

A quarterly newsletter published by Women in Economic Life — a project funded by the European Union's EUROMED programme for the MEDA region.

IN FOCUS

Welcome Note by Team Leader

We are very pleased to introduce the EUROMED Women in Economic Life Regional Programme (RWEL) in this first quarterly newsletter. The three-year programme launched by the European Commission in January 2006 is geared towards enhancing the role of Mediterranean public, governmental and non-governmental institutions to facilitate and expand opportunities for women's economic participation. Countries and territories involved include: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestinian Territories, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey. The programme, managed by the British Council in partnership with the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies in Cyprus, has two main components:



1) training and capacity building; and
2) information, communication and networking.

For the first component 7 NGO consortia implement projects aimed at "Enhancing the Opportunities for Women in Economic Life" in the MEDA region, covering a wide range of activities, such as:

- Increasing women's access to credit and business development services;
- Supporting women in the start-up micro and small enterprises;
- Increasing job opportunities for unemployed women through vocational skills;
- Setting-up a Mediterranean centre to promote home-based working women;
- Promoting women's participation in policy debate on economic participation;
- Building national, regional and international business women's networks;
- Supporting the recognition of women's economic contributions in the media.



Photograph © YEP

The second component aims at building a knowledge base and facilitating the exchange of experiences, research and information among partner organisations and key actors involved in the region. The knowledge generated and lessons learnt from their work on the ground with women, employers and networks will be used in addressing macro issues, especially policies and legislations related to enhancing women's economic participation and empowerment.

Finally, the programme will share the knowledge base it will generate by engaging in awareness-raising actions, dissemination of information and communication. This will include exchange of information and networking, cross regional cooperation and synthesis of key lessons learned through seminars and events, newsletters and brochures.

We invite readers to visit the project's website:
www.roleofwomenineconomiclife.net

We look forward to your comments, suggestions and contributions.

Marguerite Appel
Project Team leader

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This project is funded by the European Union



This project is implemented by the British Council



The whole nine yards

Introducing MIGS

The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) is the British Council's sole partner in the EUROMED Women in Economic Life Regional Programme.

The partnership involves sharing and exchanging knowledge and experience in the implementation of projects on issues of gender and empowerment, working with the Technical Assistance Team and regional partners implementing EOWEL projects, thus contributing to the impact and success of the programme in general. MIGS work has focussed on gender and the media, violence against women and girls, gender and migration, women in politics, women's issues under conditions of ethno-political conflict, and women in employment and economic life. As an organization working predominately in the Mediterranean region, MIGS recognizes the multilayered levels of discrimination against women and that this discrimination takes different forms.

It is committed to the elimination of this discrimination through a blend of research, advocacy and lobbying, as well as training, organizing conferences, and other activities.

The RWEL regional programme is a particularly important initiative promoting economic empowerment for women in the region. It can play a catalytic role in the adoption of future national programmes that work to incorporate a gender sensitive perspective in order to address the major barriers toward women's economic participation and empowerment.

Such barriers include negative gender stereotypes, legal and socio-cultural barriers, violence against women, poverty, and lack of education. The work of the 7 regional consortia implementing EOWEL projects is key to reaching this goal. However, MIGS strongly believes that women's empowerment in one area cannot be achieved without attention to

other facets of gender discrimination. For example, greater decision making power and access to economic resources do not necessarily translate into greater representation of, or power for women within political institutions.

In order for economic empowerment to be sustainable, a holistic approach must be adopted, one that is critical, gender-aware and which addresses structural as well as other factors contributing to the marginalization of women in all areas of life. In the coming years, the RWEL regional programme, with the active involvement of MIGS, will use the knowledge generated by the EOWEL project partners' work on the ground to promote the kind of multilayered and complex transformation necessary for genuine empowerment for women to be realised and sustained.

Susana Pavlou
Programme Coordinator
MIGS



The takeoff

The First Regional Partners' Meeting launches the RWEL regional programme

Seven NGO consortia from across the region gathered in Cairo 26-29 June for the First Regional Partners Meeting. Held at Cairo's Nile-side Conrad Hotel, the meeting marked the launch of the EUROMED Women in Economic Life Regional Programme. Besides the NGO consortia from such countries as Turkey to Morocco, the meeting was attended by the RWEL Technical Assistance Team, representatives from the European Commission (EC) Brussels, and the EC delegation in Lebanon, as well as the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies. The meeting provided a forum for partners to become familiar with the aims, objectives and approach of the RWEL regional programme, clarify the roles of the various stakeholders involved, including the technical assistance team, the EC delegation in Lebanon, and the EC Brussels. It also worked to define the expectations of all those involved. The most exciting aspect of the meeting, however, was that it provided an opportunity for the project partners to become acquainted with each others' work and exchange information and experience on best practice, share lessons learned and establish linkages on issues of mutual interest and concern. As a result of this five working groups were established with the aim of proposing specific activities, within the framework of the RWEL regional programme, on areas requiring special support and assistance.

These proposals will assist the RWEL technical assistance team to better cater to the specific needs of the project partners.

The first day of business included opening statements by Leonidas Kiuoussis, Chief of Sector MEDA, EuropeAid Brussels; Joseph Piazzadolmo, Operational Manager, Lebanon Delegation of the European Commission; Catherine Colomb-Nancy, Euromed Operations Manager, EuropeAid Brussels; and Marguerite Appel, Team Leader, Role of

Women in Economic Life, British Council Egypt.

On 28 June, a press conference was held with a view to raising awareness of the programme, and providing it with visibility in the region. A representative of the European Commission, Catherine Colomb-Nancy, two representatives of the RWEL technical assistance team, Fatma Khafagy and Marguerite Appel, and two representatives of partner NGOs, Omar Traboulsi and Maha Soliman Rashid Najjab, spoke at the press conference.



On the ground

Enhancing the Opportunities for Women in Economic Life (EOWEL) Projects - an overview:

The most important component of the EUROMED Women in Economic Life Regional Programme are the seven projects being implemented within the framework of the "Enhancing the Opportunities for Women in Economic Life [EOWEL] programme. These projects involve 28 partner organisations spanning eight countries in the MEDA region, as well as France, Italy and Belgium. They cover a wide range of activities from increasing women's access to credit and business development services, to building national, regional and international business women's networks. For more detailed information please visit the RWEL project website at www.roleofwomenineconomiclife.net/eowel-projects/eowel-projects.html

The Community Development Association and Small Enterprises (GEESE)

The GEESE project is an ambitious project implemented by no less than five NGOs in Egypt and one NGO in Jordan aiming to improve the economic status of women by encouraging and supporting their involvement in economic activity and paid employment. The project will meet its objectives by employing innovative techniques including the establishment of gender and employment centres in the target areas and leadership training aimed at enhancing the capacity of women to advocate for their rights. A unique feature of this project is its plan to analyze women's image in the media and make recommendations for gender sensitive reporting and the portrayal of positive images of women.



For more information on this project please contact The Community Development Association & Small Enterprises (El Mobadara) at el_mobadara@link.net or visit their website at www.egyptsmo.org

Economic Empowerment for Palestinian Women : Turning Business Ideas into Reality

This project is one of two joint Palestinian-Israeli projects funded by the EOWEL programme and is implemented by the Centre for Jewish-Arab Economic Development in partnership

with the Palestinian Media and Development Institute and the Jerusalem Women's Association. It aims at enhancing the economic and social empowerment of rural Palestinian women as well as the promotion of peaceful co-existence of the two communities. The project is based upon a comprehensive approach with activities ranging from vocational training, training in entrepreneurship and business skills, as well as the provision of guidance in designing business plans and accessing micro-credit facilities. This project is innovative in that it facilitates the communication and networking of Palestinian and Israeli women entrepreneurs, encouraging the sharing of information and experience and the promotion of peace. For more information on this project please contact The Centre for Jewish-Arab Economic Development at clare@cjaed.org.il, info@pmdip.org or visit their website at www.cjaed.org.il



Femmes Entrepreneuses en Méditerranée (FEM)

This is an exciting project that spans five countries in the Mediterranean region, including two organisations from France. Project activities will be implemented in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia with the aim of improving the standard of living and capacity to generate sustainable income of women micro-entrepreneurs. FEM takes a two-track approach: enhancing the capacities of staff in organizations serving the target population on the one hand, and informing women of new openings in the job market and providing them with necessary support on the other. FEM also organizes trade fairs for women, providing them with opportunities to network, share information, and gain mobility. Last year FEM organized three travelling forums with specific themes that allowed ten women from each country to travel to another country represented in the FEM consortium. For more information on this project please contact Enda Inter-Arabe Appui Aux Micro-entrepreneurs at partnership@endarabe.org.tn or visit their website at www.endarabe.org.tn



with the Jordan Chamber of Industry, the Arab Women Organization in Jordan, and Society Voice Association for Community and Civil Work, an association based in Gaza. The project seeks to bridge the gap between employment supply and demand and to enhance women's skills to meet the needs of the labour market through personalised training programmes. It targets rural women of Amman and Gaza, women employed in the public sector, women entrepreneurs, farmers and owners of agricultural enterprises, public organizations, small and medium enterprises, and civil society associations and NGOs. For more information on this project please contact Tatawor Association for the Preparation of Youth info@tatawor.org or visit their website at www.tatwor.org



Sustainable Economic Opportunities for Women in the MENA region (SEOW-MENA)

SEOW-MENA is a two-year regional project led by the Collective for Research and Training on Development - Action (CRTD.A) in collaboration with two partners and covers Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Algeria and Morocco. An innovative feature of this project is expressed in the recognition of the structural and institutional obstacles to women's economic participation in the MENA region and the need to reduce these obstacles through awareness raising and capacity building of major stakeholders to promote gender mainstreaming in economic development policies. The project seeks to meet its objectives through training and building women's capacities in economic literacy and leadership skills, the development of a database on resources on women's economic empowerment, and networking, communication and participation in policy dialogue and formulation, among others. For more information on this project please contact Collective for Research and Training on Development Action CRTDA at labouhabib@crttd.org or visit their website at www.crttd.org



Free to Work

This ambitious project is being undertaken by the Tatawor Association for the Preparation of Youth in collaboration

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Women in conflict: Interviews with Al Majmoua and Collective for Research and Training on Development– Action (CRTD.A), Lebanon by MIGS

The recent conflict between Hezbollah and Israel sent shock-waves across the region, Europe and beyond threatening the fragile stability of the region and plunging Lebanon into a war it could ill afford after 25 years of post-Taif reconstruction and only 6 years after the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon. Since the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 and the ensuing "cessation of hostilities," ordinary Lebanese have been venturing to return to their homes and businesses with the assistance of emergency relief agencies. Susana Pavlou (MIGS) asks Al Majmoua and Collective for Research and Training on Development – Action (CRTD.A), Lebanese organisations implementing EOWEL projects, how their staff and project activities have been affected by the recent conflict.

Al Majmoua

How has Al Majmoua experienced the attacks? How has it affected their staff and their work on the ground?

During the war about 35 Al Majmoua employees were displaced with their families to safe areas outside their neighborhoods and region. As a result, Majmoua opened its offices in Sidon, Bourj Barajneh and Beirut to lodge our "refugees". Soon after the war began, our staff cooperated with emergency relief agencies offering assistance in the schools where refugees were gathered. One of our employees, Mohamad Oseily, based in the South of Lebanon, was severely injured by bomb shells while working as a volunteer with the Red Cross.

All of our micro-entrepreneurs beneficiaries, including those outside the war areas, have been severely affected by the conflict. As many as 10 clients (including 3 women beneficiaries) were killed during the bombings. 28 beneficiaries have now total or partial disability (including 4 women beneficiaries) and more than 65 clients are still unaccounted for.

How has this impacted your project in particular?

Al Majmoua is back on track and has resumed the activities linked to the FEM (Femmes Entrepreneuses en Méditerranée) project.

Some adjustments have naturally been made with regard to the kinds of services we offer to women. For example, under the awareness component of

our project we are now focusing on delivering psychological assistance through group therapy to women who have suffered from the attacks in a number of ways. These women also need economic advice in order to help them in taking the lead in generating income for the survival of their families.

What are these women's immediate needs? How have them been affected directly?

From an economic perspective, women entrepreneurs all over Lebanon were adversely affected by the war. Their businesses were either physically damaged or have become unoperational due to loss of operating capital and assets. This loss threatens their immediate livelihoods. The heavier burden is shouldered by women heads of households, especially in rural areas, which were also affected by displacement. Perhaps more important is the psychological impact of the war. The war has affected the physical and psychological well-being of the population in general, and women in particular in view of their more limited access to health care facilities. Further, the reinforcement of their maternal role during the war has led to increased responsibility towards the well-being of their children. New special needs have also been identified for women: the new widows, the wives of disabled people, the displaced and other female-headed households.

What were Al Majmoua's priorities? And have these priorities affected by the conflict?

Our priorities, which were to expand the beneficiaries outreach and to enlarge the variety of non financial services offered to women, have been affected by the conflict and Al Majmoua's

sustainability may be at stake if the Institution is not able to recover the portfolio that is currently at risk because the beneficiaries are unable to repay their loans. Therefore our new priorities include programmes encompassing a range of activities such as credit, marketing assistance, basic education, skills development and health education. Thus, a combination of social, psychological, financial and technical support is needed to speed up the process of enabling affected enterprises and families to economically survive the current crisis.

How can the EOWEL regional programme contribute to the successful continuation of the project?

Al Majmoua would like to thank all EOWEL partners who have shown their concern for Lebanon in general and our Institution in particular. Your moral support has helped us tremendously to get through this crisis.

The EOWEL regional programme can play a critical role in the successful continuation of the project through the sharing of ideas, experiences, and literature on best practices on how to help women in the post-war phase. Institutions in Palestine may have a lot to share with us from their own experience. Not only could they help to identify the most vulnerable target groups but also give us ideas on how to respond to their needs in the best possible ways.

The British Council could support us in obtaining flexibility from the EC with regard to our activity schedule due to the delays caused by recent events. Also, we would welcome any assistance from our fellow partners in fundraising to finance our activities on the ground.



Collective for Research and Training on Development – Action (CRTD.A)

How has CRTDA experienced the attacks? How has it affected their staff and their work on the ground?

During the July 2006 war on Lebanon, the Collective for Research and Training on Development – Action (CRTD.A) engaged, like many other community-based and civil society organizations, in easing the suffering of the displaced who were forced to abandon their towns and villages in the South, the Western Beqaa Valley, Baalbek, and Beirut's Southern suburbs, and providing them with immediate relief assistance.

CRTD.A remained open and operational despite the fact that one third of our staff was trapped in remote areas as a result of the destruction of bridges as well as threats from bombardments and air strikes.

Nevertheless, CRTD.A mobilized its staff, networks and resources to carry out an immediate relief action. It even hosted volunteers from Arab countries as well as from Europe. These volunteers wanted to offer their time, labour, as well as solidarity to support our relief actions.

In the first phase, CRTD.A's relief intervention aimed at addressing critical public health needs of IDP centres as a first step towards reaching women and addressing their direct needs. Focused actions were also carried out with partner organizations and local authorities, particularly aiming at encouraging the mobilization and organization of IDP families in order to ensure the public health and environmental safety.

Work with the environmental health committees focused on ensuring women's participation and representation through local committees. These local structures are considered as key for the sustainability of this initiative and ensuring that women are active participants in their governance.

During the following, second, phase, more attention was given on ensuring private and safe spaces for women IDPs whilst focusing on self-help and steadfastness. Local communities were mobilized to help the women cope with their situation, and provide them with rudimentary tools that would allow them to organize various social and economic activities. This phase is running concomitantly with a third that aims at preparing women, and through them their families, for their eventual return to their homes.

How does this impact on the region in general and on the EOWEL regional programme in particular?

The July 2006 war has had a devastating impact on Lebanon. The social, economic, and psychological ramifications are expected to be long term and in some cases quite devastating if not addressed immediately and properly. The EOWEL programme can have a very positive impact in addressing the economic recovery of women and as such contribute to the long term and sustainable livelihood of women in Lebanon.

What are the views of women on the conflict?

Women have been the source of steadfastness throughout this conflict. They have taken on immense responsibilities and have ensured the livelihood of their families and communities. As such, and according to the UN resolution 1235, they need to be part of the recovery, rehabilitation, and peace building process, as full fledged actors and stakeholders and not as victims.

What are these women's immediate needs? How has the war affected them directly?

Women's immediate needs can be summarized as follows:

- Rebuilding the infrastructure
- Recovering economic independence

What have been CRTDA's priorities for the near future? And have these priorities been affected by the conflict?

Upon the end of the war, CRTD.A engaged in a third phase which essentially started with an assessment of the situation of returnees, the extent of damage to the infrastructure and the rehabilitation and recovery needs. We are focusing on the impact of this war on women's immediate and long term economic participation and economic independence. Our priorities for the moment are:

- 1) Re-start all our regular programmes in Lebanon and in the region;
- 2) Initiate a programme targeting women affected by the war and focusing on their livelihoods and economic recovery;
- 3) Mainstream this new initiative within our regular programme framework.

How can the EOWEL regional programme contribute to the successful continuation of the project?

The EOWEL project focuses on promoting and enhancing sustainable economic alternatives for women (this is the key focus of CRTD.A's EOWEL project: SEOW-MENA). As such, this addresses an immediate and critical need for women affected by the July 2006 conflict in Lebanon.



Interview with Society Voice Foundation – Gaza by MIGS

How has the conflict situation in Gaza impacted Palestinian Society?

The Palestinian people are living under harsh and difficult conditions; a full humanitarian crisis is taking place. The conditions created by the conflict, such as the destruction of infrastructure, have led to an increase in the already high unemployment and poverty rates in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank which has directly affected the process of investment, production, importation and exportation, effectively paralyzing the economy.

How has the recent conflict affected the Society Voice Foundation, the staff, and their work on the ground?

Although the recent conflict experienced in the Gaza Strip has been a very difficult one, the Society Voice has not been affected as badly as other organizations due to the foundation's branches in other cities such as Ramallah. This has helped in reducing the Foundation's losses. As such, SVF staff could continue carrying out their daily tasks of field training, public meetings, radio programs and writing their daily and monthly reports.

Certainly, at first, the SVF staff was very much affected by the events, but they soon became accustomed to the circumstances and continued with their daily tasks to the best of their abilities. As mentioned before, the existing offices of the SVF in other towns helped our organization tremendously in coordinating our activities. Also, staff members living in different areas of the Strip have been instrumental in reaching their respective communities.

How was the program of "enhancing the economic opportunities" affected in general and its women component in particular?

Unemployment among women has increased, as many women have been made redundant due to the loss of investment in the Palestinian economy. Unemployment and poverty have increased dramatically; impacting refugee camps in particular, and it is expected to increase should the economic situation remain unchanged.

Through our project Free to Work we hope to ease the unemployment situation for women by identifying job opportunity and implementing small projects that women and their families can benefit from in this difficult

period. The project will raise awareness among women with regard to their economic rights, particularly among those working in the local market, and will conduct intensive training courses to provide women with the necessary skills to find employment in both the private and public sectors.

How do women in the Gaza strip view the conflict?

Women represent 49.5% of the Palestinian society and play multiple roles in the private and public spheres in ways that perhaps differentiate them from women living in other countries. These differences stem from the special political, economic, social circumstances in the Palestinian territories. Women carry the greatest burden in conflict situations and this is not less true in the Gaza strip. For this reason Palestinian women call for a real peace that will put an end to the conflict that has affected them and their families so severely, and for a stable and secure life under favourable economic conditions.

What are the urgent needs of women?

In order to empower women in Palestinian society, their immediate and urgent needs should be addressed. These include the provision of job opportunities for unemployed women through small fundraising projects, awareness of their economic and legal rights, and vocational training to provide skills for entering new and specialized industries. These are only some of the ways

with which we can positively affect women's position in society in a practical and effective way.

What have been the priorities and aspirations that your organization aimed to achieve in the near future? Are those being affected by the conflict?

The Society Voice has been successful in developing small fundraising projects to benefit women and their families, and has guaranteed sustainability by networking and cooperating with a number of specialized economic institutions working with women.

In the near future, Society Voice will continue to build the capacities of our project staff as well as women themselves through training in new methods of project administration in order to assist them in carryout their projects. We will also continue to work towards identifying local and international donors to fund projects targeting unemployed women and providing job opportunities.

Such priorities and aspiration will help increase the incomes of women involved in the project and promote their role in the Palestinian community. Through our continuous efforts to ease the economic burden of unemployed women and their families, we work to change the political, social and the economic circumstances of all Palestinian citizens.



Best practice

Integration of Women in Economic Life: Tunisia's Personal Status Code a Powerful Tool, by Michael Cracknell, Co-Director ENDA Inter - Arabe Appui Aux Micro Entrepreneurs

One of the first pieces of legislation enacted by Tunisia's first President, Habib Bourguiba, just a few months after independence, was the Personal Status Code (PSC), adopted on 13th August 1956.

Recognized at the time as audacious and highly innovative, especially for an Arab-Muslim country, the Code lays the groundwork for the emancipation of Tunisian women in society and within the family. It forbade polygamy and repudiation, and made compulsory the consent of the woman for marriage and divorce among other improvements in women's status.

Over the 50 years since its enactment, the Code has been periodically enriched in the same progressive and reformist spirit in which it was initiated (right to family planning and abortion, abolition of the duty to obey the husband, making it possible for the mother to give her name to her children...). The aim is to further equality between the sexes by removing obstacles to women's economic and social empowerment and by providing them with equal rights and opportunities in all spheres of life.

Throughout the Arab world, only one country, Morocco, in 2005, has adopted anything like Tunisia's ground-breaking legislation.

Many laws and other measures have strengthened the impact of the Code itself. For example, women of modest means with children benefit from social security; after divorce, the ex-husband is obliged to pay alimony and a Guarantee Fund strengthens this obligation; the Code on contractual obligations has been changed to reflect the spirit of the PSC, technical centres supporting innovations and creativity by artisans promote participation and recognition of women artisans' work.

Working women represent 25% of Tunisia's workforce. Over the past 20 years, more than twenty women's professional associations in various fields have been set up. Some 15,000 women are heads of companies and this figure does not include innumerable women heading micro-enterprises and accessing micro-credit to set up and develop their businesses.

Without this series of legislative measures over a 50-year period, it is unlikely that these women micro-entrepreneurs would now be in a position to develop their skills and contribute to their families' economic wellbeing and to the national economy.



(Continued from p.3)

Creating New Opportunities and Networking Facilities for Marginalised Home-Based Working Women

This project is implemented by Planet Finance Morocco in collaboration with Hacettepe University and the Contemporary Women and Youth Foundation both in Turkey. The project fosters the creation of a grass-roots networking organization and the capacity building of local organizations based in Morocco and Turkey. Over 200 women from 12 associations and cooperatives are participating in the project in Morocco providing technical assistance to women artisans and working to optimise the role of the institutions in promoting income generating activities. In Turkey over 100 home-based working women have been targeted for the development of their products and their commercialisation.

For more information on this project please contact Planet Finance Morocco sduquet@planetfinance.org or visit their website at: www.maroc.planetfinance.org



Economic Empowerment of Rural Palestinian Women

This joint Palestinian-Israeli-Italian project is implemented by the Negev Institute for Strategies of Peace and Development (NISPED) in partnership with Legacoop, Diesis Coop, and Young Entrepreneurs Palestine (YEP). It focuses specifically on the development and provision of training programmes adapted to the unique needs of women with the aim of guiding and providing support for the establishment of enterprises in four Palestinian regions. The partners to this project are also dedicated to the promotion and enhancement of peaceful co-existence, based on mutual interest, between Palestinians and Israelis, through the sharing of practical knowledge and experience and the fostering of direct economic cooperation between Palestinian, Israeli and Italian women. This will be achieved through the development of local networks that will provide a forum for the exchange of best practice and experience as well as guidance and support for the development of new business ventures.



For more information on this project please contact Negev Institute for Strategies of Peace & Development Paradise-Negev (NISPED) at ruthp@nisped.org.il, info@yep.ps or visit their website at www.nisped.org.il

Calendar of Events

October 2006

- A "training for trainers" targeting 15 activists from civil society in Gaza and Jordan - Free to Work project.
- Training on women's rights targeting 20 women leaders in Egypt - GESE project.
- Lecture on legal awareness for 20 women entrepreneurs in Egypt - GESE project.
- Mid-term conference in Tangier, Morocco Creating New Opportunities and Networking Facilities for Marginalised Home-Based Working Women project.

November 2006

- Lecture on women's rights for 20 women entrepreneurs in Egypt - GESE project.
- Graduation Ceremony for 30 women who have completed the "training for trainers" programme - Economic Empowerment for Palestinian Women: Turning Business Ideas into Reality project.
- The Ministerial Conference on "Strengthening the Role of Women in Society", Istanbul, Turkey 13-14 November, 2006.

December 2006

- Field visit to Algeria to assess economic opportunities for women - SEOW-MENA project.
- Christmas shopping exhibition in Tangier, Morocco - Creating New Opportunities and Networking Facilities for Marginalised Home-Based Working Women project.
- 2nd Role of Women in Economic Life Regional Partners Meeting – RWEL project.

Introducing the Gender Equality Database

The Gender Equality Database is a groundbreaking new initiative that will serve as an easily accessible and user-friendly framework for analyses of the situation of women in each of the ten MEDA countries. It will review and bring together in one easily accessible format gender equality literature and critical analyses of related themes on women's situation and empowerment – such issues that have not been sufficiently researched in the Mediterranean countries. The database will be of use to researchers, students, NGOs, policy makers and others interested in gender equality and women's empowerment in the Mediterranean region.

An initial mapping and review of literature on gender equality revealed a number of gaps in research prompting the RWEL team to commission two new studies never before conducted in the region.

Of immediate importance is a study on the economic situation of women in each of the MEDA countries to highlight to what extent women are economically active, in which sectors, and how their economic participation is shaped in view of their health, educational level and skills. The study will also map existing laws and their implementation, cultural values and norms affecting gender relations in particular, and the extent of each of the countries' political commitment to gender equality.

The second study is a Critical Assessment of National Women's Machineries to highlight the different forms these machineries take, examine how these machineries function and the extent to which they represent a strong voice for women in their country. The study will also examine and assess the machineries' achievements as well as their relationship with women's NGOs.

Upon completion of the studies, a synthesis report will be drafted that will include a comparative analysis indicating best practices in the region, implementation gaps in gender equality policy, and recommendations for policy and strategies for the future.

In the meantime a review of literature was also undertaken on the economic role of women in the Mediterranean region, and on women and family law in several of the Arab countries of the Mediterranean. The annotated bibliography is available on the project website at www.roleofwomenineconomiclife.net/

For more information in the gender equality database, please contact our Policy/Legal Expert: **Dr. Fatma Khafagy at:**
Fatma.Khafagy@britishcouncil.org.eg

To view studies www.roleofwomenineconomiclife.net/ged/rwel_studies.html

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