



WORK DOCUMENT

Manual of Good Practices for development in the most disadvantaged countries in the Euro-Mediterranean sphere Education, Gender Equality and Rule of Law

CONTEXT:

Education

Processes of development, promotion of equal opportunities for men and women and empowerment of women must seek the joint participation of men and women. Education plays a crucial role here, provided that it is an all-round education that not only provides training and skills -technical education-, but also enables people to grow and develop as human beings.

This seminar is aware of the huge importance of education in the Mediterranean region, an education whose motivating principle is the intrinsic and unrestricted value of the individual, hence the fact that it is geared towards interiorizing respect for and compliance with Human Rights.

Building a knowledge and learning society in the southern region of the Mediterranean is the ambitious task that concerns us. In a region where political instability manifests itself, education helps to promote tolerance. Given the seismic activity that characterises the fragile political structures of the majority of these countries and the constant threat -or existence- of conflicts, perpetuated over time or in the collective memory, with the consequent danger of forging a culture of war and violence, the need to educate in a culture of peace is more urgent than ever.

The following issues will be addressed:

1. Conditions for guaranteeing universal access to primary education.
2. Conditions for facilitating the continuity of academic education in the secondary cycle.

3. Reflecting on possible channels of non-formal and informal education, for example, vocational training which enables young people who do want to take a university degree to enter the job market.
4. Reflecting on the ideal conditions that would give students access to specialisation within a certain sector and facilitate their integration into the job market, and the different ways of tightening the link between university and employment office.
5. Reflecting on some syllabuses guided by principles based on Human Rights, fundamental freedoms, respect for the dignity of the individual, and which give rise to a type of education which, without disregarding the obvious differences between men and women, emphasises a common identity.
6. Promoting co-existence based on respect for others. In those countries that suffer situations of conflict, or groups marginalised on the grounds of identity, race, creed, etc., promoting a review of textbooks and examining what image of others they convey, in order to find common ground.

Gender Equality and Rule of Law

By analysing how the legal systems of southern Mediterranean countries regulate legal relations, we find that even though women's political rights are enshrined in most of these constitutions, they are still deprived of the opportunity to fully exercise these rights for reasons unrelated to the legal setting. Furthermore, the labour laws, penal codes and civil laws in these countries still accommodate many forms of discrimination against women, in spite of the tangible legislative steps that have been taken to eliminate such discrimination, especially with regard to civil law and certain matters relating to personal status.

Having said this, the most obvious form of discrimination in these legal systems lies in the sphere of personal status legislation. Although legislators in several Maghreb countries have amended such laws, with the aim of putting an end to the cruel consequences of legalised discrimination, these attempts fall short of the changes introduced in the codes for personal status in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria.

Attempts to raise awareness of the situation of women within the legal community have failed because of various means used against them. Proof of this can be found in the partial measures that exist in the legislative process, in the judiciary's enforcement of the law, and in the interpretation of laws, which supports the controversy that the drawing-up, enforcement and interpretation of laws is, in the Arab Mediterranean world, the task of a male-oriented culture. This does not mean that there are no tendencies in favour of gender equality and

positive actions aimed at empowering women. However, these tendencies are not sufficiently influential.

The participation of women in political activity is still one of the lowest in the world. In 2005, women in the Mashreq subregion enjoyed the greatest parliamentary representation in their history, with an average of 10%, followed by the Maghreb with 8%. Nevertheless, the political empowerment of women still has a long way to go, given that they are only marginally represented in some political parties, trade unions and civil society organisations. Women's representation in parliaments has not entailed more and better legislation in favour of gender equality and the empowerment of women, offering cultural and social norms and exerting a pressure to put them into practice. A note of optimism is represented by the growing number of women judges in the Mashreq countries, who now represent 42% in a country such as Lebanon.

This makes us realise that the elements underlying discrimination against women are not strictly economic, legislative or political; there are also factors which we might call socio-cultural. In some countries, the recent rise of Islamic ideology political parties may presage a relapse and a worsening of a situation which to begin with is a long way from offering equal opportunities for men and women. These parties regard the westernization of women and the disintegration of the family as dangers for the women of the Muslim nation. Women in these political parties are starting to demand a more important role when it comes to devising the political strategies of their parties. These women are not demanding equality as it is understood on the Western side of the Mediterranean, but instead are concerned about maintaining the values of their religion as embodied in the *Sharia*, albeit interpreting the latter in a more modern sense.

The international agenda has undergone fundamental changes since the early 1990s, with the growing importance of issues such as human rights, women's rights and minority rights, and the shift towards democracy. Attention in the Arab world was focused on cultural factors, with the aim of creating different societies capable of embracing different values and new principles. At the heart of these values lay various issues based on women's political participation and their involvement in development processes.

The crucial factor does not concern the legal sphere, but rather strengthening in the area of needs on the ground. Hence the role that local NGOs and civil society are destined to play on the ground in harmony with the international community and their own governments.

Aware of the vitally important task that NGOs have to perform in promoting gender equality and empowering women, and without obviating the irreplaceable role that education can play in this task, the aim is to take advantage of the catalysing structure of the NGO network READI, a structure which allows greater coordination among the NGOs of northern and southern Mediterranean countries.

The following issues will be addressed:

1. How to safeguard the right of Arab women to participate in power structures and decision-action mechanisms.
2. Offering legal channels adapted to the socio-cultural factors of legislation reforms to ensure equal opportunities for men and women in the personal, economic and social spheres.
3. Offering conditions for women's access to the different education levels on an equal footing with men.
4. Analysing the effects of war, occupation and armed conflicts on Arab women.
5. Proposing the framework of an effective use of the communication media, in order to bring about changes in social roles and enhance gender equality.

Cross-cutting issues related to women and education in the Arab region of the Mediterranean

The specific problems posed by war situations and conflicts in the abovementioned issues will be analysed as a cross-cutting issue.

Alignment with the guidelines set out by the international community

In 1990, the international community expressed a firm determination to change the status of women in countries where they suffer discrimination. An action plan was devised, known as the Millennium Development Goals, consisting of 8 goals to be achieved by 2015. This seminar intends to highlight two of these goals:

- *Promote gender equality and empower power (3rd MDG)*
- *Achieve universal primary education (2nd MDG)*

Purpose of the seminar

This seminar will result in a **manual of good practices** on the subject of education and women in the Arab Mediterranean world, due to the close relationship between both sectors, and as a specific means to contribute to the improvement of cooperation for development in the region.