP lounge. They had to stand behind the pane and watch their male counterparts applauded for their accomplishments. To add insult to injury, the organisers did not mention the Women Futsal Team throughout the ceremony.

The Team complained afterwards: why drag them from faraway cities to the Capital, why invite them, if they were to remain 'unseen'. Shahrzad Mozafar, the head coach - nick named Shahrzad Capello - was furious: "What was the point of them being there if their names weren't to be mentioned, or they weren't to appear on the field?



These girls have paid from their own pocket to get here, and now they're being sent back, again at their own expense, and with empty hands". Fahimeh Zarei, one of the stars of the team, later told reporters how with great difficulty she had managed to pay for her journey. She lives in Bashagard, a small town in one of the more deprived provinces of Iran, some 1400 km from the Capital, Tehran.

The treatment of the Women Futsal team hints only briefly at the overall situation of women sports in Iran. And still they are the lucky ones. True, they have to play in women-only arenas, or with the full Islamic outfit in international matches, but at least the footballers can be in a team, they do get to play. There are but sports that are banned altogether: wrestling, weight lifting, boxing; and there are others like swimming and gymnastics that are permitted strictly in women-only environments, which means there is no possibility for women in these sports to compete in international tournaments.

In 2011, authorities in the Ministry of Sports and Youth decided to ban Kick Boxing and Muay Thai for women. Of all combat sports which have official, international organisations for women, these were the only ones with a functioning federation in Iran. The decision was made - coincidentally perhaps - in the midst of a series of reports which hinted at an

unprecedented surge in the number of women training in martial arts, something they probably believed could use in self defence on the streets - or at home.

Explaining the ban, Marzieh Akbarabadi, the Deputy for Women in the Ministry of Sports and Youth, said such sports had an 'aggressive nature', and could affect the health and the well-being of the 'future mothers'. The values and customs entailed in these sports, she argued, clashed with Islamic principles. The decision raised some objections even among the officials. The head of Martial Arts Association in one province called it 'scientifically unfounded'. The Ministry, however, reiterated the argument: martial arts are not only in conflict with 'health principles', 'social values' and 'cultural norms', but also 'degrading to Muslim women'.

Ms Akbarabadi, the Deputy Minister, who one expects to be looking after the interests of sportswomen in Iran, is in fact a stern advocate of full Islamic dress code. She was the one who ordered the players in the women National Football Team to wear something like a shower-cap on top of their head scarves. Even the Football Federation of Iran advised against it, to no avail. This item was beyond what FIFA allows for Muslim players. It was bound to cause trouble, and it did. Iran faced Jordan in the qualifying round of the 2012 Olympics. The teams walked to the pitch, all was set, but picking up on the unsolicited head gear, the AFC representative required the referee to call the game off. The rest - the tears, the disbelief, the anger - is history. Only it isn't. to continue reading the article follow the link <http://www.wluml.org/news/iran-predicaments-being-sportswoman-iran>

...Also in Iran President Rohani Appoints Woman Cabinet Minister

Many women who helped vote Hassan Rohani into office as Iran's new president did so in the hope that he would push for equality. Yet, when Rohani released his proposed new cabinet on inauguration day on August 4, his list had the makings of an all-male club. In an apparent response to the criticism that followed from female voters and rights watchers, the cabinet now has its first woman. Elham Aminzadeh, a former conservative lawmaker who reportedly teaches at several universities, has been named vice president for legal affairs. Rohani said in an August 11 decree that Aminzadeh was given the job because of her "scientific competence" and "legal qualifications" and also for her "moral virtues," Fars reported. Susan Tahmasebi, a prominent Iranian women's rights activist, welcomed Aminzadeh's appointment as a positive step.

Yet she says it still falls short of her expectations for Rohani's presidency.

"It's women's right to have female ministers appointed as well," Tahmasebi says. "[Former Iranian President Mahmud] Ahmadinejad introduced three female ministers, one of whom was actually approved by the parliament. We expected more from Rohani, especially [since] he came in promising to have a positive view on women's issues, whereas Ahmadinejad's presidency, all eight years, was marked with serious setbacks for women."

Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi was nominated in 2009 by Ahmadinejad to serve in his second term as health minister. She was approved, becoming the Islamic republic's first female minister. She was dismissed in 2012 for criticizing a colleague.



President Mohammad Khatami brought the first woman into a top government post in 1997, when he named Massoumeh Ebtekar to a vice presidential post and as head of the environmental protection organization.

Rohani's proposed all-male cabinet led to protests among women's rights advocates and intellectuals in Iran, including Ashraf Geramizadegan, a journalist and lawyer. "We women don't want from Rohani and his government our share of the cabinet. It is rather our right," Geramizadegan was quoted as saying during a meeting held in Tehran in early August to discuss the shape of the future government. At the same meeting, journalist Shahindokht Molaverdi said the all-male cabinet list leaked to the media ahead of Rohani's inauguration exhibited the "very tall walls" keeping women out of politics. "Everywhere in Rohani's programs, there was talk of equal participation for women, and we were expecting to see -- in the framework of moderation -- the presence of women along with men in the cabinet," she said. Rohani campaigned on a platform of moderation, spoke in favor of gender equality, and pledged to create a ministry of women's affairs. In his first press conference after taking power, the Iranian president addressed criticisms over his cabinet and said he would work to eliminate inequalities against Iranian women. "Even if a woman is appointed as minister, it doesn't mean that women have achieved equal rights," Rohani said. "All the inequalities must be compensated at different management levels. The aim is not to have a woman in the government, just to say, 'Look people, we have a woman, so they got their rights.'" In Washington, Tahmasebi agrees. But she says appointing a female cabinet minister would have sent a strong message. "It shows that he recognizes that half of the population is [made up of] women. That a lot of people who voted for him are women. That he wants to have a cabinet and a group of ministers that are somewhat representative of the general population of Iran," Tahmasebi says. "And yes, of course, it's not going to solve the problems. I think all the ministers really need to be aware of women's issues and they need to be committed to the issue of empowering women, women's equality, and advancing women's rights." To continue reading the article follow the link <http://isnblog.ethz.ch/international-relations/perhaps-bowing-to-pressure-rohani-appoints-woman-to-iranian-cabinet>

RESOURCES & CALLS

BOOKS & REPORTS

Grantmaking with a Gender Lens, Using a Gender Analysis

In this guide, grantmakers and grantees describe the experience of using a "gender lens" in their work. They explain what gender analysis is and isn't - and why it can help shape more effective programs and organizations. The guide also takes a closer look at how gender analysis has led to new thinking in fields as diverse as public health, international development, juvenile justice, and youth services. And it offers additional insights and special advice on issues ranging from "What about Men and Boys" to "Uncovering Gender Assumptions." To download the pdf version check this link

<http://www.grantcraft.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&pageId=1328>



Advancing Women's Rights through Islamic Law

This article discusses the challenges and opportunities for advancing women's rights through Islamic law using contemporary Morocco as a case study. Part I provides an overview of women's rights in



Morocco including the historic 2004 Mudawana (Code of Personal Status) reforms. Part II

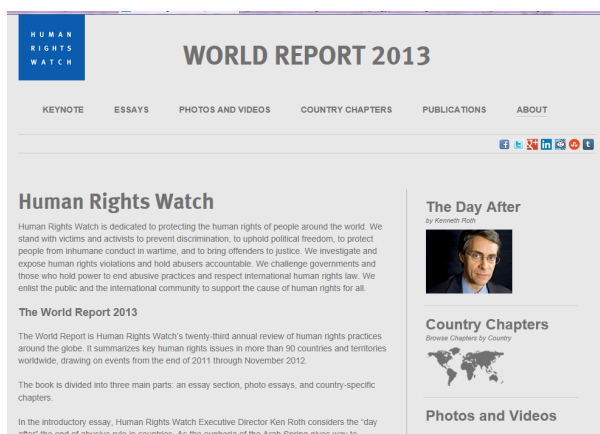
discusses the social roles, cultural representations, and socioeconomic realities of Moroccan women, emphasizing the important role that Moroccan women have played in legal and social reform efforts through their participation in civil society. Part III discusses several legal strategies for advancing women's rights in Islamic states and assesses the strengths, weaknesses, and likely success of each approach. These strategies include implementing international law and secular reform, utilizing the Moroccan legislative process, reinterpreting the Qur'an and the hadith (the two primary sources of Islamic law), exercising ijtihad (resolving an Islamic legal issue through personal thought and reflection), and contesting the development of Shari'a. Part IV outlines the most promising strategy for advancing women's rights in Islamic states. This final Part discusses failed reform strategies, outlines an effective reform strategy, and concludes that women's rights are largely compatible with Shari'a provided the right social and political conditions exist. To read more about the article follow the link

http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/08_13/08_05/080513_advancing.htm

Human Rights Watch World Report 2013 - Women & Girls

This comprehensive report includes multiple gender dimensions, as shown in individual country reports. Scroll down after the country list below, to see an example of specific components of the **Colombia Report** and the **Iraq Report**, directed to women. But, references throughout each country overview intersect with the human rights of women and girls.

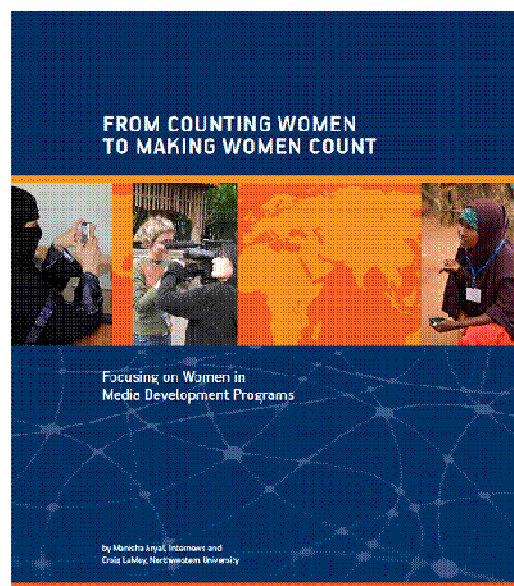
<http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/afghanistan?page=2>



Women in Media Development Programs

Women's voices are essential to the development of societies; correspondingly, gender equality and female empowerment are necessary to finding solutions to the world's most pressing development challenges. Although gender concerns have been part of development programs for almost 40 years, a wide range of stakeholders report that it continues to be an afterthought, or just a box to tick during program implementation.

This paper argues that like other sectors, the media development sector needs to bring greater empirical rigor to its operations in order to bring about gender integration. It attempts to orient media development practitioners with both a historical and contemporary view of key policies, research and approaches to gender integration, as produced by media development scholars, practitioners and the donor community. Through in-depth interviews with Internews country staff around the world, and a



number of leading stakeholders, including representatives of the United States Agency for International

Development (USAID), the Open Society Foundation (OSF), the World Bank, think tanks and academic experts, the paper looks at the following questions and issues:

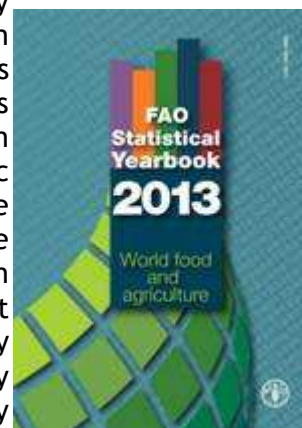
1. What does gender integration or gender equality mean and how do these terms apply to media development?
2. Does gender matter for media development programs, and if so, why?
3. What are the biggest challenges donors and practitioners face in supporting gender goals through media development?
4. What are the best practices or outstanding examples of media development programs or achievements that have helped advance gender goals?
5. What are the priorities for gender goals in terms of media related work?

To download the full publication check the link

http://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/Internews_MakingWomenCount2013-03.pdf

FAO Statistical Yearbook 2013, World food and agriculture

In many poor developing countries, primary activities such as agriculture still constitute the backbone of the economy. However, the sector often faces many challenges. A profound and prolonged lack of investment in agriculture is evident in many countries. Notably, infrastructure is missing or weak in rural areas, agricultural productivity is stagnant, and lack of opportunities for income diversification combines with poorly functioning markets to undermine economic growth. There is often a gender divide. Although women make significant contributions to the rural economy, they often have less access to productive resources than men, and families often rely on children's work for survival. Women make significant contributions to the rural economy in all developing country regions. Their roles differ across regions, yet they consistently have less access than men to the resources and opportunities they need to be more productive. Increasing women's access to land, livestock, education, financial services, extension, technology and rural employment would boost their productivity and generate gains in terms of agricultural production, food security, economic growth and social welfare. Closing the gender gap in agricultural inputs alone could lift 100-150 million people out of hunger. No blueprint exists for closing the gender gap, but some basic principles are universal: governments, the international community and civil society should work together to eliminate discrimination under the law, to promote equal access to resources and opportunities, to ensure that agricultural policies and programmes are gender-aware, and to make women's voices heard as equal partners for sustainable development. Achieving gender equality and empowering women in agriculture is not only the right thing to do. It is also crucial for agricultural development and food security. To Read the executive summary or download the full publication please follow the link <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e.pdf>



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