

Promoting Arab Women's Participation in Public Life: The Quest for Best Practices

Soukeina Bouraoui. Executive Director of Center for Arab Women Training and Research (CAWTAR), Tunis

Why and How to Use Best Practices: The Main Arguments

While there are numerous governmental, non-governmental, regional and international programmes in the Arab region focusing on enhancing women's effective participation in public life, there is still a large gap, as evidence shows, between the challenges they face in both the public and the private spheres. This fact poses the question of why some programmes work while others do not. Best practices have come across to the donors and other development agents as important proxies to the measures of programmatic capacity enhancement.

However, the opponents express their concern about the use of these practices as a blueprint. Despite the similarity of issues, their main argument is centred upon the difference between the home institutional and social environment in which best practices are generated, and the host context in which they will be replicated. In addition to the standardization difficulty, they raise the question of how to use best practices in order to avoid compromising the innovativeness and the original contributions of projects and programmes, which

is critical for many donors to commit their resources.

The proponents consider best practices essential in maintaining a shared level of understanding of what has worked and what has not from previous experiences. Therefore, they help in overcoming unforeseeable risks which can intersect the implementation of the projects and programmes. UN Habitat and the OECD have illustrated the advantages of best practices and how they can feed back into programme design, management and evaluation. The current use of best practices can be categorized within three trends.

Internationally, best practices are generated through donors' electronic specialized database and showcase. It is more or less a presentation of their supported successful projects and programmes. Regionally, with very few exceptions, the best practices are generally presented in modules and their use is restricted to targeted groups. Nationally, it is only recently that governmental and non-governmental organizations have begun considering the use of best practices. The extent of such use is largely linked to the terms of their grant agreement with donor agencies.

Accordingly, the best practices are perceived to help in the following activities:

1. Analysis of current trends, issues to be revisited as well as emerging ones, thereby forming a base to design suitable conceptual and technical approaches to capacity-building programmes.
2. Efficient budgeting of capacity development initiatives.
3. Formulation of adequate strategies to overcome the bottlenecks in the implementation process.
4. Appropriation of measurement standards to assess intended as opposed to actual outcomes.
5. Setting up mechanisms to monitor the immediate benefit to organisational capacity.
6. Identification of how end-users benefited from programmes.
7. Establishment of networks among producers and ultimate users of best practices.
8. Maintaining a balance of supply with demand for proven expertise and experience.
9. Designing advocacy programmes based on what works.

CAWTAR Best Practices-based Projects

CAWTAR is a regional institution based in Tunisia. The Centre's mandate is to promote the role of Arab women in development. One of its main strategies in the development and implementation of its projects is to assess the new trends and to capitalize on good experiences. As a result, the centre has paid particular attention to the use of best practices to enhance the quality of its advocacy-based research, training, networking and documentation. The Centre objectives in the adoption of these practices are based on three principal points: first, to scrutinize and capitalize on rel-

evant practices produced in other regions. Secondly, to contribute to the documentation of home-grown best practices. Finally, to maintain a base to share these practices among multiple stakeholders in the form of advocacy tools. The following projects are typical examples of the Centre's objectives.

Arab Women and Local Governance

Arab Women and Local Governance is a regional project covering five Arab countries: Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia and Yemen. The project objectives are twofold: to foster local dialogue through maintaining the relationship between women leaders and their constituencies; and to build a critical mass of groups and institutions supportive of promotion of gender equity and women's voices in decisions affecting their own daily lives. CAWTAR has adopted best practices in this project.

The main lesson the Centre has learned from such an experience is that, given the novelty of the topic of the gendered impact of decentralization in the Arab region, the best practices generated in other regions have been valuable in terms of formulation of the conceptual and methodological approach of this regional project.

Further, these practices are based on rich grounds to be capitalized on in the design of the evaluation measure of the project. Finally, there is an almost non-existent body of best practices in the Arab region in the field of women in local governance while learning from the compilation process of practices in other regions is undoubtedly critical.

Discriminatory Social Practices and Gender Equity in the MENA Region

The persistence of socially-based gender discrimination, despite the efforts and resources incurred, is a contentious issue for development agents in the Arab region. CAWTAR has developed this project to mainly document the

good experiences of specialized institutions and fieldworkers in this field. The lessons learned by CAWTAR from the question of use of best practices in this area can be summarized as follows:

- Firstly, in spite of the regional awareness of the negative impact of discriminatory practices on gender equity, there is a dearth of information on what has been achieved and what has not due to the absence of methodologies to measure the impact of projects after their completion.
- Secondly, there is a greater need for enhancing the capacity of institutions active in this field to document their good experiences, a matter that CAWTAR has observed from the decline of some among the solid fieldworks approached to contribute to the project.

Evidence-based Advocacy to Improve the Conditions of Arab Women

CAWTAR has adopted this regional project to lever advocacy efforts to improve the conditions of Arab women in decision-making and reproductive health. Given the wide range of these issues compounded by the absence of best practices in this area, the Centre has developed a grid to compile the best practices of the 150 members of its regional Arab Network for Gender and Development. The ultimate goal is to build a compendium of best practices within the main and other cross-over themes in decision-making and reproductive health.

One of the lessons learned from these experiences is that there is a greater need from human and financial resources to compile such types of best practices in the region; there is

also a need to maintain a base to share these practices among specialized actors in these fields.

CAWTAR Electronic Clearing House: The Best Practices Database

CAWTAR has established an electronic clearing house to serve several ends:

- Firstly, it aims to contribute to the compilation and documentation of good experiences under different themes covered by its aforementioned regional projects.
- Secondly, it will make available the standards and workbooks for ultimate user organizations and fieldworkers to enhance their capacities to better document and monitor the outcome of their projects.
- Thirdly, it yearns to disseminate best practices from the Arab region to the wide international policy community.
- Finally, it will adapt these practices in advocacy tools that can be used by different actors in the field of gender and development in the Arab region.

Concluding Remarks

It is very important to scrutinize best practices before their use in order to ensure their relevance to the context in which they will be replicated. In addition, it is also important to develop training programmes that would make possible the exchange of experiences and to maintain institutional capacity so as to better manage the use of best practices, with the final aim of strengthening programmes enhancing women's effective participation in public life.



Femmes en mouvement, changeons l'Europe, changeons le monde ! Bilan et réflexions sur la présence et l'intervention féministe au IV^e Forum social européen d'Athènes

Sonia Mitralia. Membre du Comité pour la préparation de l'Assemblée des femmes et de la Coordination du réseau grec de la Marche mondiale des femmes

Comme nous le savons, lors du IV^e Forum social européen se sont tenus 8 séminaires et de nombreux ateliers féministes dans l'espace « Alternative féministe ». La dimension du genre était aussi partie intégrante de nombre des 210 autres séminaires et des dizaines d'ateliers du Forum.

Même si les séminaires féministes étaient moins nombreux qu'aux précédents forums sociaux européens, nous constatons avec satisfaction que leur contenu était de qualité et était marqué par le souci de faire progresser le processus de recomposition du mouvement féministe à l'échelle européenne. Toutes les salles étaient combles, les débats étaient pleins de vie, en présence des centaines de représentantes de réseaux pour les droits des femmes, d'associations de femmes, de syndicats et d'organisations politiques venues des quatre coins d'Europe, avec une large participation de l'Europe de l'Est (Russie, Ukraine, Moldavie, Pologne, Hongrie, Roumanie, Bulgarie, Républi-

que de Macédoine, Albanie, Serbie et Croatie). Ceci est nouveau, historique, pourrait-on dire, puisque les mouvements féministes des pays de l'Ouest et de l'Est n'ont collaboré que très faiblement dans le passé.

Il y avait également de nombreuses femmes de Turquie, de Chypre, de France, d'Italie, de Grande-Bretagne, du Pays Basque, de Catalogne et de l'État Espagnol, de Belgique, de Hollande, du Danemark, de Suède, d'Allemagne, d'Autriche, d'Israël et de Palestine, mais aussi d'Afrique et d'Amérique Latine...

La collaboration inter-réseaux féministes européens pour la préparation de l'Assemblée du IV^e forum du Forum social européen (FSE) a été une nouveauté. Comme ces réseaux sont aussi implantés dans les pays du Nord, ils pourraient aider à renforcer les liens entre les féministes de ces pays et des autres parties de l'Europe.

En revanche la collaboration avec d'autres réseaux de grande importance, comme le ré-