

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

Report on the
Workshop on Citizenship and Gendered
Social Entitlements

In collaboration with the Royal Dutch
Embassy in Lebanon
and the support of IDRC

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Table of Contents

I.	Introduction-----	3
(1)	The workshop sought to-----	3
II.	Background information -----	3
(1)	Lebanon situation -----	4
III.	Women and Citizenship -----	4
IV.	Women and Education-----	5
V.	Women and Health-----	5
VI.	Women and Social Safety Nets-----	6
VII.	Workshops -----	6
VIII.	Final Output -----	7
(1)	General recommendation -----	7
(2)	Follow up on the level of the media -----	7
(3)	Follow up on the level of the research project and influencing policy -----	7
(4)	Organizations that expressed interest in joining the follow up committee ----	7

I. Introduction

CRTD.A held a workshop seminar in the Crowne Plaza on May 12-13 to address the issue of Active citizenship and Gendered Social Entitlements in Lebanon. This event is part of a collaborative initiative which reaches out to the NGO community, policymakers, academics and researchers in an effort to contribute to a debate on social and economic rights from a gendered perspective and to engendering micro and macro level policies.

The main objective of the workshop was to strengthen the dialogue between the different parties in order to find common working grounds to enhance citizenship; attain social entitlements and achieve gender equality.

(1) The workshop sought to:

- Introduce the **ACGEN** project and its basic principles (i.e. active citizenship and gendered social entitlements)
- Mobilize interest and collaboration around these issues
- Develop a collective action plan for policy dialogue
- Set up a national collective advocacy platform on women's citizenship rights

The seminar presented four papers commissioned to experts on the issues of Women and Health, Women and Citizenship, Women and Education, Women and Social Safety Nets. A Q & A session followed each presentation and 4 simultaneous workshops were held on the next day to further discuss these issues with NGOs, policy makers and researchers engaged in these issues.

The results of these workshops were later presented in joint meeting with all workshop attendees and common recommendations were developed by the participants.

In attendance were over 100 women and men from various backgrounds in the field of development. The profile of the organizations represented was as follows:

- Human Rights Organization (Y)
- Women Organizations (١٤)
- Official institutions(٤)
- International Organizations (٨)
- Other various organizations (١٦)
- Researchers and Academics (١٠)

Seminar materials were distributed to each participant including an overview of the **ACGEN** project, the papers and presentations made during the seminar as well as other background material.

II. Background information

Active Citizenship and Gendered Social Entitlements - ACGEN

In June 2004, the Collective for Research and Training on Development – Action (CRTD.A) launched a regional action-research project entitled "*Active Citizenship and Gendered Social*

Entitlements'. This project explores the relationship between governments, NGOs and community activism in providing social entitlements to women through an investigation of the gendered and relational aspects of civil society and governments in the field of service provision.

Using Lebanon, Egypt and Palestine as case studies, the initial action-research examines whether local NGOs are merely relieving governments of their obligations to citizens in providing basic services and to what extent they are promoting the notion and practice of women's active citizenship. Placing emphasis on women's agency, the project aims to develop strategies for the creation of an enabling environment within which women may make claims to their social entitlements. Partnering NGOs in each study country are collaborating on the research to eventually develop a series of country- and regional-level action plans based on the findings.

The Lebanon situation

In Lebanon, NGOs play a vital role in providing social services, and advocate alongside women's national machineries on a range of vital issues such as political participation. However, the extent to which these activities actually include promotion of active citizenship is unknown. Using Lebanon as a case study, the central goals of the action research presented here are to, 1) identify NGOs and assess their relationships with both the state and their client communities, and, 2) ascertain how these NGOs implement their activities and assess how and if these activities contribute to notions and practice of women's active citizenship. Investigating these questions in the particular context of the Middle East region will provide timely and vital lessons concerning active citizenship, a fundamental aspect of promoting peaceful and democratic societies.

This initiative raises questions that will then serve as a starting point for deeper analysis and comparison. These questions include, but are not limited to: What type of active citizenship exists? What can be learned about the role of the different stakeholders in providing citizen's social entitlements, and to what extent are these entitlements gendered? What is the relationship of NGOs with their constituencies, and how is this relation gendered? What role do NGOs play in negotiating citizen entitlements and what role do they play in engendering the notion of citizenship? What are the implications of the above questions for the notion of active citizenship and its practice, and how does this contribute to or frustrate the process of gendered social entitlements?

III. Women and Citizenship

The first presentation was based on a paper prepared by Ms. Marie Rose Zalzal, an attorney at law and human rights advocate. Ms. Zalzal gave an overview of the understanding of the concept of citizenship in Lebanon and how it has evolved through contemporary history. She moved on to discuss the gendered problematics of citizenship, and more specifically how women are viewed in the eyes of the Lebanese law. The last section of the presentation addressed the work of NGO's and women's organizations and their role in promoting gender equality and promoting economic and social rights.

During the questions and answer period, some of the main issues raised included:

- The necessity of reforming discriminatory laws and those which violate the principle of equal citizenship (such as the nationality law and personal status codes)

- The need to challenge the patriarchal system built on male privilege rather than on citizens' rights

IV. Women and Education

The second presentation was given by Ms. Ilham Sawaya, an activist in the field of popular education. In her presentation, Ms. Sawaya highlighted the challenges in the education sector in Lebanon to the achievement of gender inequality. Sawaya also addressed the existing gap in women's participation in decision making processes, especially at the level of formulation of education policies. Moreover, she touched upon the lack of a coherent national policy on education and a weak strategy in addressing education problems, particularly in relation to quality of education, illiteracy, and accessibility of people in remote areas. Ms. Sawaya also dealt with the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon access (or lack thereof) to quality education. Finally, the presentation dealt with the patriarchal social order which often hinders access to education especially for women and girls.

During the questions and answer period, some of the main issues raised included:

- The phenomenon of faith based schools which institutionalize and reproduce sectarian values and gender inequality.
- The discriminatory nature of the educational system which excludes Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon.
- Issues faced by special interest groups such as people with disabilities.
- Gender stereotyping in the educational system and its impact on the life chances of women and girls.

V. Women and Health

Ms. Hiam Kahi's presentation was on women and health in Lebanon. Her talk opened with an overview of women's right to health care in the major international human rights conventions, followed by a brief look at Lebanese laws that constrain women's abilities to access adequate health care, particularly in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Ms Kahi then spoke about the health care system in Lebanon and how readily accessible quality health care services are to women in terms of the rural/urban divide, legal and/or social prohibitions against sexual and reproductive health care, as well as the ramifications of a highly privatized health care system. Finally, she gave an overview of some of the problems that women in Lebanon face with the Lebanese health care system, highlighting both Lebanese nationals as well as Palestinians. The presentation closed with a discussion on the role of civil society and citizen participation in advocating for quality health care services based on the principles of gender and economic equality.

During the questions and answer period, some of the main issues that were raised included:

- The high cost of some medication and the sanctions against the production of generic medicines.
- The need for civil society to pressure policy makers and engage in the formulation of an equitable and fair government health care policy

- The low quality of the public health care system compared to the private for-profit health industry
- The problem of access to health care for those who live in remote rural areas, especially for women.

VI. Women and Social Safety Nets

The topic of women and social safety nets in Lebanon was tackled by Ms. Iqbal Doughan, a lawyer and long-time activist for women's rights as well as a well known trade unionist. She opened with a brief historical overview of the evolution of the concepts of social safety nets and social security and how they are employed today, noting an absence of the former as a comprehensive system of social care in Lebanon. She then discussed the different governmental and NGO social security and welfare schemes in Lebanon, focusing on the gender gaps in the system in terms of both law and practice. In the final section of her presentation, she spoke of the obstacles that hinder the promotion of gender equality in welfare services and the role civil society should play in helping to bridge this gap.

During the questions and answer period, some of the main issues that were raised included:

- The lack of clarity of the concept of social safety nets in Lebanon.
- The precarity of women's entry into the labor force, due to a lack of regulation, the acceptance of temporary work contracts, a perception of expendability, and lower wages than men.
- The fact that women are still considered to be "dependent" and as such, their rights are linked to their relation with male kins.

VII. Workshops

The second day, four simultaneous workshops were held on the four topics: Citizenship, health, education and social safety nets. The workshops were intended to address the following points:

1. What are some of the obstacles that hinder achieving equality between men and women in health, education, social welfare/security services and provide comprehensive coverage to all citizens?
2. State 3 working headings that civil society organizations and women's associations should concentrate on to reach the objective of gender equality in each of the topics under examination
3. What is required to mobilize citizens (and women in particular) to act towards fighting for their social rights? State 4 practical suggestions that can provide a platform upon which to build.

The workshops were held over a period of 1.5 to 2 hours. The results of the workshops were presented in joint meeting with all the attendees. After each group presented its workshop results as power point presentation, the floor was open to discussions that aimed to formulate common ground to serve as a starting point for civil society to work on the realization of women's citizenship rights. (The presentations are attached in Arabic). In order to build a sustainable network of NGOs dedicated to working on women's citizenship rights and to involve local partners in the field

research component of ACGEN, a follow-up committee was formed consisting of some of the participants from the seminar.

VIII. Final Output

(1) General recommendation:

1. Adopt and endorse social rights as part of programmatic activities towards women's citizenship rights
2. Develop a better understanding of the situation through research, studies, and documentation
3. Network with NGO's, policymakers, and activists
4. Work with social workers in order to create a better understanding of the concept of gender education.
5. Include human rights education in awareness-raising activities
6. Amend laws that discriminate against women/ eradicate legal illiteracy
7. Agree to common objectives and draft specific work plans

(2) Follow up on the level of the media:

1. Training for journalists
2. Networking between experts in the field and journalists
3. Involving the media in drafting work plans – not just for coverage
4. Creating a media committee to follow up with other journalists and media personnel
5. Media campaign that is specific in objectives and carried out nationwide to mobilize public opinion

(3) Follow up on the level of the research project and influencing policy:

1. Build on previous experiences in legal advocacy for social rights
2. Formulate a workplan in coordination with CRTD.A
3. Drawing upon the expertise of each organization in order to fully harness possibilities for coordinated interventions
4. Coordinate a follow up committee
5. Hold workshops in the rest of Lebanon/ transmit the seminar's summary to workshops to be held in different communities in the country

(4) Organizations that expressed interest in joining the follow up committee

- Lebanese Council to resist violence against women
- UNRWA
- Raedat al Tanmia
- Rassemblement Démocratique du Femme au Liban (RDFL)
- Working Women's League in Lebanon
- Palestinian Women's Union
- Al Karameh Association
- Organisation for Civil Action (Organization Pour Action Civile)
- ALDHOM

CRTD.A will call for a general meeting directed to all those interested in joining the follow up committee on women's social rights. The invitation is open to all and will be sent out within the coming 2 weeks.

This report will be publicly available electronically and distributed to any interested party. It will be posted on CRTD.A's ACGEN website: www.crtld.org/acgen.