

EUROMED WOMEN'S RIGHTS

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• EDITORIAL BY RWEL TEAM LEADER: WOMEN IN FOCUS

We are proud to present the second issue of the EUROMED Women's Rights quarterly newsletter. In this issue we concentrate on women's economic participation in the south Mediterranean region, the main focus of our programme.



The article prepared by the Collective for Research and Training on Development – Action (CRTD-A) in Lebanon, the lead partner of the EUROMED Sustainable Economic Opportunities for Women in the MENA region (SEOW – MENA) project, is one in a series of three developed by CRTD-A as part of its EU funded SEOW – MENA project. As a regional initiative concerned with strengthening and promoting sustainable economic opportunities for women in selected countries in the region, SEOW – MENA is also engaged in creating, sharing and disseminating indigenous knowledge on women's economic opportunities and participation. This first article explores key issues related to gender and economic participation and highlights the gender gap.

By providing an overview on the current status of women's economic participation in the region and identifying the main obstacles and challenges to be addressed for improvements, subsequent newsletters will focus on women's economic participation in specific areas or sectors relevant to the region. Besides articles from our EUROMED partners we welcome contributions from other actors in the region engaged with women's economic empowerment on innovative approaches, research findings as well as good practice examples.

In this issue we also highlight the first EUROMED Ministerial Conference on "Strengthening the role of Women in Society" which took place in Turkey, 14-15 November 2006 with a summary of the main conclusions and a revealing interview with the EC Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner on the challenges and opportunities ahead.

With almost one year into project implementation a comprehensive update is provided of our EUROMED partners activities on the ground. With the overall aim to enhance women's economic opportunities in the region, activities range from diverse training programmes such as entrepreneurship, women's leadership and legal rights, to social mapping studies, women's media watch and networking.

Described in more detail are two specific events. The first is an overseas study mission in Italy by Palestinian women project leaders and hosted by their Italian EUROMED project partners, providing the opportunity for learning and networking, and getting acquainted with women's cooperatives in action in Italy. The second event



describes the exciting experience of five Egyptian women attending a Forum for Mediterranean Micro-Entrepreneurs in Tunisia organized by the EUROMED FEM project.

Each issue of this quarterly newsletter will include a section on EUROMED Women's Rights Electronic Resources, providing a brief description and links to recent online publications and reports, and a section on the programmes' Gender Equality Data base. We hope that these will be useful to readers! We invite readers to visit our website www.euromedwomensrights.net and always welcome comments, suggestions and contributions.

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• STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY: - ROADMAP FOR EQUALITY

For the first time, the EU and its Mediterranean partners have agreed to work within a common framework of action to strengthen the role of women in the political, civil, social, economic and cultural spheres, and to fight against discrimination.



In the conclusions of the first Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on “Strengthening the Role of Women in Society,” held on 14-15 November 2006 in Istanbul, ministers agreed to adopt a holistic approach to women's issues based on three interdependent and interlinked priorities: women's political and civil rights; women's social and economic rights and sustainable development; and women's rights in the cultural sphere and the role of communications and the mass media. An important aspect of the conference was the commitment by the Euro-Mediterranean partners to work toward their objectives over the next five years and for the Euromed Committee to convene at least once a year to review the implementation of the measures contained in the conclusions.

A follow-up Euromed Ministerial Conference to discuss issues related to the full enjoyment of all human rights by women and the progress made in the implementation of these measures will take place in 2009.

For the full report on the conclusions of the Ministerial Conference please visit the Commission website at:

http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/euromed/women/docs/conclusions_1106.pdf

- BREAKING THROUGH GLASS CEILINGS

Having addressed the first Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society in Istanbul, EC Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner took time to talk to us about the challenges and opportunities ahead

“The Euromed region is very diverse and the main benefit [of this event] is not only that it is the first ever event of its kind but that it resulted in a political declaration enforced via a monitoring mechanism that can follow-up on commitments each and every year,” explained Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner.

In her address to the Ministerial Conference a little earlier, Ferrero-Waldner had been keen to point out that progress had been made “on improving the rights of women in the region. There has been an increase in the level of education attained by women, and much of the region has been praised for being 'on-track' towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals for girls' enrolment in primary schools. We have also seen a growing number of women gaining positions of power in governmental and professional institutions.”

But while highlighting progress the Commissioner stressed that “[I]n principle a lot of progress has been made, of course further progress is necessary. It is very easy to pass a law but then the issue becomes to make sure laws are executed. [In some cases] social behaviour needs to change so that nobody stands silent.”

The challenges are immense and Ferrero-Waldner recounted that

“Someone from the Arab World was telling me that it is now getting more difficult as more fundamentalist ideas are coming back. But we must stress that women's rights are important rights. That women's rights are universal rights that should not be diminished.”

The Commissioner emphasized that education is key towards women's empowerment. “When you get an education then you can have a job, have more self esteem. In fact the EC is spending a lot of money on education throughout the Euromed area - in total a 30 per cent increase this year over last year's budget.”

Following education the commissioner highlighted the importance of economic development and the liberalization of products. In her statement she noted that the EU will “work to achieve an increase in the number of women in paid employment, stronger social inclusion and a reduction in disparities between rural and urban women. The measures identified in the Plan of Action will help create more equal opportunities and remove obstacles for women to work.” Finally while women's empowerment through democratic reform must be promoted we must also work toward the removal of what the Commissioner describes as 'cultural rights', namely, traditional gender stereotypes that pose obstacles to women's advancement.

While the affairs of women outside of the EU are of particular concern they are by no means the only focus of attention for the EU. “Our countries have made more progress [towards women's empowerment] but still there are many challenges. Women often do not enjoy equal opportunity in the private sector and violence within the family is still taboo in countries such as Spain. But this is something that does not change overnight - it is a long term process.”

The 'glass ceiling' on women's advancement created by dominant negative attitudes towards women's empowerment is something Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner knows intimately. “When I was running in the presidential elections [in Austria] I lost by three per cent. The three per cent represented those people who felt it was not right for a woman to be president,” she recounted.

Hence the stress on the difficult task of changing attitudes in the region. Within EU member states gender mainstreaming, a priority in the European Union, is underway. And across the board the message is that women can be empowered “with awareness and consciousness.”

- MINISTERIAL CONCLUSIONS

- Combat all forms of violence against women, guarantee women protection and redress in case of violation of their rights; protect the fundamental rights of women victims of all forms of violence, especially domestic violence, trafficking in human beings, harmful traditional practices and violence against migrant women.



- Promote women's active participation in political decision-making positions in the executive and judicial powers at all levels. Create equal opportunities and remove obstacles for women to work or to be recruited/ employed or to stay employed.

- Promote women's entrepreneurship by improving inter-alia women's access to land, finance, markets, information, training and networking and encourage financial institutions to tailor products to women's needs, in particular by providing micro- credit.

- Ensure empowerment of women including through greater access to education at all levels and to vocational and technical training.

- Promote a balanced and non stereotyped portrayal of women and men in the media.

• ENHANCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN ECONOMIC LIFE (EOWEL) PROJECTS - AN UPDATE:

- ON THE GROUND

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, involving 30 partner organisations spanning eight countries in the MEDA region, are now in full swing with a wide range of activities being implemented including training courses on empowerment, leadership, entrepreneurship, and job competencies targeting women, as well as job fairs and exhibitions, gender Media Watch Groups, and a number of other information and awareness raising activities. All project activities share the same objective of reducing the barriers to women’s economic participation and empowerment in the MEDA region and can be considered ground breaking in that they incorporate a gender perspective in order to address these barriers. Hundreds of women from all economic sectors, from urban as well as rural areas, employed and unemployed have been involved in the project activities of the seven EOWEL projects as beneficiaries, trainees, and trainers. Job competencies and skills have been developed through training courses; products have been developed through entrepreneurship and project start-up trainings and sold in fairs and exhibitions. Beneficiaries have also had the opportunity to meet women from other regions and engage in networking activities to exchange information, knowledge and experiences.

For more detailed information please visit the RWEL project website at www.womensrights.net.

- GENDER EQUALITY IN EMPLOYMENT AND SMALL ENTERPRISES (GEESE)



The GEESE project is implemented by five NGOs in Egypt and three NGOs in Jordan and aims to improve the economic status of women by encouraging and supporting their involvement in economic activity and paid employment. Project activities were launched in August 2006 with a two-day Gender Workshop for NGO partners to train project staff in gender analysis and gender sensitive project implementation. Subsequently, five-day leadership training workshops were implemented by the National Partners in Egypt. These were attended by a total of 100 women operating their own enterprises – either formally registered or home-based. In addition, 15 awareness raising seminars on women’s economic and legal rights for existing and potential women entrepreneurs were attended by over 300 women.

A challenging 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. The first volunteer Media Watch Groups have been established covering Arabic language articles in newspapers and magazines, television and information on the internet. The first Media Watch reports have been submitted providing a compilation of positive and nega-

tive images of working women portrayed in the printed and electronic media, as well as on television.

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

- ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FOR PALESTINIAN WOMEN: TURNING BUSINESS IDEAS INTO REALITY



This joint Palestinian-Israeli project 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. A Training of Trainers (TOT) programme was organized targeting 30 women and covering business, marketing and financial skills training. The project partners also developed a full training module for trainers making use of widely available materials. The project partners have now begun identifying the 120 potential women that will participate in the entrepreneurship training programmes that are scheduled to take place in Bethlehem, Ramallah, Nablus, and Jenin. Potential participants are targeted through a public advertisement campaign and through approaching the NGO community in Palestine. The women trainers have also been conducting workshops in order to raise awareness of the project and of the entrepreneurship training programme.

The project partners have built strong relationships with government ministries who are of most relevance to the project: the Ministry of Trade and Economy; the Ministry of Social Welfare; and the Ministry of Agriculture. The project is also cooperating with the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees (PARC) and is considering cooperation in training programmes for women with businesses in the field of agriculture.

For more information on this project please contact The Centre for Jewish-Arab Economic Development at clare@cjaed.org.il or visit their website at www.cjaed.org.il.

- FEMMES ENTREPRENEUSES EN MÉDITERRANÉE (FEM)

This project is being 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.

A number of training seminars have taken place within the framework of the FEM project in the past months including a capacity building seminar for Al Majmoua staff that included a Training of Trainers as well as other topics such as management, leadership and communication. Business trainings were also offered to women beneficiaries that included communication and marketing sessions.

Due to the recent war in Lebanon, Al Majmoua had to adapt the project activities to meet the changing needs of the target population. As a result, cluster bomb awareness trainings were offered to women living in South Lebanon in October 2006.

Also due to the war and the subsequent political instability in the country, three major fairs organised by Al Majmoua were cancelled throughout the year. However, a number of exhibitions were organised to assist women in the commercialization of their products and, despite the economic situation in the country, the women micro-entrepreneurs managed to acquire revenue from their sales.

In November 2006 ENDA hosted women entrepreneurs from all partner countries to the FEM project to exchange techniques and practices and engage in networking in a Forum for Mediterranean Micro-Entrepreneurs in Tunisia. As a result of this exchange the women participants gained knowledge, confidence, and initiative.

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.

- FREE TO WORK



The Free to Work project began its activities in February 2006 and aims 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. The first local and trans-national consortiums were held in Gaza in June 2006 and in Jordan in July 2006, engaging a broad range of civil society actors, such as women entrepreneurs, unemployed women, women in decision making positions, and women representing NGOs. The consortiums provided a forum for dialogue around women, employment, legal and education issues. The views expressed during the discussions were diverse and the debate on issues such as equal opportunity rich. It created a culture of debate amongst a diversity of people and agencies who rarely meet in the normal course of business to exchange views, share experiences and discuss common concerns and ways of addressing them.

Other activities included a six week Provisional Management of Jobs and Competencies (PMJC) targeting 50 women from the Municipality of Amman to develop their personal portfolio of competencies. A Training of Trainers (TOT) Programme for a select group of women to enable them to develop their own portfolio of competencies as well as to transfer this knowledge to women in their own social and professional networks was also organised by the project partners. Through this multiplier effect, the project partners aim to reach over 4,000 women beneficiaries.

Finally, the project has set up six observation posts both in Jordan and Gaza to map out and then monitor developments related to economic development and social cohesion, analysis of employment demand and supply per sector, public policies, labour laws, equal chances and qualifications, and life long learning.

For more information on this project please contact Tatawor Association for the Preparation of Youth info@tatawor.org or visit their website at www.tatawor.org.

- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE MENA REGION (SEOW-MENA)

CRTD.A's EU-funded SEOW – MENA regional programme began in January 2007.

On February 1, 2007, CRTD.A will be organising a press conference attended by the EU delegation in Beirut to share with stakeholders from the public and NGOs sector the results and findings of the first assessment phase which was carried out in Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria and Syria. This phase involved a regional training and validation workshop in Beirut, local workshops in selected countries of the project, and development of local and regional assessment reports.

The process was participatory and thorough and gathered significant knowledge. In addition, it was critical for building alliances and ownership and for developing a participatory activities implementation plan for the second phase of the project which will be announced during the press conference.

Despite the war in Lebanon in the summer of 2006, the SEOW – MENA programme has continued its work and is now set to moving to a new and exciting phase.

For more information on this project please contact Collective for Research & Training on Development Action CRTDA at: labouhabib@crttd.org or visit their website at www.crttd.org.

- ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL PALESTINIAN WOMEN



This joint Palestinian-Israeli-Italian project, implemented by the Negev Institute for Strategies of Peace and Development (NISPED) in partnership with Young Entrepreneurs Palestine (YEP), Legacoop Italy and Diesis Coop was launched in May 2006 with the organisation of a series of public meetings with women leaders in the Palestinian rural areas. Hundreds of women participated in these meetings that indicated that Palestinian women are interested in small craft projects such as embroidery, ceramics, and glass painting.

The beneficiaries of the project were selected after a rigorous application and selection process where 80 women were selected among 300 candidates individually interviewed by the steering committee of the project. The beneficiaries attended a number of training courses on how to become an entrepreneur and start a business, as well as training on the preparation of business plans for new projects, feasibility studies, taxation and pricing, and more. The beneficiaries also had the opportunity to meet with local women leaders and business owners.

The highlight of the project was the organisation of a five-day study mission in Italy that was attended by a group of eight Palestinian women in November 2006. The purpose of the visit was to acquaint the project leadership with various women's cooperatives in action, how they are organised and how they operate, so as to transfer this knowledge to the beneficiaries in Palestine. A more detailed report of the study visit can be found on page 6.

Finally, in December 2006, twelve coordinators attended a Training of Trainers course and are now able to train women in all districts of the West Bank on how to launch their own projects.

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

- 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, Research and Implementation Centre on Women's Issues and the Contemporary Women and Youth Foundation, Turkey. The project aims to increase home-based working women's opportunities to participate in economic life through the development of supporting measures to eliminate underlying structural obstacles.



The project was launched in April 2006 with a kick-off conference that was attended by 45 invitees representing local authorities and local development organisations. Subsequently, a number of activities were implemented including a social mapping study to identify priority regions for the implementation of project activities as well as a report entitled 'Socio-Economic and Activity Profile of our Partner Women Artisans' that includes analysis of a qualitative research involving 80 home based working women.

In Morocco, beneficiaries of the project attended a 'Self-Confidence Training' organised by Planet Finance Morocco covering New Family Code 2004 (Moudawana) training in June 2006, women's rights/responsibility/health in November 2006, and on HIV/AIDS also in November 2006. Management and leadership trainings have also been organised in August and September 2006 targeting the management boards of 12 associations and cooperative partners of the project. In addition, a Training of Trainers (TOT) took place in June and July 2006 in Tangier and in Marrakech each with 14 participants. Finally, a technical training for women workers was organised including sessions on merchandising, product costing, and new product development.

In Turkey, the first set of capacity-building training entitled "Empowerment Training" covering gender roles, communication and conflict resolution in working life, citizenship awareness, reproductive health, folk culture and products took place in May and June of 2006 for over 100 home-based working women. A series of sessions comprising entrepreneurship training, leadership/management training and business planning was delivered for 60 women in June, November and December respectively.

Finally, the project has also embarked on an information and public awareness campaign that included an exhibition in Marrakesh in July 2006 to sell products by the women beneficiaries, and give the beneficiaries the opportunity to face their clients and compare their products to the demand on the market. A Christmas market was also held in Tangier in December 2006 that proved very successful.

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

• PROMOTING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION IN THE MENA REGION: A CALL FOR URGENT ACTION – CRTDA

The UNDP Arab Human Development Report 2005 (AHDR) clearly indicated that overall, development in the Arab region is largely hindered by a freedom deficit, gender inequality, and poor information and technology usage. More specifically, the regional average of Arab's women's literacy is no more than 50 percent whilst Arab women's participation in political and economic life is one of the lowest worldwide. The AHDR strongly urged Arab states to address gender equalities through increasing public spending to bring about educational, political, economic and social empowerment for women.

The current status of women's economic participation in the MENA region

Driven by dramatic increases in educational levels and improvements in health for women as well as reduction in fertility during the 1970s and 1980s, female labour force participation rates increased significantly over the last two decades in MENA, but remain among the lowest in the world and well below what would be expected given education levels, fertility rates, and age structure characteristics.

Region	Female Economic Participation Rate (%)	As % of Male Rate
All Developing Countries	55.7	67
Least Developed Countries	64.2	74
Arab States	32.7	41
East Asia & Pacific	68.8	32
Latin America & Caribbean	42.2	52
South Asia	43.6	52
Sub-Saharan Africa	62.2	73

Source: UNDP, 2003

The impact of gender-blind economic reform policies has been sorely felt by women jobseekers, employees and entrepreneurs alike. These include the consequences of extensive cutbacks in the public sector, a traditional employer of female professionals; ongoing gender discrimination in wages and employment benefits; continued barriers to women's participation in business and finance, such as requirements that all transactions with the state take place via a male intermediary; a decline in women's self-employment; and the feminization of export industries, whose low wages attract mostly women. These trends point to a consolidation of women's employment in low-skill jobs, and an obstruction of their entry into, and mobility within, higher-skill professions. Reductions in social services or introduction of user fees in areas such as health also weigh heavily on women, who compensate either by spending more time caring for sick or disabled household members, or pursuing supplemental income informally.

Perhaps the most disappointing finding of many MENA regional surveys is that higher levels of educational attainment for women in the MENA have not resulted in either better jobs or higher wages (Belghazi and Baden, 2002; World Bank, 2003). It has instead result-

ed in a growing female workforce—both blue and white collar—including new entrants and laid-off public sector employees, competing for jobs in a low-growth market that remains obstructed by ideological and structural gender barriers.

The few labour law reforms intended to benefit women have instead made them less desirable job candidates, such as is the case with laws that shift the burden of compensation for maternity leave and provision of childcare on private employers (Moghadam,



1998; World Bank, 2003). These and other factors, have led to a “feminization of unemployment” in the MENA region with higher joblessness among educated women compared to their male counterparts.

As in other parts of the developing world, the expansion of public education and higher enrolment rates for girls in primary and secondary school, combined with trade and economic liberalization, have provided young women with job opportunities unavailable to them a generation ago. However, this progress is attenuated by the fact that such jobs are generally low wage, unskilled positions in export manufacturing industries. In addition, employers favour female blue-collar workers. Often unaware of their legal rights and unrepresented by unions, these women provide a cheap, flexible and easily replaceable labour force (WIDE, 1999; IGTN, 2003). Unfair hiring practices that discriminate against married women contribute to high employee turnover rates, further allowing management to suppress wages by maintaining a less experienced workforce (Belghazi & Baden, 2002). As elsewhere, young Arab women have essentially formed a niche labour pool, echoing a global trend towards the feminization of export manufacturing and the casualization of the female work force (WIDE, 1999; Carr & Chen, 2001; Belghazi & Baden, 2002). Clearly, female education alone does not suffice as a vehicle to empowerment and equality for women while other systemic barriers remain in place.

Unequal gender relations: A main obstacle and challenge in the MENA region

Most Arab countries have signed and ratified several conventions related to the upholding and protection of women’s rights notably the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). As such, Arab states are committed to putting in place policies which encourage women’s empowerment and active participation in public life. Such policies are expected to cover various fields such as access to education, health, sustainable employment, political participation as well as security and freedom from gender based violence and discrimination.

However, due to the intrinsic relation between social institutions, namely the state, the household, the community and the market, Arab women’s citizenship rights are constantly undermined by patriarchal practices within and beyond the household. One consequence of this, as indicated earlier, is that Arab women are by and large still at the bottom of the employment ladder, and their roles are confined to the private and reproductive sphere. Women’s access to gainful employment remains very much determined by gendered policies and preferential/discriminatory treatment within the household and within the market.

Thus, while the overall macroeconomic performance of the economy may have diminished the demand for female labour, gender and social constraints play the defining role in society in the MENA region. The patriarchal nature of Arab society institutionalises gender inequality, and keeps both official and unofficial discrimination between men and women alive. The choice of women’s place and

nature of employment is seen and judged in this light, as are her mobility and access to self-improvement opportunities. Furthermore, she rarely keeps her income to herself as it is usually controlled by her male guardian.

Change and transformation in unequal gender relations are necessary and possible through strengthening economic participation

The starting point of any initiative for improvement of women’s participation in the economy in the MENA region should concentrate on action to upgrade women’s skills and knowledge through capacity-building, putting forward gender sensitive interventions, developing gender-aware policies, and opening doors for women to access new information and economic opportunities.

As such, the immediate needs for women’s economic empowerment in the Arab region can be identified as follows:

- Gender knowledge and expertise in most central and local government agencies as well as amongst the NGO community and other stakeholders involved in women’s economic participation.
- Enhanced political will and commitment for enhancing economic opportunities for women.
- A need to build local human resources which combine gender, development and leadership, economic literacy and entrepreneurial skills expertise.
- Transparency and accountability in budgetary processes, requiring a continued demand from civil society and non-governmental organisations as well as international organisations.

• NETWORKING- PALESTINIAN WOMEN ATTEND OVERSEAS STUDY MISSION IN ITALY



Legacoop (Italy), partner to the EOWEL project Economic Empowerment of Rural Palestinian Women, hosted a group of six Palestinian women and two project coordinators from NISPED and YEP, for a five-day study mission and workshop that took place in Italy on 26th November – 1st December 2006.

The purpose of the study mission was to acquaint the project leadership with women’s cooperatives of different types in action and to learn how cooperatives are organized and how they operate with the aim to transfer this knowledge and experience to Palestinian trainees. More specifically, the study mission enabled the eight participants to get acquainted with Legacoop cooperative experience and to meet experts in various fields of activity such as business development, micro-enterprise, marketing and communication, networking and much more.

As well as attending workshop lectures, participants visited a number of enterprises including a small silver jeweller and embroidery shop, a dance school and beauty salon, and a gardening and catering company. Participants gained a wealth of knowledge and returned to Palestine rich with ideas for new projects. Interesting proposals to identify further steps to take to ensure the sustainability of the envisaged projects were discussed during the final evaluation session. These include the building of networks among enterprises, an

e-commerce website where beneficiaries can market their products, and a fair of Palestinian products to take place in 2007 in Belgium or Italy in order to give the project more visibility and to establish new business contacts.

Overall the Palestinian participants showed much enthusiasm for the programme organized for them and were excited about the new business proposals identified, the new business contacts made, and opportunities for collaboration. The stay in Italy also strengthened team spirit among the participants, who thoroughly enjoyed visiting Rome.

• FIVE EGYPTIAN WOMEN TRAVEL TO TUNISIA FOR A FORUM FOR MEDITERRANEAN MICRO-ENTREPRENEURS

The Egyptian Association for Comprehensive Development [EACD], a partner to the Euromed GEESE project, selected five women from different governorates and villages in Egypt to travel from Helwan, Sohag, Luxor and Cairo to Tunisia to attend a Forum for Mediterranean Micro-Entrepreneurs on the invitation of Enda Inter-Arabe Appui Aux Micro-entrepreneurs. The group was also accompanied by two staff members from EACD. The main purpose of this activity was to provide the opportunity for the women participants to exchange their knowledge and experience with other women from Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia. Each participating country sent six women to form a diverse group of 18 women. However, in Egypt, the reaction of the women's families to this excursion was unique and unexpected.

As this was the first time these women were to travel to a foreign country and for some of them even outside their cities and villages, the families and the women themselves needed a lot of information about all aspects of the excursion to assure them in this new experience and challenge. To facilitate this, the Association organized orientation sessions to assist the participants and provide information regarding some practical aspects that they will need travel: How to dress for the occasion, the customs procedures, the official documents that should carry etc.

On the 1st of November 2006, the adventure began. The group crossed Cairo to the airport and once in the airplane one cannot describe the fascination, the surprise expressed by the women at being so close to the clouds! It was a dream fulfilled combined with fear and awe. After a few hours the city of Tunis appears in the horizon. Upon arrival and meeting the other participants, the five Egyptian women were confronted for the first time with the diversity of the Arabic language; Lebanese, Moroccan and Egyptian were not the same colloquial language. Thus, a special effort was needed on behalf of the entire group to communicate and bond with one another. They also found that they needed to adapt themselves to the different Tunisian culinary dishes!

The 18 women that participated in the excursion spent five days at the same hotel in the coastal city of Hammamat. There they talked about their products, the different techniques of production, the pricing, the possibilities for export, the type of promotion they could use for marketing, as well as ways to improve their products. By talking together, the women spontaneously raised issues that women face in their respective countries and their social, economical and political condition. They shared amongst themselves their every day battles - their joys, their tears, dreams, and fears. In brief, they shared the story of their lives.

By the end of the five-day event the women participants who had come to Tunis as different groups of women, left as one team of friends and business associates. They all exchanged contact information and returned home with new ideas, more money (they all had sold all their products during the excursion!), and with a better view of themselves and each other. Back at home, in addition to celebrating their return, the women's families were proud and honored that their sister, mother, or daughter had traveled outside Egypt on

business. "Can you believe it? We have an Egyptian woman who has traveled to Tunis!"

• EURO-MED WOMEN'S RIGHTS ELECTRONIC RESOURCES - ONLINE REPORTS



Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Citizenship and Justice Freedom House.

This is a comprehensive study published by Freedom House that contains reports on 16 countries and one territory. Each report presents basic political, economic, and social data, as well as key statistics relevant to the status of women. The overarching goal of this survey is to facilitate and support national and international efforts to empower women in the Middle East and North Africa. Available in English at:

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=164>

Available in Arabic at:

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=138&report=35>

A Question of Security: Violence Against Palestinian Women and Girls Human Rights Watch.

This report, based on field research conducted in the West Bank and Gaza, documents dozens of cases of violence ranging from spousal and child abuse to rape, incest and murders committed under the guise of family "honour." The full report can be downloaded at:

<http://hrw.org/reports/2006/opt1106/opt1106web.pdf>

Arab Human Development Report 2005: Toward the rise of women in the Arab world United Nations Development Programme

This report identifies the key factors inhibiting the rise of women and their full participation and empowerment in all levels of society. The report calls for all Arab women to be given equal access to essential health, education and all types of activities outside the family, but also urges temporary adoption of affirmative action to expand such participation, thus allowing centuries-old structures of discrimination to be dismantled. Available at:

<http://rbas.undp.org/ahdr2005.shtml>

Gender and equity in access to health care services in the Middle East and North Africa Population Reference Bureau

This article investigates differences in access to health care services between men and women in the Middle East and North Africa. It suggests that significant inequalities in access to health care services and overall health status persist for the region's women, especially in the area of reproductive health. For more information:

<http://www.eldis.org/cf/rdr/rdr.cfm?doc=DOC23240>

The Integration of Women's Rights from the MENA into the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network

This report provides a context for understanding the dynamics that hinder and promote women's rights in the Middle East and North

Africa and within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. It reviews the situation in nine partner countries. Available at www.euromedrights.net/pages/91

• THE GENDER EQUALITY DATABASE



The Gender Equality Database developed by the RWEL project, has commissioned studies on the Critical Assessment of National Women's Mechanisms (NWMs) to take place in ten countries in the MEDA region. These studies examine how these mechanisms function and to what extent they represent a strong voice for women in the region. Issues addressed include the achievements of National Women's Mechanisms in addressing gender discriminatory legislation and gender mainstreaming and the relationship of NWMs with women's NGOs and the women's movement. The studies also make recommendations for policy and strategies for the future.

The studies are now being finalised and a synthesis and comparative analysis report is being prepared. All the studies as well as the synthesis report will be available on the RWEL website.

In order to initiate discussion on the findings of the studies, the Embassy of the Netherlands in Cairo has kindly agreed to fund a two-day regional seminar to be held in Cairo in April 2007. The researchers that conducted the studies will be present, as well as representatives from the National Women Mechanisms and from NGOs in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and Turkey as well as representatives from UN Division of Advancement of Women, regional research centres, MIGS and the European Commission. The main objectives of the seminar are to arrive at practical recommendations that can strengthen the role of the NWMs in these countries; to draw a comparison among the different NWMs in order to draw lessons and to benefit from good practices; to suggest modes of cooperation between NWMs and civil society organizations; to discuss the use of the findings of the studies in promoting national and regional ownership of the gender equality agenda; and finally to discuss the use of donor funding to strengthen the NWMs and to encourage dialogue between them and civil society organizations.

For more information please contact our Policy/Legal Expert: Dr. Fatma Khafagy at Fatma.Khafagy@britishcouncil.org.eg. Please also visit the Gender Equality Database at www.womensrights.net

• CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January 2007

- Project partners meeting in Beirut 16-18 January 2007 (FEM project)
- A Training of Trainers targeting activists from civil society in Gaza (Free to Work project)
- First entrepreneurship training course for women using training modules and materials developed during the project in Palestine (Enhancing Empowerment for Palestinian Women: Turning Business Ideas into Reality project)
- Partners quarterly meeting focusing on media watch analysis and

reporting in Cairo (GEESE project)

February 2007

- Vocational Trainings by local and international experts conducted by YEP (Economic Empowerment of Rural Palestinian Women project)
- On February 1, 2007, CRTD. A will be organising a press conference attended by the EU delegation in Beirut to share with stakeholders from the public and NGO sector the results and findings of the first assessment phase (SEOW-MENA project)
- Broadcast of two radio programmes to disseminate the project's information to the public (Free to Work project)
- The Society Voice Foundation will conduct five sessions on enhancing women's skills in the market targeting over 50 women (Free to Work project)
- Gender Mainstreaming workshop in Cairo (GEESE project)

March 2007

- Second Regional Partners Meeting on 5 - 8 March 2007 in Casablanca, Morocco
- National Media Seminar in Cairo (GEESE project)

April 2007

- Two - day regional seminar on the Role of National Women's Mechanisms - Cairo, Egypt.

• CONTACTS AND SUBSCRIPTION

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