

## **Regional approach to institutionalize gender mainstreaming: Gender Audits in the Middle East**

### **LEAD Programme - Strengthening Women in Decision Making in the Middle East (Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon), SI MENA (BMZ)**

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#### **Context**

In the Middle East, women's political and effective participation in decision-making ranks among the lowest in international comparison.

In Palestine, in accordance with the quota system (20%), women represent 21% of local council members. In Jordan, women are allocated a quota of 25% of the seats in the municipal councils. Since the introduction of the quota, the representation of women in local councils increased to surpass the minimum and reached up to 36%. In Lebanon, which is the second world's worst country in terms of women's participation in politics, there is no quota. Women account for slightly over 5% of municipal councils' seats.

In all these three partner countries, even when women's representation is relatively high in terms of numbers, their actual involvement and influence on governance decisions remains weak. In general, on the local level, there are still too few women who are actively involved in local councils and public administration. Once women succeed in gaining public offices, they often find themselves confined to a system which is male dominated and does not favor equal access and engagement in important decision-making. Often male actors question the necessity of female members in public offices and their capacity to fulfil their positions. Typically, female actors tend to work mainly on issues traditionally considered more appropriate for women, so called "soft topics", such as women's affairs, education and health care. Yet many decisions having a more substantial impact on the society and all its individuals are being taken without women's participation (e.g. on public spending, municipal projects, human resources)

#### **LEAD programme's rationale**

Against this background, one of the goals of the LEAD programme is to support an **enabling environment** for gender equal participation in Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon. LEAD addresses mainly local structures, namely local councils and administration. In order to reach broad impact and sustainability, it works as well with civil society and national institutions. The main tool used to enhance an organizational culture that respects and takes gender equality into account is the **Participatory Gender Audit (PGA)**.

The PGA goes hand in hand with other approaches of the programme. It takes into consideration existing experience in other GIZ programmes and of partner organizations, while adapting it to the specifics of each country.

PGAs were initially supported in five Palestinian municipalities by the GIZ project "Promotion of Gender Sensitive Municipal Decision Making". That earlier programme piloted the approach, which is now being built upon in Palestine and replicated across Jordan and Lebanon through the LEAD programme. As it is the first time for this ILO approach to be applied in Jordan and Lebanon, LEAD works with experts to adapt it to the local contexts.

## The Participatory Gender Audits (PGA)

### What is a Gender Audit?

Gender Audit is a participatory process, a tool for self-assessment and a means for planning. It aims to institutionalize gender in the organization under audit and to disseminate awareness on the importance of gender mainstreaming in the organization's mechanisms of policy and decision-making including budget allocations by creating an organizational culture that respects and takes gender equality into account throughout all work phases.

### Purpose of the Gender Audit

- ✓ to establish a baseline for audited organizations and departments,
- ✓ to identify gaps and challenges that impede gender institutionalization and suggest recommendations to tackle them,
- ✓ to document and set up good practices that take gender equality into consideration.

### Applied methodology

The Gender Audits implemented at municipal level adopt the International Labor Organization's (ILO) methodology, which is a participatory approach. For the audit, local councils are screened on all administrative and executive levels through: literature reviews of relevant local council's documents and related laws; in-depth interviews with the local council's different levels; collective workshops organized at all levels; consulting partner organizations and parties. The mayors and municipal council members, management staff and support staff in the municipalities as well as the local community and local civil society are participating in the audit process.

The audits work along different themes:

- 1) Gender equality issues within work units' context, existing gender expertise in terms of competence and capacity building
- 2) Gender inclusion in local councils' objectives and programs during work implementation and selection of partner organizations
- 3) Information and knowledge management and gender equality as reflected in the local councils' products and overall image
- 4) Staff recruitment and human resources, decision making, and organizational culture
- 5) Achievements in the field of gender equality integration

Based on the outcome of the audit, a **report with recommendations** is developed for the councils for performance improvement and concrete actions for follow-up.

As gender mainstreaming is a topic that does not automatically raise interest on the side of the official audited institutions, it requires continuous expert advice, in order to ensure a successful and high-quality implementation. The LEAD programme is organizing a supervision process to support the facilitators in implementing the Gender Audits according to the ILO methodology and adapt it to the specifics of the MENA region.

### Selection of findings

In order to illustrate possible findings that represent potential for municipalities to improve gender equality and responsiveness, hereafter is a sample from the PGA conducted in Palestine according to the themes:

Theme 1: Existing awareness of some of the local councils' members and employees of the importance of gender mainstreaming, but no adequate capacities to apply it to decision making, gender budgeting and development of policies and by-laws.

Theme 2: Municipal strategic plans, projects and budgets are still completely neutral regarding gender issues. Projects and services are often implemented on the assumption that target groups (citizens, youth and children) have similar needs and priorities without taking differences resulting from the social context and community culture, which impose such differences within the same group, into account.

Theme 3: Collected data and information are not sex-disaggregated; Masculine language is dominantly used in the majority of websites, publications and advertisements issued by some of the local councils.

Theme 4: The few women in the audited local councils are concentrated in the lower hierarchical levels; The needs of female employees, especially mothers, who play several roles inside their homes and in their work places have not been adequately taken into account

Theme 5: Several measures have already been taken by municipal councils in the field of gender equality integration, such as establishing dialogue formats between male and female citizens with decision-makers to identify and include their need into the municipal work.

## **Achievements and results**

- ✓ In each LEAD partner country 5-7 Gender Audit Facilitators underwent training in Participative Gender Audits by the International Labor Organizations (ILO) (the first trainings to be offered by ILO in Arabic). In Jordan and Lebanon these are the first official PGA facilitators.
- ✓ Following the Gender Audits in Palestine, an action plan was agreed upon with three municipalities (Hebron, Bethlehem, and Birzeit), in which these prioritized 3-6 fields of action to be implemented.
- ✓ The Palestinian Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) is institutionalizing gender unit/focal points in the audited municipalities, with clear roles and responsibilities.
- ✓ The National Commissions for Women in Lebanon and Jordan are committed and engaged in supporting and implementing PGA in national and local institutions, and advocating for the systematic use of the tool by public institutions.
- ✓ The transfer of experience from Palestine, the regional pioneers in implementing Participative Gender Audits, to Jordan and Lebanon.
- ✓ Male decision makers, who were involved in the Gender Audits in Palestine are familiar with and supportive of gender sensitive approaches in the work of the local government and at ministries.

Furthermore, the programme has yielded **unexpected positive results** beyond its plan:

- ✓ The main partner in Lebanon, the National Commission of Lebanese Women (NCLW) is applying the concept to support gender mainstreaming in Ministries (e.g. Ministry of Education and Higher Education with LEAD support, Ministry of Culture with EU support).
- ✓ The Jordanian National Commission of Women (JNCW), a semi-governmental actor, cooperates with a civil society organization towards a common goal, not a usual form of partnership in the region.
- ✓ Spill-over effects: The trained facilitators in Lebanon are in the process of conducting PGA in 3 major political parties with other commissioners.
- ✓ Support for the adaptation of the ILO methodology to the MENA region and the specifics of the three LEAD partner countries, as well as its application to various institutions, through leadership by one of the Arab speaking instructors of ILO. (In order for the certification of the trainees that passed the final exam to be completed and officially recognized by ILO, each trainee is carrying out at least one supervised standard Gender Audit in an official institution in their country).

In addition, the LEAD programme anticipates **further far-reaching developments:**

- ✓ In Lebanon, after the accomplishment of PGA in 3 municipalities, which are currently conducted, NCLW aims at establishing the concept as a standard tool at the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities.
- ✓ In Jordan, JNCW intends to build upon the results of this PGA process to roll out the recommendations on a national level, thus making more visible the role of civil society in the current decentralization and local governance reform.
- ✓ Male decision makers increasingly support gender equality & women's participation in public affairs.

**An achievement that deserves special attention is the established and sustained regional dialogue, cooperation and exchange of experience in a fragile area respectively conflictive contexts (including between individuals living in areas where mutual communication is normally impeded).**

### **Sustainability and results based monitoring**

The Participative Gender Audit is a concept that, in itself, aims at bringing along sustainable change at different levels. The whole process aims at changing perceptions and attitudes in terms of gender equality and inclusive decision making that responds to the needs of different society members. It drives systematic institutional change by formally embedding gender principles and approaches into formal structures and processes, while addressing structural discrimination. This makes it independent of individuals in decision-making positions.

Once the audits have been completed and recommendations have been adopted, the LEAD programme and its partners accompany audited institutions in the implementation of the recommendations (e.g. through the elaboration and follow-up of action plans, selection and capacity building for appointed responsible focal points in institutions etc.)

By enabling several gender experts in each of the partner countries to become certified Gender Audit Facilitator, LEAD and its partners ensure that a solid base of knowledge is available in the countries after the project ends. By acquiring practical experience through the implementation (initially supervised and gradually independent), the PGA facilitators are empowered to continue applying and developing the approach beyond the cooperation with LEAD.

As a part of the process, networks for exchange of knowledge and experience and joint learning have been created not only within each country (between individuals of opposing political or religious views), but also between the involved facilitators in all three countries.

The results based monitoring is ensured by LEAD partners by including obligatory M&E of the process in the Terms of Reference of the PGA facilitators (in addition to the regular internal M&E of LEAD).

### **Cooperation**

The LEAD programme and its partner seek to fulfil various international and national commitments concerning gender equality, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 5, Goal 11), Germany's and partner countries' National Strategies and Action Plans to promote gender equality and women's rights, as well as strategies to promote good governance.

The approach used by the LEAD programme brings together a variety of actors, that cooperate closely to make its implementation possible and successful.

**Overall partners:** ILO and Women's Study Center (regional guidance and supervision)

**In Palestine:** Ministry of Local Governance, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Women's Study Center (implementing partner organizations), 5 selected municipalities

**In Jordan:** Identity Center for Development (partner NGO), Jordanian National Commission of Women, 3 selected municipalities

**In Lebanon:** The National Commission for Lebanese Women, Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, 3 selected municipalities. Indirect cooperation (through LEAD partners and PGA facilitators): EU, Ministry of Culture, HIVOS, International Center for Migration.

**NOTE:** LEAD is producing a short film to present the Gender Audits and their implementation by partners.