

# STATUS OF WOMEN

in the Middle East and North Africa

## Using Research on the Status of Women to Improve Public Policies in the Middle East and North Africa

*A Capacity-Building Toolkit for  
Nongovernmental Organizations*



Canadian International  
Development Agency



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# Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa

## Capacity-Building Toolkit

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# ABOUT SWMENA

This toolkit provides methods, techniques and tips for individuals and organizations to undertake and use research on the status of women as a mechanism for positive change in the lives of women, their families and communities. It was designed as a part of a larger project, the Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA).

Women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) lag behind much of the world — and men in their region — in social and economic autonomy, labor force participation, political representation and health. The paucity of accurate, comprehensive national data in these areas presents an additional obstacle to evaluate the status of women in the MENA region. It also hinders the ability of local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and supporters of women's rights to effectively influence decision makers and advocate on behalf of women.

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) united their years of experience in research and capacity building to study and enhance the status of women in the MENA region through the *Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa* project. Through comparative and country-specific surveys, the project measures how women in Lebanon, Morocco and Yemen see themselves as members of society, the economy and the polity. Using the information obtained from the surveys, the project builds the capacity of local NGOs and advocates working to improve women's well-being by providing them with tools to develop policy recommendations and skills for working on advocacy campaigns.

The SWMENA project has two phases. The first phase involves collection and analysis of data on women's status in several areas: political representation and participation; economic participation and opportunity; poverty, ownership and social welfare; and health, violence and well-being. In each country, IFES and IWPR have involved local research and advocacy organizations to define central concepts and metrics used to create the questionnaires.

The second phase of the project increases the capacity of local non-governmental organizations in each country by building skills to research for policy change, work on media or advocacy campaigns and focus on activities that target parliament and/or other decision makers to advance the status of women.

Data findings and preliminary analysis for Lebanon, Morocco and Yemen are currently available on [www.SWMENA.org](http://www.SWMENA.org).

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# INTRODUCTION

## Research as a Tool for Amplifying Women's Voices

Policymakers, researchers and advocates need reliable information about women and the issues that affect their lives in order to advance policies and programs that promote gender equity. Such information can explain the current state of women through using objective, credible data that support proposed policies. Strengthening the capacity of women's organizations to develop a research program and incorporate the findings in advocacy efforts can improve women's inclusiveness based on real and sustainable information. By providing reliable information to policymakers and other influential parties, women's organizations can effectively demonstrate needed improvements for women and increase the inclusion of women in societal development and problem solving.

Social indicators illustrate inequities among populations, including between women and men. Social indicators are a statistical measure that, when collected at different times, can monitor change. Indicators include measurable information, such as the percentage of girls enrolled in secondary education and average household wages for female-headed households. Social indicator development is not academic; instead, it is designed for application in the context of societal problems and intended for use by nonprofessionals and policymakers. This information can influence public policy by identifying areas of need and providing a context for policy agendas. Gender indicators can be used for holding policymakers and institutions accountable by exposing the divergence between gender equality commitments countries have signed onto and their actual implementation and impact (Moser 2007). Therefore, the ability to provide quantitative support in the form of social indicators to influence public policy is especially important in the effort to improve the lives of women around the world.

Women account for half of the world's population. Their viewpoints and experiences need to be considered to create better solutions and more comprehensive public policies for all. Even when women are not fully mobilized, social indicators can serve as a tool for women's empowerment and help ensure that women's perspectives and needs are addressed. All women—regardless of background, sect, geography, ethnicity, citizenship, economic status, disability or education—must be included in influencing public policies if they are to meet the needs of an entire nation. Women can take part as candidates, such as they have for years in Morocco; as those who collect information and analyze it for those in politics, as in Lebanon; and as activists and advocates using data to inform policy and programs that improve opportunities for women, as in Yemen. Whether it is action specifically aimed at helping women, or the population as a whole, it will fall short of its potential if it is not informed by the reality of all women's lives.

## What Social Indicators Do

1. Assess women's status using a human rights lens; since women's rights are human rights, women's status should be gauged by a standard such as those found in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) or in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
2. Show comparisons among different groups of women within a nation and allow comparisons among women in different parts of the world related to varying levels of education, income, assets and responsibilities
3. Provide an objective basis for public policy that responds to social problems and policy gaps

## Toolkit Objectives

The objectives of this toolkit are to suggest strategies for creating a status of women research report and campaign that will empower women to speak for themselves; share opinions and expertise in public discussions; and ensure public decisions benefit women, their families and their communities. A status of women report is a powerful tool that can have tremendous impact. The report can be used to inform policy change and to:

- Educate women about how their interests can be addressed in public policy
- Bring women's concerns forward for public discussion and debate
- Inform policymakers about the variety of options that exist to address women's needs
- Increase the visibility of women's voting power among legislators and policymakers
- Provide a call-to-action, by motivating women and men to advocate on behalf of women
- Contribute locally-informed data to international (e.g., development or humanitarian) actors

- Serve as the basis for extended analyses of important public policy problems

This kit includes descriptions of concrete steps that will allow nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to:

- Develop a status of women research program
- Conduct media outreach and disseminate research findings
- Advocate for the representation of a diverse group of women's voices
- Support women in leadership roles

This toolkit is designed so that NGOs can use each module separately or together as a whole. Some modules overlap in content, creating occasional repetition. For information within the kit about collecting and interpreting data and generating recommendations for evidence-based policy, please see "Module I: Developing a Status of Women Research Program." To create a strategy for media and community outreach, please see "Module II: Media Outreach and Research Dissemination." Strategies for advocacy are described in "Module III: Advocacy to Support

Women.” “Module IV: Supporting Women in Leadership” includes methods through which women can access leadership roles in the research and advocacy process, and resources to mentor, train and support woman leaders. The four modules and combined toolkit can be found at [www.swmena.org](http://www.swmena.org) and at [www.iwpr.org/initiatives/swmena](http://www.iwpr.org/initiatives/swmena).

The model for the IFES-IWPR SWMENA project is based on IWPR’s The Status of Women in the States initiative. IWPR reports have three goals: to analyze and disseminate information about rights and opportunities for all women; to identify and measure remaining barriers to equality; and to provide baseline measures and continue monitoring of women’s progress. The Status of Women in the States reports for all 50 states in the United States and the District of Columbia have been used at every level of government policy and practice to encourage change. The methodology developed for those reports involved NGOs in each state and region helping to collect and put into use data needed on the status of women in order to address key issues facing women and their families. IWPR and IFES used this participatory research method in developing and disseminating its SWMENA survey.

## Partners

IWPR conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women, promote public dialogue, and strengthen families, communities and societies. IWPR works with policymakers, scholars and public interest groups to design, execute and disseminate research that illuminates economic and social policy issues affecting women and their families,

and to build a network of individuals and organizations that conduct and use women-oriented policy research. IWPR’s work is supported by foundation grants; government grants and contracts; donations from individuals; and contributions from organizations and corporations. IWPR is a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt organization that also works in affiliation with the women’s studies and public policy programs at The George Washington University.

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) supports citizens’ right to participate in free and fair elections. IFES’ independent expertise strengthens electoral systems and builds local capacity to deliver sustainable solutions.

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- Providing technical assistance to election officials
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- Applying field-based research to improve the electoral cycle

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## **IWPR and IFES Contact Information for Further Assistance**

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# STATUS OF WOMEN

in the Middle East and North Africa

## Developing a Status of Women Research Program

### *Module I*

*from the  
Using Research on the Status of Women to  
Improve Public Policies in the Middle East and North Africa  
Capacity-Building Toolkit*



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# MODULE I: DEVELOPING A STATUS OF WOMEN RESEARCH PROGRAM

## In this Module, Learn How to:

- Create a diverse working advisory committee
- Define the most important social indicators on the status of women for a region or nation
- Identify relevant data sources
- Interpret and present the data in ways that reflect similarities and differences among women and men, among women and over time
- Generate meaningful public policy recommendations
- Prepare the report and other informational resources
- Make data available

## Introduction

Women's views on policy have traditionally been underrepresented. This is true, in part, because discrimination against women exists across all regions and social classes, limiting women's influence and ability to organize. Restrictions and barriers for women obstruct their education, employment, income, health, travel, freedom of movement and overall opportunities. A status of women report can elevate women's needs and concerns and views on policies in the eyes of other women, men, political leaders and policymakers.

A status of women report should present new information found through research. In addition, the report should find new ways to use verified data to understand existing social problems. Social indicators are used to study new and existing data together and identify policy gaps to improve the status of women in society, economy and government. By addressing gender inequities, status of women research is intended to inform and guide new programs and public policies that address issues facing women.

## Create a Diverse Working Advisory Committee

An important first step in creating a status of women report, as well as an advocacy campaign, is to form an advisory committee. The advisory committee is composed of a diverse group of volunteers and leaders who will guide the project and the work that paid and volunteer staff complete. This advisory committee will help ensure that the report gets the widest possible support when it is completed and distributed. When formed prior to the research, an advisory committee can make sure key issues are included at the onset. A strong advisory committee can also help create useful and relevant policy recommendations.

Advisory committees can include individuals from a range of backgrounds, with experts and community representatives, including professionals from a variety of fields, such as policy analysis, research, advocacy, communications and politics. It is best to create an

advisory committee that is representative of a broad range of organizations to ensure recommendations are developed as objectively and inclusively as possible. It is particularly helpful if all participants have knowledge of and/or concern about gender issues.

A major emphasis should be on creating a well-functioning advisory committee. IWPR recommends 15 to 20 members. This is typically large enough to be diverse and for members to develop strong relationships with one another, but not so large as to slow down communication. Achieving this usually means inviting 25 to 30 people to serve, as some who are invited will be unable or unwilling to participate.

The views of all established leaders should be respected, but it is important to include advisers who have leadership skills, but perhaps no leadership position. Not only does that help the committee from being viewed as merely part of the existing power structure, but helps ensure that a wide range of views and concerns of all women and communities contribute to the research and its uses. More about such bridge leaders appears in the next section.

## Ways to Form an Advisory Committee

Potential members for an advisory committee should receive a formal invitation that asks for their participation, identifies the goals of the planned status of women report and states the expectations for members. This invitation can be co-signed by the chair of the advisory committee and any sponsoring organization or organizing committee.

Women for Women International, an NGO working in Afghanistan, Iraq, Rwanda, Sudan, Kosovo and the Democratic Republic of Congo, has a distinguished advisory council. The organization's mission is to develop and advance women's participation in their respective societies. Women for Women's council includes Jean Bolen and Lisa See; activists such as Alice Walker; politicians Rwandan Senator Aloisea Inyumba; and Nobel Peace Prize winner and former Managing Director of Grameen Bank Muhammad Yunus.

This committee represents the idea that advisers should come from different fields and experiences (Women for Women International 2011). A diverse advisory committee gives the board of directors and the organization advice on direction and action. It also helps promote change by

### Who To Include in an Advisory Committee

- Researchers and statisticians
- Policy experts
- Communications professionals
- Advocates for women
- Legislators and other elected officials at all levels of government
- Members and leaders of key communities

spreading the word on research through a variety of networks. While not all local NGOs can get volunteer support from such well-connected advisers, the point is to seek supporters representing a range of backgrounds, views, beliefs and associations who will work together to help the NGO gather data and use it to help all women.

There are four main ways to seek and form a successful advisory committee:

1. Issue a public request for participation. This request to the public can go out to organizations, leaders, advocates and activists. The request should state the goals of the committee and ask that individuals who would be qualified and interested in serving be nominated to become an advisory committee member. This has the advantage of making sure that all interested individuals are offered an opportunity to share their views. But, it has the disadvantage of possibly permitting individuals who lack commitment or might not fully share the goals of the project to attain a leadership role.

2. Start with an event. A conference on the status of women can generate interest in the topic. It is possible to ask for experts or leaders to speak on the topic and to ask for papers from scholars and advocates, from across the nation and of different income levels, cultures and viewpoints. This has the advantage of gathering, in one place, those interested in working to improve the status of women, but might

exclude other leaders who support the research and program only if they approached personally to discuss its importance.

3. Start small and build out. By starting small with a group of committed volunteers who understand the project, some risks can be avoided, like trying to gain consensus in large group meetings. This has the advantage of helping to create and foster a unified view on the status of women report. The disadvantage is possibly excluding other views that will help inform the project. In this circumstance, it will be important to listen to the views of those who were not active from the beginning and allow them to help shape the final product.

4. Look for bridge leaders. Bridge leaders are women and men who have positions in more than one activist organization or community, although not necessarily as established leaders. These are advisers who can bring in broader constituencies. It is common for women to hold top positions in organizations less frequently, but to have organized for political change more often. Look at the roles women and men play in existing organizations and seek individuals who can provide skills, judgment and passion for the group's goals in conducting research and sharing it to change policy. Look at women's existing positions of both formal and informal power and work to include leaders who are committed to the program's work.



### Advisory Committee Chair Tasks

- Co-signs letters inviting representatives of other organizations to serve on advisory committee
- Provides leadership over the advisory committee to encourage consensus
- Serves as the contact person for information about the status of women report
- Provides help in fundraising for the production of the status of women report
- Is listed as the chair of the advisory committee and the contact person in the report
- Prepares report's preface
- Leads distribution of the report

### Activities of the Advisory Committee

The advisory committee should hold a series of meetings of the full group (typically at least four) throughout the development of the status of women report. These include:

- Orientation meeting to establish goals and become acquainted
- Planning meeting to talk about what issues to cover and divide into smaller committees to complete necessary tasks
- Review meeting to discuss the draft report to ensure consensus over the findings and how they are interpreted and presented
- Outreach meeting to plan for publicity and dissemination of the final report

### The Role of the Advisory Committee Chair

Each advisory committee should nominate or elect a chair. The chair of the advisory committee is an important volunteer leader. This individual is an ambassador for the advisory committee to invite and mobilize new members. If there are multiple per-

sons who reasonably might be considered for the position of chair, one could be an honorary chair or there could be co-chairs with different portfolios.

The chair prepares meeting agendas and leads meetings. To build agreement, the chair needs to work closely with paid and volunteer staff and remain in contact with members of the advisory committee, especially since sometimes individuals might hesitate to voice concerns in a large group.

Some questions and issues about consensus-building may require working across different points of view in the broader community. Different groups in society will have different customs and interests. Having different groups reach consensus and obtain a mutual understanding will ensure research in the report includes social indicators that represent the diverse needs and concerns of women (IWPR 1999).

Fundraising is also an important contribution that an advisory committee chair can make. Even with extensive contributions from volunteers, there will still be a need to fund resources, travel and report production and distribution. Putting together a budget and presenting the project to po-

tential funders will help obtain monetary, material and volunteer contributions. Once the research is done, the advisory committee chair can play an important role in ensuring that the report reflects local context and is designed to address key issues. The advisory committee chair provides important leadership in coordinating any contributions to report text from the advisory committee.

Other key roles for the advisory committee chair include ensuring that the media are contacted and a distribution plan is developed for the report. The advisory committee chair should make sure that as many organizations as possible are involved when publicizing and distributing the report, and that an action plan for working with policymakers and leaders is developed.

## Define the Most Important Social Indicators on the Status of Women for a Region or Nation

Social indicators are statistics, facts, numbers, opinions or perceptions employed to describe and evaluate the condition or level of social and economic development among a group of people at a specific moment in time (CIDA 1997, 5-13). For example, social indicators allow us to assess the level of poverty among single mothers in a defined geographic area and time period.

In addition, social indicators enable evaluation of government policy, programs or other interventions. When indicators are monitored multiple times they can be used to compare time periods. Social indicators also can be used to educate citizens and

policymakers on the costs of and harm caused by gender inequality, and provide a way to bring women's perspectives and insights into the policymaking process (Demetriades 2007). Because not all nations can use the same social indicators, nations differ in the level of information they have about women's lives, problems and roles and because economic and social factors vary so much from country to country. IWPR has created a set of replicable steps to develop social indicators on the status of women for a region or nation.

Before conducting new research, it is important to develop an understanding of the community context and views of women's organization leaders on key needs and opportunities, become familiar with any existing published (or perhaps unpublished) research and to learn whether reliable information exists, even if it is somewhat incomplete or out of date. Data comparing conditions for women and men and for women by different categories such as age, marital status, language, income or religious sect can be indicators of what might show up in a future survey or examination of women's lives.

IFES and IWPR developed their survey on the Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) with a focus on indicators not covered broadly in existing data sources. The SWMENA survey included questions about women's and men's household decision making; financial assets; health care access; civic and political participation; workplace harassment; attitudes about gender roles; and views about pending or proposed legislation in each nation. These survey questions, responses and brief analyses can be found organized by indicators, and in

certain cases with a look at multiple indicators, at [www.swmena.org](http://www.swmena.org) and at <http://www.iwpr.org/initiatives/swmena>. As with IWPR's previous reports, status of women indicators are grouped into a small set of categories or dimensions for ease of communication and to keep the data organized by SWMENA topic briefs.

Social indicators should include both the private and public lives of women represented by official statistics. Additionally, they can capture four different dimensions of women's lives:

1. The economic dimension includes paid labor force participation; poverty rates; income levels; access to economic resources within households; access to credit; titles, assets and savings; unpaid work; and women's business ownership.
2. The social dimension includes the level of education; living situations and roles within the household; violence against women; attitudes about women; and media representations of women.
3. The health dimension includes life expectancy, reproductive rights, incidence of disease and access to health care.
4. The political dimension includes decision-making and leadership roles; women's legal status and rights; and political engagement.

Given that each of these dimensions represents a fundamental aspect of women's lives, one can gain a broad perspective on where women are doing well and areas where women encounter roadblocks by studying each dimension carefully. However, multiple data sources will be needed because few available data sources will cover all of these dimensions. In addition to seeking multiple existing data sources for information on these four dimensions to use in a report, it is important that reports provide basic demographic information on the numbers and proportion of women, for example in different age sets; regions; sects; racial and ethnic groups; and languages used.

In addition to the above four dimensions and the demographic information, there are three important overarching considerations in assessing women's status: women's control over and access to resources; women's level of power and prestige; and attitudes toward and respect for women. Control over and access to resources is relatively easy to measure – it represents women's relationships to economic, health and educational resources. Within some places, it is possible that access to resources, different levels of awareness, and use of resources can be found in existing government data. The first status of women report could focus on women's access to existing resources.

"Although no number of targets and indicators can capture the rich diversity and complexity of women's lives, they help us monitor the fulfillment of commitments to women's progress, as well as mobilize support for stronger efforts in this regard... Assessing the progress of women against agreed targets reveals how much still remains to be done."

- Noeleen Heyzer, *Progress for Women, Progress For All*

Data used in a report typically comes through survey research, and which surveys are used should be carefully considered:

“Survey research or assessment activities can contribute valuable information to program design and lead to further questions to answer during the design phase. Design of the survey tool should ensure that the survey population is gender-balanced or reflects the composition of the entire community it seeks to serve. Likewise, the content of the survey questions must be comprehensive enough to solicit information that will reveal gender differences.”

- National Democratic Institute, 2011

Power and prestige are more complicated and represent informal parts of role and status. Power is the ability to control one’s own life and can be examined both in private life and in public life. To what extent are women free from the control of others? Indicators of power include women’s sense of worth and participation in public life. Power can also be measured by women’s influence in household decisions, freedom of movement and ability to escape from domestic violence.

Attitudes toward women are also important. This includes how women are respected because of their gender in both public and private life. Are women and men viewed as equals? Is women’s work valued equally compared to work typically done by men? Are the views of women regularly considered as important in public policy debates? These areas of women’s lives might need original surveys and interviews with smaller groups to get data.

Finally, data about conditions for women need to include both public and private aspects of women’s lives. Private freedom is important to the idea of universal human rights and requires “domestic” privacy. Domestic privacy is the idea that affairs within the family or home should be private and outside the influence of government,

human rights organizations or other NGOs. Although not without challenges, protections for domestic privacy can result in the creation of policies that place control over women’s role and status in an individual family or household, which might result in inhibiting her own freedom and creating limitations.

Because of this, surveyed measures of women’s status should include both indicators of public and private status. Indicators of women’s public status include employment and earnings, political participation and poverty rates. Indicators of women’s private status include the different types of labor in households; decision making opportunities; control over assets; levels of and views about domestic violence; and women’s and men’s family roles and obligations. However, it is important to remember that women’s employment can be very difficult to measure: both informal and formal (with written agreements) paid labor by women is often underreported (Bardasi et al. 2011).

## Identify Relevant Data Sources

Data for status of women reports can come from a number of different sources, through government statistical agencies, international agencies, published academic papers, NGO research or through original quantitative or qualitative data collection. To become acquainted with existing research and possible data sources it is important to conduct a search for existing studies through library and web-based research and by contacting scholars, advocates and community leaders who may know of data sources and reports.

## Working with Government, University and Nongovernmental Data

Some governments publish data that are collected by agencies and departments on specific topics related to areas under their jurisdiction. For example, the Ministry of Labor may publish annual labor statistics and may disaggregate this information by gender, age or other characteristics. A legislative committee might collect and analyze information on a specific policy or issue area. This information, however, is not always made public, disaggregated by gender and/or updated regularly.

For these reasons, it is often necessary to complement government data with other sources, such as surveys conducted by universities and other research institutions like think tanks and transnational organizations such as the United Nations, or other NGOs. Multiple data sources can contribute to a more complete picture of a

particular policy or issue area. Suggestions for data sources appear at the end of this module.

## Use Appropriate Statistical Criteria for Selecting Data and Indicators

It is important to understand the quality of the information and the limitations of existing data before choosing indicators. Does the information come from a survey that includes a subgroup of people or is it from a census that includes all citizens? Is the sample of sufficient size within each subgroup of women for findings to be generalized to the broader population of women within those groups?

Sometimes official government data does not reflect the experiences of women. For example, official crime statistics only reflect crimes that are reported. Many crimes go unreported for a variety of reasons, even though they may be classified as crimes under the penal code, as is frequently the case for domestic violence and other types of violence against women. For example, according to *Telquel* magazine, unbelievably, there is no official record of incidences of rape in Morocco (Akalay and Hamdani 2010). Indicators on the status of women should be based on data that is valid and reliable. Such limitations should be factored into analysis and tempered with additional sources for comparison, when possible.

Indicators should be based on the most recent data available. When data sources are updated periodically, it allows for the possibility of tracking changes in women's status over time. Make sure that the presentation of data clearly reflects key issues

Lebanon's Nationality Law, issued in 1925, treats women and men differently and survey data helped show the effects of that. Lebanese men who marry foreign women are able to obtain Lebanese citizenship for their spouses but it is illegal for Lebanese women to do so. To advocate against this unequal treatment for men and women, the National Committee for the Follow up on Women's Issues (NCFUWI) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) project on Lebanese women's rights and the citizenship law collected gender-specific data, particularly about Lebanese women's marriage and inheritance practices. The data shows that the law affects women's access to property, the rights of their children, and in general is a form of discrimination. (Charafeddine 2009).

affecting women, through measures that show inequality and unique aspects of women's experiences, including the positive.

Social indicators that address gender have a number of goals: to track and measure women's progress, identify unique aspects of women's experiences and to measure inequality. It is crucial to show areas where women have made progress and similarities among groups while highlighting remaining priorities and inequalities.

To gain a complete understanding of the various contexts in which women live, it is important to work with local women's advocates and researchers as well as policymakers. For example, in some national contexts there are constitutional quotas mandating a certain level of representation in public office, such as during local elections in Morocco in 2009 (Sadiqi 2010), and other contexts where quotas do not exist. Care is advised when comparing nations, since they have varying economic and political developments.

Information from surveys can help highlight particular aspects of women's inequality. For example, the IFES-IWPR SWMENA survey of women and men in

Lebanon found that no matter how educated Lebanese men were, about one in 10 men felt it was acceptable for men to beat women in certain situations. This was not true for women. Women in the survey with more education were less likely to find battering acceptable.

## Collect Original Data

Where recent data on critical issues affecting women is not currently available, an organization may wish to collect original data. Collecting original data through the use of tools such as surveys can help to fill data gaps and provide a baseline portrait of the status of women. Surveys can investigate core questions on many topic areas, including: demographics; crime; economics; health; reproductive and parenting issues; housing; education; transportation; and politics.

Alternatively, qualitative interviews and/or focus groups can assist in developing a more nuanced understanding of women's circumstances, concerns, aspirations and barriers faced in their work and personal lives or advancing in political and public life. Many tools and models exist for conducting short, simple interviews and focus groups. In some cases, portions of such materials can be included in a status



of women report, keeping the participant anonymous and bringing a human face to the issues discussed in the report.

Original research must be conducted with the highest consideration of standards for ethical research practice. It is crucial that questions be carefully developed to treat sensitive topics with care, risks to participants be minimized or eliminated, and results be kept confidential.

Original data collection can be time-consuming and costly. At a minimum, it adds additional costs to the report project beyond simply analyzing existing data sets. Contracting with an expert on culturally competent sampling can be a challenge but might be helpful both in collecting original data and in analyzing the data collected from other sources. Generally for a large sample survey, it is usually desirable to involve a survey firm with expertise in sampling techniques and culturally appropriate interview techniques.

## **Interpret and Present the Data in Ways that Reflect Similarities and Differences Among Women and Men, Among Women, and Over Time**

Ideally, interpretation of the data should be a collaboration of both lay and expert members of the advisory committee. While academic experts may have essential skills in formal data analysis and presentation, consultation from those working in direct service or advocacy may help to identify dynamics underlying the findings.

Try to view the data as telling a story. Start with the largest problems first, and then work backwards to provide other information that helps the reader of the report understand how these problems occur. For example, if there are few women in the legislature, is it because too few women are trained in the law, or is it because the parties fail to recruit and support women?

## **Use Social Indicators to show the Big Picture**

For a status of women report, IWPR recommends that one uses three types of reference points for meaningful comparisons: women compared with men; comparing different groups of women; and comparing women's status across time or different places.

Women's status compared to men's can be shown through such indicators as: a gender wage gap; a family support indicator (an indicator that shows a mother's earnings relative to a father's earnings); or a gender gap in voting (an indicator that shows the differences between women and men in supporting specific candidates or political parties).

Other types of analyses compare the status of some women to other women, over time and in different places. This might include comparing women of different levels of educational attainment, marital status, religion, language, parental status, level of median earnings, percentage of women who vote, percentage of women in professional and management occupations and size of women-owned businesses. Data collected repeatedly or in more than one site can show how gaps increase, persist or narrow in different contexts.

### Suggestions for Presenting Data

- Use social indicators to show the big picture
- Create composite indices
- Provide summary tables in the text and complex tables in an appendix
- Keep careful records on data sources and methods in the report or in an appendix

### Create Composite Indices

Another way to interpret and present data is to use a composite index to illustrate women's aggregate status within the different dimensions of women's lives. Once a composite index is developed, one can begin ranking different regions or local governments. Composite indices can convey more concise messages about the nature of progress than a larger group of indicators. As such, composite indices are useful for creating awareness of issues of inequality or quality of life. Composite indices may obscure the details and how a path to change might differ for the individual indicators that constitute the index. It may be a good idea here to hire a quantitative researcher who can create and interpret composite indices, which involves standardizing data in ways that make them comparable.

### Provide Summary Tables and Figures in the Text and Complex Tables in an Appendix

Summary tables allow NGOs to highlight outcomes or characteristics pertinent to a particular topic or region and to focus the reader's attention on indicators that are especially worrisome or encouraging. Thus, summary tables ensure that the most relevant statistics are noticed without overwhelming readers with facts

and numbers. Summary tables, however, can only convey limited information, and policymakers and advocates might require additional data. To accommodate the data requirements of some readers, reports can include more detailed and complex tables in the appendix or on a website.

### Provide a thorough description of data sources and methods in the report or in an appendix

As the report develops, NGOs should keep careful records on data sources and methods, and prepare a fairly detailed description to be included in the report or in an appendix. This increases confidence in the conclusions and allows others to replicate findings. In addition, members of the press often have specific questions about data sources and analysis techniques to verify the credibility of the findings. Maintaining careful records of the methodology employed also makes updating a report much easier.

### Generate Meaningful Public Policy Recommendations

It is important to make recommendations so a report can be successful in achieving its overall purpose: to support programs and policy changes that improve the status of women. Clear, relevant policy



Morocco ratified CEDAW in 1993, but the removal of reservations to CEDAW came at the culmination of 14 years of work by Morocco's civil society organizations in cooperation with King Mohamed VI who took the throne in 1999. The process was spurred by the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women, causing other local NGOs to follow suit (Sadiqi 2010, 5). This cooperation is not unique; in countries that have ratified CEDAW, women continue to partner with their governments, and as a result, have helped to shape policies to create greater safety and opportunity for women and their families.

recommendations can help the report have the maximum possible policy impact. Effective report recommendations should address challenges discussed in the report and suggest changes in programs or public policy. Focus on a select set of recommendations that are neither so specific that they will go out of date in short order, or so general that they might be difficult to act upon. The distinctive nature of a report on the status of women is its foundation in objective data, but the report, nevertheless, can express a point of view.

## **The Public Policy Justification**

An organization will be more effective if it can stress how supporting and empowering women will strengthen them as workers, as citizens and as parents who contribute to society and economic development. This is a public policy justification – where the organization expands support for the recommendations and convinces others who might not share in the problem that they can share in the benefit if the problem is addressed.

## **Working Within the Existing Public Policy Framework**

The public policy framework consists of ideas and policy changes that are viewed as acceptable within the existing institutions. Sometimes small wins can lead to greater confidence as organizations become trusted advocates for women. Also, there might be important, existing changes within current laws that could provide considerable benefits to women. For example, would more accessible or government-subsidized child care assist women? Could a better public bus system help girls go to school?

## **Carefully Choose New Ideas that Expand the Existing Public Policy Framework**

History has shown that change efforts create resistance. It is important to focus recommendations strategically. Prioritize changes and consider working first on ideas that might get the greatest support. Some changes may take 10 or 20 years but change can and does happen.

## Prepare the Report and other Informational Resources

Research results can be presented through a number of different types of products, including a complete report, shorter briefs on specific topics covered in the research or an executive summary, fact sheets and other resources. The advisory committee might recommend preparing several types of resources that will be useful in reaching different audiences. To reach those who are new to the issues, or for those who have limited time to invest, very brief fact sheets may be the best way to present the data. For those with a comprehensive interest in the range of issues affecting women, or who will utilize the data in a technical capacity, a complete report may be useful.

Whatever the ultimate written product, writing clearly, without jargon, is critical. The audience for the report will include laypersons as well as policymakers, scholars and advocates. Many researchers have difficulty writing accessibly, so public relations or communications experts may be consulted to improve the writing and ensure the text is understandable.

Components of a full report can include a preface, often written by the advisory committee chair, describing why the report was undertaken and its significance; an executive summary, which summarizes all of the elements of the report; and an introduction that describes the goals of the report and contextual information about the location (nation, city or province, for example) or population studied, the basic research methods, data sources used in preparing the report and provides a roadmap of how the report is structured. These sections of the report are followed by sections that present findings on different topics or sets of indicators, such as political participation and health and well being.

Each of the topical sections may begin with some contextual information on why the issue is important along with relevant background literature. The topical sections can include illustrative charts and figures that help the reader visualize important findings. Adding pull-quotes or highlighting short elements of the text to emphasize findings can help keep the reader focused on key points. Text boxes, an initial summary of critical statistics and photographs can also add visual interest or draw attention to specific aspects of the report. In some reports, each topical section includes its own set of program and policy recom-

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World at the Lebanese American University, in partnership with the Danish Center for Information on Women and Gender, has launched a searchable database of Lebanese women leaders and experts in a wide variety of fields, including government, journalism and academia (Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World). Database Editor Maysa Hajj Ballan hailed the database, which was launched in March of 2010, for helping create professional links between women experts in Lebanon and Denmark. Similar databases are being planned in Egypt and Jordan (Olofsson 2010).

mendations, whereas in others, all recommendations appear in a special section at the end of the document.

The report needs to include a section that summarizes conclusions and provides public policy recommendations that follow from the data analysis. In some cases, the report may include appendices with tables for those interested in the details without cluttering up the main portion of the text. An appendix can also be used to present more detailed methodological information, such as techniques for calculating any composite indicators used in the report, and a complete list of data sources and indicators used.

Reports may include a list of organizations and additional resources that readers can refer to for additional information or if they want to become involved in ad-

vocacy. The report should include a list of works cited. The credibility of the report is enhanced by citing all sources carefully and by citing primary, rather than secondary, sources, wherever possible.

## Make Data Available

Because existing data sources may be inadequate for comprehensive social indicators, a report on the status of women will likely reveal numerous gaps in existing data. These data gaps can be addressed by working to expand public and private sector research endeavors. This can include creating a women's research network and developing an online research resource and database.

Creating a women's research network can be helpful in linking together researchers interested in women. Creating an e-mail

### Seven Steps in Preparing a Status of Women Report to Affect Policy

1. Create a diverse working advisory committee
2. Define the most important social indicators on the status of women for a region or nation
3. Identify relevant data sources
4. Interpret and present data in ways that clearly describe where women have progressed and where their status lags behind, and illustrate similarities and differences among women and men; among women of different backgrounds; and over time
5. Generate meaningful public policy recommendations
6. Prepare the report and other informational resources
7. Make data available

listserv and online discussion group can be helpful in exchanging information and providing tips on how to collect data that inform women's policy goals. One strategy that has made women's NGOs successful in redefining the global agenda toward the issues they champion is the creation of bridge NGOs, whose goal is to maintain regular communication and networking across women's NGOs and other NGOs who share women's concern. For example, two international women's organizations, Isis and the Women's International Network, have helped women "maintain connections among themselves throughout the year through their reports and newsletters" (Ahmed and Potter 2006).

Creating and maintaining a comprehensive regional database can serve as a resource for scholars, organizations and individuals, and spur additional research. This repository of data and research could include a variety of existing global, national, university, state and local databases, and research resources on women's issues. The information and data collected could be included in a website or catalogued in a database. Each record contains a description of the data (including geography, type and source) and information on how to obtain the research or data. By including hyperlinks, a website can allow researchers to easily find data.

## Data Sources

There are a variety of global sources for both statistical and gender-relevant information.

**African Gender and Development Index (AGDI):** Developed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and launched in 2004, this index focuses on both quantitative and qualitative measures of women's role and status. It includes two components: the Gender Status Index (GSI) and the African Women's Progress Scoreboard (AWPS).

Available at: [www.uneca.org/acgs/Publications/AGDI\\_book\\_final.pdf](http://www.uneca.org/acgs/Publications/AGDI_book_final.pdf).

**Economic Research Forum (ERF):** Several data sets are available through ERF, principally about labor and small-business ownership. Available through inquiries at: [www.erf.org/cms.php?id=Datasets](http://www.erf.org/cms.php?id=Datasets).

**Gender-related Development Index (GDI):** This is a supplemental index to the Human Development Index (HDI) developed by the United Nations, which calculates gender differences in life expectancy, education and income. HDI is a composite that ranks developed, developing and underdeveloped countries by level of human development. Available at: [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR\\_2009\\_EN\\_Table\\_J.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2009_EN_Table_J.pdf).

**Gender Empowerment Index (GEM):** This is another supplemental index to the Human Development Index developed by the United Nations, which calculates gender differences in political representation, professional and management positions in the economy, and earned income. Available at: [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR\\_2009\\_EN\\_Table\\_K.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2009_EN_Table_K.pdf).

**Gender Gap Index (GGI):** This World Economic Forum source includes indicators on economic participation, economic opportunity, political empowerment and educational attainment.

Available at: [www.weforum.org/en/Communities/Women%20Leaders%20and%20Gender%20Parity/GenderGapNetwork/index.htm](http://www.weforum.org/en/Communities/Women%20Leaders%20and%20Gender%20Parity/GenderGapNetwork/index.htm).

### **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs):**

Goal 3 of the eight MDGs developed by the United Nations in 2000 is to “promote gender equality and empower women.” Gender is viewed as an issue that impacts all of the MDGs, which focus on poverty, development, health, education and environmental sustainability. Investment in women’s health and nutritional status reduces chronic hunger and malnourishment, as well as reduces infant and maternal mortality. Education for women increases participation in public life and increases both women’s and children’s school enrollment, educational attainment, and overall health. Available at: [www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender.shtml](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender.shtml).

### **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs):**

Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Progress Chart 2010: [United Nations] This chart tracks women’s progress towards achieving the MDGs using several indicators. Available at: <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Static/Products/Progress2010/MDG%20Report%202010%20-%20Gender%20Brochure%20En.pdf>.

**Social Institutions and Gender Index:** The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development’s index is both a database of indicators as well as a composite index that emphasizes discrimination against women.

Available at [www.oecd.org/document/39/0,3343,en\\_2649\\_33935\\_42274663\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/39/0,3343,en_2649_33935_42274663_1_1_1_1,00.html).

**United Nations Statistics Division:** Find global statistics information, databases and methods here. Available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/default.htm>.

### **World Bank Data:**

Development Data

Available at: <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/home.aspx>.

Gender Statistics

Available at: <http://databank.worldbank.org/Data/Views/VariableSelection/Select-Variables.aspx?source=Gender%20Statistics>

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# STATUS OF WOMEN

in the Middle East and North Africa

## Media Outreach and Research Dissemination

### *Module II*

*from the  
Using Research on the Status of Women to  
Improve Public Policies in the Middle East and North Africa  
Capacity-Building Toolkit*



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Development Agency



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# MODULE II: MEDIA OUTREACH AND RESEARCH DISSEMINATION

## In this Module, Learn How to:

- Prepare an outreach strategy
- Create a press release
- Respond to and work with the press
- Conduct community outreach
- Contact IWPR and IFES for further help or information

## Introduction

Releasing a status of women report to the press and public can be part of a broader advocacy strategy or campaign to help an NGO improve conditions for women. If shared widely and given attention, a research report can serve as a resource for different groups involved in social change—such as advocates, researchers, educators, grant writers and policymakers—to inform the public and motivate action, which helps NGOs with their work. Reports have been used by NGOs for many different activities, such as educational outreach, political participation, legislative activity, institution building, additional research, grant making, organizational fundraising and coalition building.

While broadcasting and new media technologies supplement traditional person-to-person forms of communication, they have not replaced them in terms of effectiveness. This is particularly true in change efforts to improve the public role and status of women, perhaps especially those from rural and poorer backgrounds. Outreach strategies depend on solid goals. Chosen goals should help decide which methods will be used for outreach and communication.

## How to Prepare an Outreach Strategy

To have a successful release of a research report, the NGO's plan needs to include both short-term and long-term goals. Short-term goals might be to hold a successful press conference that gets reported in mainstream media outlets, and to inspire a series of press stories on the issues raised in the report. Long-term goals might be to establish credibility as an objective and to expand policies that benefit women and girls.

## Report Dissemination Tips

In the planning stages of the project it is critical to gather input, discuss possible uses of the report and begin to build strategic partnerships with key stakeholders. The first step is to ensure a comprehensive dissemination plan by establishing specific details and methods that will be used to target the different populations that the status of women report is intended to reach.



Reports can be distributed free-of-charge to national, provincial and local policy-makers even before being released to the public. The reports can be used to create women's legislative agendas, to support legislative testimony or to mobilize women around a specific campaign or piece of legislation.

Releasing a report requires a communications strategy and press plan. Included in both the strategy and press plan should be: lists of short and long-term goals, the working group's strategy for achieving these goals, the tasks involved to reach the goals (along with benchmark dates) and the roles and responsibilities for team members. Creating a consensus on the communications strategy and press plan will ensure that everyone involved understands the message, how to communicate it to the media, what to do in order to achieve successful research dissemination and how to measure and evaluate that success. A communications strategy includes the message, the timing of the report release and the communication channels and vehicles to be used. An effective communications strategy is clear about communications goals and has identified spokespersons. Working groups and NGOs also need a range of individuals who might be available to comment on various specific stories and research areas.

## Choice of Communication Channels and Vehicles

In thinking about media, it is important to consider two different types: paid media and free media. Paid media includes commercials, posters, mailings, billboards and yard signs. Free media includes press coverage and news stories about the research

data and all other NGO work. Both take effort to meet the needs of reporters and editors. The Internet can provide opportunities for both paid media (a website) and free media (bloggers' and activists' twitter accounts that distil and discuss current news events).

Each type of media — newspapers, television, radio and the Internet — has different audiences. In considering a communications plan, NGOs should consider their target audiences and reach out to them based on the most effective media tools for those groups. For example, if youth are a target group of the campaign, it will be important to include new media elements in the communications plan, while rural or relatively isolated communities might be likelier to hear radio broadcasts and see wall posters or highway billboards. The literacy levels and languages of the audience, as well as cultural concerns in word choice, are all necessary to consider. A strategic approach will be critical to leveraging resources for targeted, effective outreach.

Communication mechanisms differ in their ability to change opinion through persuasion, in their ability to lend credibility to the message and in the type of message they carry. The first major distinction is between interpersonal communication and a media story. History has shown that women's movements tend to arise from the actions and efforts of women's organizations, where women have met face-to-face and developed new understandings through discussion groups. Social science research also demonstrates that interpersonal contacts are the most effective for changing attitudes and mobilizing support.

In contrast, media communications are most effective in establishing the credibility of messages for policy change and mobilizing support. Besides lending credibility, communication through the media can reach a broader audience. Media lays the groundwork for interpersonal change and can cover the developments and achievements of the movement, helping to draw attention to the issues and sustain the movement. In communications, it is important to include mainstream media as well as specialized media when reaching out to all women and advertising the status of women report.

Focus on newspapers first. Indications are that newspapers — even in the age of television and the Internet — remain important for laying out the shape of most stories that end up on television. First, daily newspapers are more likely to have in-depth stories read by leaders. Newspapers are also likely to have areas of specialty such as stories on women, culture and politics. At the same time, an overlap increasingly appears among newspapers, television and the Internet.

Conversely, for immediate responses to events and crises that would take too long for newspapers to handle, television is the preeminent medium of choice. For a story in the media about the status of women, an NGO should select spokespeople from within the group as well as women and men from outside the organization who have had relevant experiences and can address the message. In short, a communications strategy should also emphasize a human side to the story best shown on television. Visual aspects of a message convey strongest with the use of television, posters, billboards and displays.

An unforgettable visual can be invaluable. This can include a sign for an organization or a visual that symbolizes the work that it does. In Chile, community-based organizations of women created a visual by weaving textiles, called *arpilleras*, to protest conditions under the dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s (Adams 2000; Agosin 2008). Sometimes, events can create a visual that symbolizes themes. For example, in Iran the V-shaped peace gesture

“Nationality has become a big political and media issue, but it wasn’t when we started in 2002. We had found one thing in common in all Arab countries — nationality laws discriminate against women. When we started talking to the media, they were interested in facts, figures, and human-interest stories, but we didn’t have any. We lacked hard data. So we went back to square one — research. With [International Research Development Centre] support, we conducted research in three main areas. The findings allowed us to make the issue visible and to launch a campaign in 2004.”

- Lina Abou Habib, executive director of the Collective for Research and Training on Development-Action (CRTD-A) based in Beirut

*This research-based media and outreach campaign led to nationality policy changes and contributed to changing these policies in Egypt (2004), Algeria (2005) and Morocco (2007) (IDRC 2009).*

(sometimes with painted-green fingers or green ribbons) came to be the symbol of the Green Movement and a way to show opposition to the election.

Radio usually has very specific audiences attracted to the type of music or programming it offers. For this reason, it is helpful for targeting specific groups. Talk radio can also be used for extended discussion of issues. Here, topics can be amplified for larger audiences. NGOs can extend the reach of the research report by working to arrange interviews and by calling in to talk radio shows.

The Internet has also become an important source for information that mainstream news fails to report. This can range from rumors to genuine grassroots stories that generate a great deal of interest among ordinary citizens. Today, the Internet serves as a source for news and social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs, which are good tools for quick updates for immediate and timely releases.

For ongoing communications, an organization's website can provide both an array of information about their mission and activities as well as easy access to the organization's

research. Finally, e-mail strengthens one-on-one communications and group networks through social marketing and Listservs.<sup>®</sup> Efforts made via the Internet are essential to a press effort. Reporters will usually check an NGO's website, making it important to keep a website current and dynamic. New communication technologies are important; and websites, e-mail, Listservs<sup>®</sup>, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs are playing a growing role.

## Message

A message is a small piece of information that is persuasively presented in ways to mobilize individuals to choose and act based on that information. An effective message is:

- Clear
- Concise
- Contrasting
- Memorable
- Persuasive

"Most gender discussions focus on women as journalists or as readers, but we have to understand that it is even beyond that. It is also about women being the news, about women's share of media space, whether it is print or broadcast. Balanced reporting that reflects the whole society and its various issues not only ensures that all readers are engaged with the media, but also feel represented. Sometimes we have to cross social, cultural and traditional barriers to really reflect women's concerns in a non-superficial way. It is our ethical and professional responsibility as journalists to challenge those barriers and promote a more accurate reflection of all society's segments and be truthful to our audience."

- Nadia Abdulaziz Al-Sakkaf, publisher and editor-in-chief, *Yemen Times*, Sana'a

To the extent that there is controversy, a message becomes more newsworthy. But if a message is too controversial, it risks being treated as an oddity or as a minority viewpoint rather than something broader and factual. The message is less persuasive if it seems overly controversial.

The message of a status of women report should be framed to highlight the policy impact and the policy needs of women. To make the message clear as well as persuasive, it is helpful to develop a message box and anticipate what critics might say to undermine a message. A message box is a communications tool used to test the strength and focus of a message.

The message box considers both the positive (the benefits of the position) and the negative (what is wrong with the opposing view) of the message. This will help structure the message and prepare answers for difficult or challenging questions from journalists, advocates, researchers, educators, policymakers and critics.

## Timing of Report Release

Select the date of the report release for the status of women report far in advance. Sometimes it is helpful to select a day when women are in the public eye, such as International Women's Day or Mother's Day. Press events can also be especially effective when tied to local policy initiatives or are held at strategic times, such as on the eve of a legislative or local council session. Important media dead zones, such as during a holiday season or right before a weekend, should be avoided. The opposite is also true: the release should be timed in between any big events that are coming up since they will be distracting.

## Types of Media

### Print Press: Daily and Weekly

- Newspapers
- News
- Editorials
- Local and syndicated columns
- Opinion-editorials and guest columns
- Letters to the editor
- Lifestyle

### Specialty Press

- Trade and special interest
- Alternative or independent
- Ethnic or language-specific
- Religious
- Newsletters
- Magazines

### Television Formats

- News
- Talk shows
- Public affairs broadcasting
- Reporter's roundtables
- Satellite and cable shows

### Radio Shows

- All news
- Specialty music/programming
- Talk radio
- Public affairs broadcasting/radio

### Internet

- Social media/networking sites
- Blogging
- Twitter
- YouTube

### Other

- Billboards
- Posters
- Conference displays

In the early months of 2011 throughout the Middle East, the world saw the successful use of Facebook, Twitter, blogging and other social media networks in organizing protests that called for change in government leadership and the recognition of human rights. These uses of media led to protests that, in turn, led in several contexts either to reform or regime change. This is a specific example of the general public using social media to organize; however, it also exemplifies the strength social media and the Internet can have on any campaign (Myers 2011).

Of course, a new story about women that the press finds interesting could be picked up at any time, and NGOs should be prepared with a media message to respond to unanticipated questions from journalists.

Overall, the NGO's goal should be the creation of a running story on women's needs and issues that can be used during, but also beyond, the actual report release.

## Preparing a Press Release

The press release is an essential tool for any communications effort. Press releases are designed to create publicity for an event, while a press advisory is released in advance of the event. Select someone as a press contact to manage press questions, arrange for interviews, handle all press logistics and keep track of all press contacts for the report release.

The press contact person is not the same as a spokesperson or spokespeople for the report. Press questions can be overwhelming and it can be helpful to separate these two roles so that the spokesperson or spokespeople can focus on the message without worrying about the logistics, and the press can easily speak to someone who can arrange for interviews and meet their deadline needs.

A press release is typically distributed in conjunction with a news event or conference. A press advisory is released in advance, to alert the press about the upcoming event. Five days or so in advance should be adequate for the first advisory. Follow-up advisories may be faxed or e-mailed the day of the event. Reminder phone calls on the day of an event and follow-up phone calls are helpful to press contacts to answer any questions.

A special letterhead or logo can be used in the press release and advisories. The press release should say who, what, when, where, why and include quotes from core individuals that provide a statement of the significance of the report. Keep the press release short — only one or two pages.

A news conference is an appropriate way to make a newsworthy announcement or statement. If not conducted via telephone or webcast, it is important that the location be central. The agenda should be prepared and provided to the press in advance. Be sure to allow plenty of time for questions. It is important to have the event start and end on time. Depending on the event, questions from general audience members, in addition to questions from the media, can be included. At the conclusion, press will also seek to ask individual questions of the speakers.

In Iran, there is a growing women's movement titled the "1 Million Signatures Campaign." It is a campaign to give women equality and justice under the Iranian system of law. The idea is to receive one million signatures to petition the government to provide equality to both women and ethnic minorities under Iranian law. However, this has grown to include providing education on injustices and engaging an international audience to help the movement. The campaign has been extremely successful in its use of Internet outreach. The campaign has created a continually-updated website that includes a media page with articles that have been written about the campaign. Additionally, the campaign uses media such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter to help advance their campaign for equal rights under Iranian law (Tahmasebi 2011).

It is helpful to have a panel of individuals who will speak briefly. Selecting these individuals should be done with care. Consider both those who were involved in the report, as well as elected and community leaders whose presence can lend stature to the importance of an NGO's recommendations.

The oral remarks should complement the written press release and statements of remarks. The oral remarks can be briefer than the prepared written remarks. The report itself and the remarks can also be released in advance and embargoed for release until the date of the conference. This will allow both televised and print

media to have equal access to the event, and encourage print media to produce opinion editorials around the report.

It is important to anticipate critics and attacks. Decide in advance who will respond and make sure supporters are present. Prepare beforehand, using the message box for developing contrasting messages to be able to recognize what questions or arguments may come from both critics and supporters.

Planning is important because the media impact of a poorly staged press conference can be difficult to overcome. The status of women report release is the opportunity to showcase not only information, but also issues and recommendations for change. A release event should be well-planned.

## Type of Message

- Positive
- Contrasting
- Status of women position
- What we say about our report
- What we say about other points of view
- Opposing position
- What critics say about their position
- What critics say about the status of women report

## Working with the Press

A successful relationship with the press is important to achieving good coverage. The press sees its role as covering news. The press has its own rules about what constitutes news, and it operates under constant deadlines.

### The News Conference

- Decide who will talk
- Confirm the participation of speakers
- Choose a convenient time and place
- Set an agenda
- Secure equipment
- Set up a press table with media kits (useful materials for the press)
- Fax and e-mail a press advisory
- Make phone calls
- Start on time
- Provide a press release

An NGO should keep a press list of the names of reporters and editors who have shown prior interest in the report topics, who should be kept apprised of any report releases, updates and announcements. A current list is essential because there may be turnover among reporters. NGOs sometimes share those lists with each other to help save time by avoiding unnecessary duplication of effort.

To meet the needs of the press, an event should be newsworthy by the standards of the journalists who are invited. In writing the press release and in organizing the press conference, be sure to stress what is new and special about the report. What traditional views are not supported by the data? What current needs or problems are exposed? How does the report reveal harm to women and society? On the other hand, it is important to not exaggerate what is exceptional about the report or to mislead journalists.

Understanding the pattern of the news cycle will help guide when to release information, communicate with the press

and be prepared to respond to interview requests. For example, television and print media deadlines often will differ; early morning wire services scan morning newspapers for ideas; and bloggers who use Facebook and Twitter tend to share more important news stories on days of the week that depend on the work cycles of a region or nation.

Do not get too discouraged if the response is disappointing. Many grassroots organizations have had the experience of holding a press conference where no reporter shows up – or if they do, the story does not make it into the media – possibly because the story was vetoed by an editor. Those at an NGO working to develop the press release should plan it carefully and then keep records of the journalists who do participate and produce a story on the report.

### Keeping Track of Press Outlets: Items to Note

- Media type
- Outlet name
- Ratings/Circulation
- Focus/Specialty
- Owner
- Region
- Address
- Telephone
- Fax
- Deadlines
- Editors/News directors
- Editorial board
- Key reporters/Beats
- Notes (whom to avoid; when not to call)



In Timor-Leste, formerly East Timor, one of the most effective public information strategies targeting women was carried out by UNTAET, in collaboration with UNFPA, in the launching of a major nationwide campaign in 2002 to raise awareness on how to prevent domestic violence and to inform victims about how to seek assistance. The mission used all media channels, including posters and public service announcements, and helped train local journalists on gender-sensitive reporting of such crimes. Women candidates for Timor-Leste's popular consultation were also facilitated with special airtime. Results indicated that women constituted about 30 percent of the membership of the new Constituent Assembly (United Nations Population Fund 2005).

Before giving an interview, discuss with the reporter how information might be quoted or not. "On the record" means that the speaker can be personally quoted. Sometimes "off the record" can be requested, where a quote is given without identifying the speaker. Where a good relationship with a specific reporter is established, the speaker can provide information that is "on background." This is information that makes suggestions about the story being told, but not for quotation. Reporters rely on their sources to provide the background for a story they are developing, and speaking to inside sources can give them the insight they need to put together a great story. A background discussion can also include tips on who to interview for an on-the-record report.

The NGO should have a press call form for the status of women report so that anytime anyone speaks with a reporter,

the form is filled out and a list created. The press call form should include how to reach the reporter; the information and materials the journalist requests; and deadline. The form also should have space to fill out what was provided, when and by whom.

## Community Outreach

Community outreach can help communicate new information and policy recommendations. Because change efforts are achieved through interpersonal communications, community outreach is an important aspect of advocacy campaigns. Community outreach can create awareness through a variety of educational and outreach activities, including town meetings, mentoring programs, poster displays and special projects (Sinzdak 2002).

## Conferences, Town Meetings, Local Community Forums

A local or regional conference can be held to bring attention to the report or to address a key issue in the report. Local elected officials can be invited to speak, and workshops can be held on various aspects of the report's findings. Town meetings, local community forums, roundtables or even discussion groups can be held as well.

### Press Call Form:

- Reporter
- Outlet (publication or station)
- Date
- Request
- Deadline



When a measure to legalize polygamy surfaced in Kyrgyzstan, the Women's Political Discussion Club (WPDC) held a public roundtable to raise awareness and build consensus on how best to defeat it. The WPDC drafted a position paper, held press conferences, organized a rally and met with legislators and other government officials to argue against the measure. Success came a month later when Kyrgyzstan's parliament voted to uphold the current law outlawing the practice. In a country where women have had few opportunities to engage in the political process, members of this core group of 25 women leaders from political parties, civic organizations and the media have emerged as effective and respected citizen advocates (National Democratic Institute 2011).

Local symposia provide an opportunity to extend the report to include local women's issues and generate activism.

## Speaker's Bureaus

Many of the most effective communications are person-to-person. Speaker's bureaus can communicate report findings effectively. A speaker's bureau is composed of advisory committee members or others who speak about the report, sometimes focusing on specific topics. Speaker's bureau lists are distributed to organizations, schools and civic groups. It is also helpful to include a resource list of experts who are available to conduct longer workshops or trainings on specific issues. Combining facts with stories about the experiences of women who live in the area can be especially compelling.

## Secondary and Post-Secondary Curriculum

There are plenty of opportunities to utilize the status of women report as an educational tool in college and high school courses. Teachers and professors often welcome speakers in a classroom who can make an issue come alive for students even if the professor does not share the opinion of the speaker. To be an effective communicator

in this setting it will be important to focus on issues of concern to young people and on topics the class is studying.

## Distribution in Library Systems

To increase access to the reports, advisory committees can distribute copies to library systems. Systems to target include local, regional and national public library systems, college libraries and high school libraries.

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# STATUS OF WOMEN

in the Middle East and North Africa

## Advocacy to Support Women

### *Module III*

*from the*

*Using Research on the Status of Women to  
Improve Public Policies in the Middle East and North Africa  
Capacity-Building Toolkit*



Canadian International  
Development Agency



Global Expertise. Local Solutions.  
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# MODULE III: ADVOCACY TO SUPPORT WOMEN

## In this Module, Learn How to:

- Take critical steps in an advocacy effort
- Use reports for effective advocacy
- Build coalitions and networks
- Contact IWPR and IFES for further help or information

## Introduction

A status of women report is ultimately created to inform policy, practice and advocacy. It can help NGOs mobilize advocates for policy change, encourage coalition-building and create networks to support women's perspectives in the policymaking process. Advocacy includes efforts to communicate a set of ideas for new public policies. It includes efforts at all levels of politics, from the local and grassroots level, to the national government. A status of women report that is disseminated to public officials can be used to mobilize policy advocacy, build coalitions and garner high-level support for policies that improve conditions for women and their communities.

## Critical Steps in an Advocacy Effort

Provided below are 10 basic steps in planning an effective advocacy effort connected to findings and recommendations within the status of women report research:

1. Identify goals and methods of influence. Before launching an advocacy effort, NGOs should identify their goals and the methods for achieving them. NGOs should become familiar, if they are not already, with the parameters of legislative and other opportunities, such as the length and schedule of legislative sessions and the dates for relevant public events.
2. Understand limitations. In any effort, it is important to consider previous attempts. Have there been failures, incomplete efforts or partial successes? Public officials and others will view the organization's efforts in the context of what happened in the past. If a previous effort failed, then the organization may need to either reframe its goals or be able to explain why it will now be successful.
3. Identify the policy arena. Researching and identifying the existing policy arena will help advocates form concrete questions and achievable goals. What kinds of issues go together within political, party and legislative debates? Are certain issues cross-cutting, reinforcing or rooted in particular constituencies? Since a status of women report seeks to expand the policy space, the goal is to see where and how changes can be accommodated.

4. Know allies and opposition. Who supports the goals of and recommendations of the report and who opposes them? The better an organization can predict support and resistance to an effort, the better it can identify a successful communication strategy.

5. Develop leaders and spokespersons. The advisory committee and its chair can serve as leaders and spokespersons for a group's advocacy efforts. The group should remain open, however, to adding others who can present its issues. The broader the array of spokespersons, the better. It is also important to diversify the group's portfolio of speakers because the media may seek to focus on only a few individuals. When the effort and the movement are actually much larger, this risks creating media stars and discouraging contributing individuals who are less recognized in the media.

6. Understand the terrain of public opinion. Public opinion is complex. While polls will focus attention on the views of the majority, in reality, many do not have intense views on all subjects. Also, people sometimes ignore their own needs to follow what they believe is the majority view. One expert, German political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, calls this the "spiral of silence" (1993). Of course, as women become aware of the gap between what they need and what they are told their society wants, women might take action. Part of the objective of producing a status of women report is to identify policy and perception gaps that should be addressed. Looking critically at public opinion polls can help organizations better direct their advocacy efforts.

7. Define the targets of change. Whether NGOs focus on decision makers, activists, or the general public is a choice. Whom do they wish to persuade, in what order and why? Identifying the target audience will allow organizations to direct their efforts more efficiently.

8. Plan the channels for effective communication. Communication channels and vehicles differ. Will the group use print media, television, radio, the Internet or interpersonal contacts? Even within each type of communication, which outlet and what form will be employed? For example, an organization may choose print media as its means of communication. Within that category, the group could decide to design a poster for distribution or write a letter to the editor. This is important, because each differs in its ability to persuade and lend credibility, in the type of message promoted, as well as in the type of audience targeted. In an advocacy campaign, NGOs should specifically consider what communication sources are most often used by public officials. (Module II discusses these in more detail.)

9. Choose a message based on the organization's needs. There is likely to be an infinite number of strategies a working group or NGO could choose. Are they seeking to broaden policy conflict or to narrow it? What kind of issue strategy are they implementing — using what is known as a "wedge issue" to divide critics or a lever issue to attract allies? Is the group stressing a positive message or one that contrasts its message with others? Is the organization starting slow and building, or is it starting with a big event and then providing regular information?

Is the organization working to persuade potential supporters, or focusing only on those who are already committed?

10. Plan events and tactics to fit the organization's strategy. Events and tactics can be diverse. The goal is to garner support, capture the imagination of potential supporters, and demonstrate to public officials that the group's recommendations should be taken seriously. These tactics can include telephone, e-mail, fax and letter-writing campaigns; boycotts and rallies; and even civil disobedience. Other tactics include litigation, legal briefs and workshops.

Status of women reports are critical tools for mobilizing advocacy. Reports provide objective, credible and verifiable information that is relevant to policy and can lend support to policy recommendations. No matter what type of government or political system, all political leaders should seek to base policy on good information and evidence. This is especially true of legislative bodies, since elected officials should typically be sensitive to the concerns of their constituents. Women's advocates will benefit from valid, objective data that can be used to engage policymakers in support of their policy goals.

### **Advocacy is Part of a Comprehensive Communication Campaign**

One of the goals of a status of women report is to inform and influence public officials to help create policies that promote equality for women within that community and society. The research put together for this report must play an important role in the advocating strategy. The report will be a scholarly tool based in data and fact,

which makes advocacy more effective and respected.

Different types of advocacy can be pursued using a status of women report, such as helping to mobilize local support for clinics for women in response to health indicators, or fundraising, all of which can take place outside of the policy arena (Sharma 1997). All such advocacy is important and can be part of the larger long-term goal of the status of women campaign. Advocacy can be a part of a comprehensive communication campaign that includes media and community outreach strategies. What follows here concentrates on making changes in legislation within policy arena.

### **Understand the Policy Arena**

An effective advocacy strategy must take account of both formal and informal factors in the making of public policy. A status of women report is a core formal advocacy tool. Effective development and use of this tool requires an understanding of policy arenas.

The formal arena of policy includes legal institutions and their functions that work as parts of the government and legislature, such as the courts and their decisions. The informal arena is made up of private institutions and their functions, such as interest groups, which operate outside of the government and are independent but still cooperate to influence policy decisions.

Different policy arenas, such as legislatures, administrative agencies, courts, think tanks and political parties, provide very different advocacy targets. The ultimate goal of advocacy is to make sure

An example of the successful use of research as a catalyst for policy change is in the case of the Moroccan women's group, the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (known by its French-language acronym, ADFM). The ADFM, in coordination with 26 other Moroccan organizations, has published several reports in response to the government's official report for the CEDAW. Unlike public opinion campaigns run by ADFM (e.g., the media campaign to raise awareness about changes to the Moroccan family code), the CEDAW reports in Morocco targeted policymakers as the audience. The strategy allowed ADFM and its partner organizations to address omissions or inconsistencies in the official CEDAW report, and to make informed policy recommendations to CEDAW and government officials (Association Democratique des Femmes du Maroc 2008).

that women's interests are considered and reflected in each of the major policy arenas.

A comprehensive status of women report should include data, conclusions and recommendations that reveal the parameters of public policy problems for women. The next step in advocacy is to identify how these problems relate to current policies.

Choosing which policy arena to address should be done in consultation with the advisory committee (see Module I). This often requires a prioritization of needs, opportunities and risks. The decisions about what type of status of women re-

port to use are strategic ones that should reflect where the greatest policy opportunity exists. Choosing the right route for policy change requires a careful scan of the political environment and in-depth knowledge of policy opportunities.

Focusing on the passage of new laws is only one part of advocacy. Making effective arguments in favor of policy changes requires knowledge of other aspects of policy, such as budgets and government structure.

Strategic selection of a policy arena also includes a close observation of each possibility and consideration of which arena would be most open to influence by women advocates. Court decisions, for example, might offer a zero-sum result. Sometimes a court decision can spark widespread changes that can mobilize women, and be very influential. In other cases, a negative decision can sometimes create more harm than good, since critics might use the defeat to support arguments against freedoms and rights for women.

## Policy Arena

### Formal

- Laws
- Budgets
- Administrative interpretations and rulings
- Court decisions and actions

### Informal

- Think tank reports
- Party manifestos
- Interest group positions



When advocating for policy change in a legislature or other government body, it is imperative to understand the type of system being addressed. Major differences appear between different political systems, so advocates should consider who holds the power in their country and how decisions are made. For instance, in a parliamentary system, individual parliamentarians may have limited influence on legislation introduced by ministers. Therefore another good target might be to directly approach a cabinet minister. Since parliamentarians are elected, however, it is helpful to seek them out and persuade them to support and vote for the policy change the group wants. To be most effective, advocacy should target multiple levels of government.

Budgets should not be ignored since policies are intrinsic to them. Budgets are a policy mechanism in their own right, and budget priorities can affect policy in all arenas. At times, even if a law authorizing a program exists on the books, the program may be underfunded.

A gender budget analysis is a tool that helps policymakers and advocates identify gaps and priority policies that could improve women's lives. By analyzing how expenditures impact women and girls and meet their needs, gender-sensitive budgeting elucidates whether governments are meeting their gender goals and international commitments, and how to reallocate funds to further women's rights. A gender-sensitive budget does not require that more money be allocated for women, but that policies and programs that are funded adequately

meet both women's and men's needs (International Organization for Migration 2008).

## Learn How Legislators and Policymakers Think

To persuade legislators and those who are at other levels of decision making to consider new ideas for public policy, it is critical to understand how these and other policymakers think. This includes finding out who runs for political office and why, what their jobs are like, how candidates campaign for office, how they make decisions and who their appointees tend to be. This will differ by country, within a country, and even within political parties. A politician will be a product of all the forces that bring him or her to office, including political alliances. Her or his decisions will also reflect how the legislative institution is structured internally.

## Who Runs for Office

Not all office holders seek to be good public servants, but among those who do, motivations vary. Some, for example, care a lot about a specific set of public policies (perhaps related to a prior career); others care most about providing constituent services; and there are some who will care most about the potential power and prestige of the office. Knowing what individual members prioritize is critical to fashioning an appeal that will persuade them of the merits of the policies a group is advocating. If an organization seeks to find a champion for its advocacy, it will help to know a great deal about members' motivations and even details such as their family ties.



## What the Job Includes

Some political bodies consist of full-time professional positions, of which members become career legislators. Others are part-time and have other careers that they continue when the legislature or council is out of session. A professional politician will be more of an expert on public policies, while a part-time member of the elected body may be more open to a range of citizens' views. When in session, members hold very demanding schedules. Responsibilities include sponsoring regulations, ordinances or legislation; attending committee hearings; drafting policy or approving budgets in committees; making speeches; meeting constituents; and a variety of other tasks. As a result, any information that can be provided to a political representative is critical to her or his success. Reliable information from advocates can include a draft of legislative language, testimony in a committee, budget analyses for alternative regulations, research that supports a particular policy position and stories and facts that demonstrate the public policy benefits of a politician's work.

## How They Campaign For Office

A politician's behavior when campaigning for office will depend a great deal on local election laws and electoral frameworks. In some countries, political parties provide all of the necessary resources. In weak party systems, individuals have to raise funds to run for office. It is important to find out what resources are needed and how candidates obtain those critical resources. If elections focus on local issues, organizing locally will be important. Advocates can share resources and information that

could benefit a candidate in an election; this helps ensure that elected officials support advocates' preferred policies.

## How They Make Decisions

Decision making in political bodies depends both on internal rules as well as informal practices. Procedural rules matter, as does the relative power of political leaders. In some legislatures and councils, the speaker may have a great deal of power while, in others, the speaker may only act as a neutral administrator. The prime minister for a national legislature is usually extremely powerful, although sometimes this is a power shared with a president or monarch. It will be important to learn how individual legislatures introduce and sponsor legislation. Even when they may not have a great deal of power in moving bills through the legislature, members may be able to play a critical role in advocacy or policy incubation, which consists of the exploration of new policy ideas through committee hearings.

## Engagement Strategies

It is also important to consider the position of individual politicians. They may be sympathetic or supportive of the particular issue, or a known critic of advancing a women's agenda in the target country. Different engagement strategies will be needed to address the following five main actors:

1. **Champions.** Policymakers that support the cause can help engender further support by lobbying their colleagues, helping to develop a strong inside strategy and by speaking out publicly on the issue(s). Champions need correct and adequate information from advocates as well as visible support outside of the parliament, council or other political bodies.

2. **Allies.** Another group of politicians may be sympathetic to a cause but should be encouraged to be more vocal about it. For example, allies could be encouraged to make a statement on the issue or to convene a related policy discussion. These individuals need to be convinced of the urgency of the issue and provided with tools to take on the role of champions.

3. **Uncommitted legislators.** Some lawmakers will be uncommitted on the issues, potentially able to vote either way. An advocacy strategy should incorporate inside persuasion and outside pressure to influence these legislators to support a position based on the status of women report's findings.

4. **Mild critics.** Another group of politicians is very likely to vote against an issue but is not inclined to be active about it. With this group, it is important to keep them from becoming more active, by giving them just enough information and messaging to make them pause but not enough to make them hostile.

5. **Hostile critics.** Lawmakers who lead the opposition tend to speak in extremes. In this case it is most effective in the campaign to highlight the extremes of the critics' views, statements and alliances, and to give other policymakers reason

to hesitate before joining this group. You should not waste time trying to convince them to change their positions, but should be aware of their arguments and tactics in order to address them (with the goal of persuading uncommitted or mild critics to change their stance).

## Political Reform

In considering new areas of public policy, it is important not to neglect political reform. This includes laws on eligibility and requirements for public office; the structure and prerogatives of the civil service; campaign finance law; political party law; advocacy and civil society laws; freedom of the press; how electoral districts are drawn and apportioned; how frequently elections are held; how party nominations are made (e.g., conventions, primaries or caucuses); and the size of the legislature. While it may seem that a movement is a prerequisite to political reform, it is important to recognize that the rules of the political arena are as much an opportunity for public policy reform as is the formation or revision of public policy itself.

Globally, research has shown that quotas and reform of electoral frameworks increasingly provide tools of first resort for increasing the number of women leaders and elected officials. If there are numerous areas where there is little opportunity for women to influence public policy, political reform may be necessary. For example, if legislative districts are "gerrymandered" (i.e., an electoral district is created or redrawn to ensure a particular leader is elected), then a status of women report that demonstrates how current district lines are damaging to women could be helpful.

## Meeting with Legislators and Other Decision Makers

In meeting with legislators, councilors, community leaders and other decision makers for advocacy purposes, it is always critical to prepare well beforehand. NGO representatives should be respectful of the time allotted to meet with the legislator, minister, leader, or his or her staff. Organization representatives should also bring an information packet with prepared materials (e.g., the status of women report and a one-page information sheet with frequently asked questions and answers, information about their organization and the advisory committee, and press releases about the release of the report and any other activities or events).

Having two advocates at the meeting can be helpful in making sure that all important points are made and to keep track of what was said. An organization will need to provide the public policy purpose or rationale for the visit. While it will help that the recommendations or issues discussed might benefit the legislator's constituents, it is also helpful to explain why the advice provided supports good public policy in general.

It is critical to remain true to the facts of the status of women report. With strong research and ongoing communication, trust can build to the point where a policymaker will turn to the NGO for additional information and recommendations.

In any meeting with a decision maker, it is important to listen to the responses and take good notes to review later. Sometimes it is tempting to work so hard to advocate a particular view that one does not listen

to what the other person is saying. Often, by listening, an advocate can gain valuable information that can be shared with others about the prospects for adoption of the NGO's policy position. A policymaker will also be able to provide insight into what can be added to a status of women report to make it more effective.

It is also possible that the meeting will be shorter than anticipated. Start with the main point and relate it to an action item or request. What is it that the decision maker must know about the issue, and what is it that you are asking them to do? Do you want them to vote for specific draft legislation? Influence a draft amendment? Meet with a colleague to encourage their support? Make a public statement on a policy issue?

Develop a succinct summary (just a few minutes in most countries) to explain the issue, cover key data from the report to reinforce the extent of the issue and conclude with a request or action item for the decision maker. If you have additional time, expand on each point, allowing time for the individual to respond and ask questions.

Always leave written materials and continue to follow up throughout the advocacy campaign. It is important to thank the per-

### Fundamentals of a Legislative Visit

- Plan ahead of time
- Bring prepared materials
- Go in pairs
- Stress the organization's public policy purpose while meeting
- Send follow-up thank-you note

son for their time (usually with a formal letter, which also provides another opportunity to summarize the issue and the request) and to update the decision maker on any developments.

## Communicating with Group Members and Aligned Organizations

Advocacy is often most effective when large numbers of people are mobilized and advocating for policy change. A comprehensive campaign should include direct communication with legislators and decision makers, but also incorporate elements that engage the target community in advocacy initiatives. This will help to ensure that the right priorities and concerns are being communicated to decision makers through the campaign and that the voices of the community are leveraged in promoting policy change (IFES 2010). Activities may include:

## Information Packages/ Lobbying Kits

Materials can be shared with members of the public and other organizations that support the policy issue, both to generate their support and to equip them to engage directly with their elected officials. The information packets may include:

- Background information on an issue
- Summary findings from the status of women report and related policy recommendations
- Recent developments in the lobbying process at national and/or district levels
- Tactical tips for advocating for a particular issue in a particular political con-

text (a sample e-mail to send to their member of parliament, for instance)

- Press releases from the campaign

## Newsflashes and Legislative Alerts

Using newsflashes to share important updates and commentary on key issues throughout the campaign helps to build and maintain public support and involvement. Newsflashes can be over e-mail or in print, as well as through social media tools such as Facebook.

Separate legislative alerts should be used when you need to mobilize immediate support from members of your network to contact their elected officials. If you do not separate these alerts from ordinary newsflashes, they may be missed or ignored by your members at times when immediate action is very important. Depending on your organization's budget, you can also use Short Message Service (SMS) alerts.

## Conferences

Person-to-person contact and group discussions are critical to building commitment and involvement, particularly in sustaining public engagement on the issue over time. At least once a year, a coalition should convene active members of the campaign and collaborating organizations to review progress, discuss focus areas and strategize next steps.

## Coalition Building and Networking

Coalition-building and networking are important additions to any successful advocacy campaign. The goal is to win a majority

The intervention of the network *Collectif 95 Maghreb Egalité* was essential in the adoption of pro-woman reforms in 2003 to the Moroccan family code, the moudawana. The Collectif, a groundbreaking network in the Maghreb, brought together women and labor organizations from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. By pooling together the resources and expertise of numerous organizations throughout the region, the Collectif was able to produce reports and toolkits that helped pave the way for change in Morocco (Labidi 2007; Weedon 2006).

vote. Rarely will an organization be able to make an effective argument for public policy using only the resources of a single organization. To maximize the strength of a campaign, the ability to work with other groups is crucial.

To be effective, an advocacy strategy must take into account other informal and grass-roots sources of policy advocacy. Advocates should scan the environment to see what policy institutes or think tanks are recommending, what political party statements and other campaign documents are promising and what other special interest groups are promoting. It can be very useful to create partnerships with think tanks and research institutes to collaborate on research and develop policy and status reports.

NGO leaders can gain additional information that will be useful for advocacy by speaking and working with other group leaders. Even networking with those who might oppose

some of the research recommendations might help an NGO to find individuals or groups who could support them on another issue. For example, a group that opposes reproductive choice may be willing to provide support on an issue such as being allowed time and privacy for breast-feeding at places of paid employment. Politics is ultimately based on trust, and these are interpersonal relationships that are built over time. Each cooperative effort and every interaction should be treated with care.

When attempting to influence policy change, there are a number of elements to keep in mind. It is essential for an NGO or working group to consider a variety of options, including who the audience is, how to present an argument to them and which route is most appropriate to achieve the ultimate policy goal and evaluate the success of its research and influence.

Women's organizations led a remarkable community development effort in São João D'Alanca, located in the central plateau region of Brazil. The municipality, with a population of 6,700, draws its revenue mainly from agriculture, but does not have a sewage collection or treatment system. This has created many environmental concerns. In response to farmers' worries about the deterioration of water in the area, the local Union of Rural Workers collaborated with the University of Brasilia in 2000 to devise a water project with the community. This project was a women-led initiative, called the "Water Women." Activities included raising awareness, education and training on the environment and gender mainstreaming and involvement of the entire community (Gender and Water Alliance 2006).

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# STATUS OF WOMEN

in the Middle East and North Africa

## Supporting Women in Leadership

### *Module IV*

*from the*

*Using Research on the Status of Women to  
Improve Public Policies in the Middle East and North Africa  
Capacity-Building Toolkit*



Canadian International  
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Global Expertise. Local Solutions.  
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# MODULE IV: SUPPORTING WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

## **In this Module, Learn About:**

- Research to support women's leadership
- Mentoring
- Training and supporting women in leadership positions
- Leadership resources

## **Introduction**

By extending the status of women report to trainings and support for women's leadership, NGOs can work to include women's viewpoints in the government. All effective movements for change start both at the grassroots and leadership levels. Throughout history, individual women have always demonstrated leadership skills, and yet women are only marginally represented in the ranks of high-level leadership in both public and private sectors in many nations. Anne Marie Goetz (2006), an expert on women's empowerment, notes the biggest obstacle for increasing the number of women in leadership roles is accountability. This includes four topics that should be addressed in a status of women report and in efforts surrounding its release:

1. Substance. This includes women's rights and the neglect of their needs.
2. Seekers. Women's leaders, women's groups and women as a political constituency must work to develop political leverage to demand answers from power-holders.
3. Targets. Women's organizations must decide who is responsible for meeting women's needs and how public policy can address these problems.
4. Methods. Women must gain the rights to demand that institutions are accountable to them, which includes standing in court as well as the election of women to public office who can articulate and speak for women.

## **Research to Support Women's Leadership**

Supporting women in leadership through a status of women report is one way to provide women with the resources to share their perspectives in all aspects of society. In addition to considering recommendations for political and governmental reform, the research helps raise awareness among women of the status of other women in their countries, regions and communities. A status of women report can help identify important public policy issues; demystify the often invisible and informal process by which much leadership is developed and exercised; and serve as a training tool for potential and current women leaders.



## How Research Supports Women in Leadership Positions

Research can be seen as a building block for action. Effective, factual based research and data analysis not only provide information on what has happened in the past, but give insight into what will happen in the future. Valuable research, when distributed to women in leadership positions, can show the pace of development and highlight deficiencies and problems in different policies or programs. Statistics and other research data add components of accountability and transparency, allowing critics and supporters alike to see the factual basis of arguments, statements and proposals.

A status of women report that includes extensive data and statistical analysis on women throughout a nation can help women in multiple types of leadership positions – from CEOs to politicians — address and advance policy. Careful research can inform women on important issues and enlighten them to the changes that need to be made. By highlighting the topics, a status of women report can help bring change on women's issues to the forefront of policy and speed up implementation of alternatives.

At the very least, the dissemination of a significant and effective status of women report would bring insight and awareness to the issues of women in the researched nation and inform women in leadership positions who have the ability to enact change. This research, when distributed efficiently and effectively, will help leaders become aware of the issues, set objectives and plan for the future.

## How Research can be Used as a Political Tool

Research provides credible, qualitative and statistical analysis to policymakers, advocates, community leaders and the media so they can present fact-based arguments, highlight misleading information and correct it with grounded sustainable research. In the case of a status of women report, research and information on women's conditions in developing nations is sparse compared to the availability of information on women in more prosperous nations. A status of women report can correct misconceptions on women's issues and emphasize the public policy needs of women in that region. A report of this kind, based on the analysis of statistics and other reliable information, establishes legitimacy for movements to adjust public policy.

“The structure of political parties and the tribal system are still interconnected and influence each other. Yemeni elections have reflected this contradiction and hesitation to let go of a traditional past and tribal attitudes against women. Hence, independent women candidates who are not supported by political parties have been unable to get either the support of businessmen and economic institutions or the support of the traditional social structure, which is based on the discriminating tribal system.”

- Alsharki Hassan, *Breaking the Stereotype: Yemeni Female Candidates in Elections* (2008)

“Good statistics provide a basis for good decision making, help governments to identify the best courses of action in addressing complex problems, are essential to manage the effective delivery of basic services, and are an indispensable core requirement for accountability and transparency. Good statistics are a core component of good governance. They also provide a sound basis for the design, management and for monitoring progress toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Good statistics, therefore, are part of the enabling environment for development; they measure inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact, providing reliable assessments of key economic and social indicators, covering all aspects of development from measures of economic output and price inflation, to the well-being of individuals.”

- Aziz Othman, *The Role of Statistics in Factual-Based Policy Making* (2005)

It is important to circulate findings through effective media outreach (fSee Module II) in order to make people aware of the research that is being done. It is necessary to disseminate the research to the appropriate people and channels for the report to effectively aid leaders in decisionmaking. The report should also be given directly to women in leadership positions so they and their staff can more closely understand and utilize the research.

The importance of effective research distribution is not always processed by every organization, leaving important and useful research relatively unknown. In addition to conducting new research, compiling existing statistics and facts can be extremely useful to women in powerful positions. Much of the information that can support women in leadership positions merely needs to be compiled and presented in an accessible manner. This is one significant way that a research organization or NGO can assist women in political and leadership positions.

## Capacity-Building for Organizations and Supporting Actors

Capacity-building is “efforts aimed to develop human skills or societal infrastructures within a community or organization” (United Nations 2004). Capacity-building and improving the abilities and knowledge of leaders and women aspiring to participate in leadership positions is essential to developing sound and strong women leaders. Capacity-building should focus on the following three areas:

1. Developing participant understanding of the skills needed in leadership positions and informing women on the structures, methods and procedures that are associated with leadership in their field.
2. Acquainting women with research and information; a status of women report will allow them to make informed decisions on women’s policy issues they will face once in a position of leadership and power.

3. Informing women of past precedents and developments in those regions, and how development both institutionally and legally will improve one's ability to lead and effectively enact change.

Capacity-building can be in the form of workshops and discussions, or through a more direct process of mentoring. However, in any form of capacity-building, it is necessary to back up recommendations for development and change with strong, fact-based research. A status of women report that makes recommendations for women's policy and highlights where women are lacking in leadership and within society is helpful to plan for change and guide development to increase efficiency.

## Mentoring

Mentoring is a powerful tool to increase the numbers of women in office. Both Susan Bulkeley Butler and Bob Keefe (2010) argue that "women need to have mentors and strong advocates who will push them to excel."

IWPR has conducted research on how women become politically active through their report *I Knew I Could Do This Work* (2007). Mentoring was found to help women realize their own skills and abilities:

"I had a couple of wonderful mentors. I think as folks have for them before, what they did for me was to draw out those qualities or those traits that I have, emphasize or help me emphasize my principles, help me work towards actively living my principles" (Caiazza 2007).

In addition, mentoring was the critical difference in how women took the extra step to become leaders.

The traditional, long-term, individual model for mentoring aims to build a relationship that develops learning over time. In this relationship, the mentor and the protégée have an ongoing, personal relationship where the more-experienced person advises the less-experienced person.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) has been conducting regular focus group surveys in Sudan since 2004 to help policymakers, civil society groups and the international community better understand citizens' views and perspectives during the country's dynamic transitional period and to highlight citizens' needs and expectations for the interim period following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The focus groups have measured the attitudes of selected participants to share ideas and participate in the political process through NDI's research. The findings of this research have informed a number of program areas, including the *Let's Talk* radio program, which provides a weekly sketch that addresses democracy issues. By demonstrating where deficiencies in citizens' knowledge about democracy and good governance exist, the focus group research has been used to identify the topics to include on the weekly radio program. One of the programs also included the role of women in the recent elections to address sentiments reflected in the focus groups about women's role in politics (National Democratic Institute 2011).

Short-term mentoring also exists. Today, mentoring can involve e-mail and phone as well as interpersonal contact. In practice, someone might need many mentors, whether concurrently or sequentially.

Mentoring consists of three fundamental elements: coaching, counseling and sponsorship.

1. Coaching helps to build skills by acting as a role model and a teacher. For example, understanding how to respond to individuals with dissenting viewpoints is a political skill that most leaders need to learn.

2. Counseling provides emotional support while a protégée is making a transition from a private citizen to a leader, since leadership is lonely and involves learning how to make hard decisions that have consequences on people's lives. A good mentor will provide inspiration during tough times and guidance about how to make decisions and respond to criticism.

3. Sponsoring is important because mentors can also promote their protégées by recommending them for awards or for opportunities to serve on a commission or in a ministry.

Developing a mentoring program can provide a critical edge. Coaching, counseling and sponsoring all work to ensure women have the confidence to try new ways to lead other women. As IWPR research has demonstrated, a personal relationship with a mentor who is already doing similar work can provide this critical push.

She was an organizer here. She was awesome. She would say, "Now you have to go and say this." "I don't think I can do

that." "Yes, you can. I know you can. You just do this and do that, and I know you." [She encouraged me to talk to a powerful person at my employer], and I was so scared, my knees were trembling. I could feel my knees going ta-ta-ta-ta. But she said, "I'll sit right by you, and you tell them what we need here." And I did it. I don't know how I did it, but I did it (Caiazza 2007).

Formal mentoring programs developed around the release of a status of women report can help ensure women are provided the kind of coaching, counseling and sponsorship critical to empowering participation at all levels. Conversations about the obstacles and opportunities facing women can help them develop strategies for dealing with (and making the most of) both. They can also provide emotional support and empowerment in the realization that women's problems are not just their own.

The creation of parliamentary or legislative staff fellowships for women can have several benefits. A fellowship program that pays the salary of a staff person for a year can allow individuals to gain critical skills and access to connections. When a program like this is combined with training and regular mentoring meetings, fellows

## Mentoring Types

- Long-term
- Individual or one-on-one relationships
- Formal fellowship programs
- Group mentoring
- Short-term
- Conference or leadership retreat
- Special interest mentoring
- Peer mentoring

"I knew I could do the work. But then when you have somebody that's doing the work, and they are telling you they know you can do it, that just gives you that little 'Come on, I know you can do it,' I probably would have done minimal. I probably wouldn't be where I am now."

- Amy Caiazza, *I Knew I Could Do This Work* (2007)

will benefit from peer mentoring and gain confidence.

When there are few women in high-level positions, it can be beneficial to teach women how to ask leaders, including those who are men, to mentor them. When asked appropriately, especially around a shared interest, even very busy individuals can find mentoring quite rewarding. It is especially powerful when women leaders act as mentors to younger women, as IWPR research has shown.

Women leaders who have had relatively powerful mentors might not recognize the difficulties sometimes experienced by women who either have not had mentors, or whose mentors are relatively less able to obtain opportunities or lend support. This means that part of the work to capacitate women to become leaders can involve supporting women who already have leadership roles to increase their levels of influence and expand their networks so they can help others.

Regardless of whether women leaders have been supportive of the status of women report as one would wish, they should receive full consideration as a potential ally and mentor for future women leaders. In addition, the advisory group, as a set of men and women leaders already known to be committed to fostering research and advocacy toward policy change that helps women, should be encouraged

to extend the reach of the status of women report and the capacity-building of the NGO by developing mentoring programs and combining mentoring with training.

## Training and Supporting Women in Leadership Positions

Running for political office is daunting. To encourage more women to run for office, a training program for leadership is essential (Baer 2006). Leadership training provides more formal and systematic information at one time than do mentoring programs. A training and support program for current and aspiring women leaders should be an adjunct to the development and release of a status of women report.

### There are Four Target Audiences for Leadership Training:

1. Younger women interested in learning about routes to becoming a leader
2. Women interested in learning how to prepare to run for office in a few years
3. Women considering the decision to run for office
4. Current women candidates

There are many types of leadership training that can be useful, depending on the age of those being trained, the level of office and the stage of leadership.

The Nobel Women's Initiative (NWI), created in August 2006, was a response to a suggestion by Iranian laureate Shirin Ebadi that women recipients of the Peace Prize should collectively endeavor to use the power and influence concomitant with being Nobel laureates to advance the cause of women internationally, by bringing their voices and experiences to the direct attention of the international community and media sources (Barlow 2008).

NWI's first international conference was held in Galway, Ireland, in May 2007. What was notable about the gathering was the presence of over 80 of the world's leading activists and scholars on women's empowerment and gender equality. It provided women from more than 40 countries an opportunity to share their experiences of discrimination and oppression; exchange strategies that have improved women's conditions; and discuss how best to work together to demand a central place for women at the negotiating table of the peace process and political liberalization (Barlow 2008).

## Leadership Training Basics for Women

Fundamental leadership training is important for teaching women how to develop and work with their own leadership style. Gaining practice in public speaking is a critical first step. Women should be encouraged to take every opportunity to gain speaking experience. Women can also discuss how to stay informed about a range of political issues, how to develop political networks and how to think strategically about elective or appointive office.

## Status of Women Report Training

Concurrent with the release of a status of women report, training events can provide in-depth discussions of the issues as well as an opportunity to train local women on how to develop their own status of women report and to use social indicators to examine the status and role of women.

## Developing a Leadership Portfolio Training

Learning how to develop a leadership portfolio is important for women who aspire to high-level leadership. Becoming involved in volunteer public leadership, for example, can be a stepping stone for women who might wish to run for office at a later point.

## Deciding to Run Training

Campaign training introduces the elements of a successful campaign to women ready to run for office. Candidates should not be their own campaign managers, but they do need to understand the elements of a successful election campaign. How can candidates be taken seriously while navigating gender norms? How do candidates make the announcement and hire a campaign staff? What role does polling play in developing a message?



An example from Qatar illustrates why developing a women's movement is an important precursor to expanding the number of women elected officials. March 1999 marked the first time that women participated in electoral politics in Qatar, after the Arab Emirate's ruler gave women the right to vote and run for public office (BBC News 2005). Despite the emir's support for women's political participation and the presence of women candidates on the ballot, no female candidates were elected to public office. One Middle East scholar attributed women candidates' poor showing at the polls to the lack of a network of women organizations that could train women leaders and mobilize likeminded voters (Hatem 2005).

## The Elements of Successful Campaign Training

This training can be targeted toward both the candidate who must lead a campaign that she can be proud of, and the campaign managers for women's campaigns. While this should be tailored to the level of office and the local context, professionalized campaign skills are helpful in any election. As new candidates, women need to campaign in ways that address gender as well as the other issues voters care about. Even when a campaign is lost, it can still be a victory for women. Studies demonstrate that if the race is done well, a loss can significantly change voter attitudes, increase the chances a woman might win the next time and educate voters about issues such as those found in a status of women report.

## Starting a Training Program

A variety of international development organizations offer training for women candidates. One example is Vital Voices, whose international staff and team "have trained and mentored more than 8,000 emerging women leaders from over 127 countries ... since 1997" (Vital Voices 2010). It is also beneficial to develop locally-based training programs. In part, organizing a leadership

and campaign training program is in itself capacity-building. NGOs can take steps such as talking about their status of women report, bringing in people who know the community and those who are already elected officials and reaching out to others with knowledge of the party system, media and government. In addition, producing a local training program provides potential candidates with an opportunity to meet people who are influential in the local area and community.

## Topics to Include in Training Programs

NGOs can include a discussion of the status of women in any leadership training. They can also hand out status of women reports and be certain to let women know that the organization and the advisory committee will be there to support them at any point in their campaigns and afterwards, while in office, if they have questions (Bryan and Varat 2008).

A lack of resources usually poses problems for women seeking leadership positions. Women in many countries are far less likely than men to own property and assets; gain economic security; and earn higher incomes. The costs of a campaign do not only include the costs of running

for office (e.g., having a campaign office, hiring a campaign manager, printing campaign materials); they also include the cost of covering a woman's absence in the domestic sphere while she campaigns. Volunteers can help to support women and any training can also help by creating lasting connections among women who attend events. Organizations should create an alumni program and consider the women they train are new leaders whether or not they ever run for office.

Government campaign funding is another issue to discuss in training. This is a public policy issue often discussed as an antidote to corruption, paternalism and cronyism of the traditional, all-male network. However, government funding, even when available, is usually not the only answer for women candidates. First, government funding will not cover the full cost of a political campaign and current leaders will always have greater access to funding. Government funding formulas tend to reward existing political parties and power bases (e.g., by funding based on previous votes). Additionally, in many countries, government funding only covers the public media; many political parties now own their own television stations or newspapers, so biased private media can still remain unchecked.

Persuading voters is usually done best person-to-person, so relying on public funding of media commercials will not be the most effective way to manage a non-incumbent's campaign. In light of this constraint, women can work to build volunteer-support networks that compensate with support.

In addition, women can work to help elected women officials. Once in office, the visibility of a woman leader can lend itself to criticism. This criticism can undermine the elected official who lacks a support network. Women leaders should create their own networks and work to bring other women along with them. When former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright served as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, she created a network of other women ambassadors. U.S. Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) is known for her work to support other women senators and as the dean of women senators. First elected over a quarter of a century ago, she organized weekly dinners where women senators could speak privately across political party lines on women's issues and developed trainings on how to organize an office and learn to gain influence within the U.S. Senate. Networking activities help women individually and raise the profile of women's issues.

La Mujer Obrera (LMO) is the creation of working-class Mexican and Mexican-American women's leaders. Leaders of LMO said that "the personal attention they received when they first came to the organization was crucial in helping them to develop both their confidence and their skills." LMO has evolved from its labor union roots into a community-based organization focused on defending the human and civil rights of immigrants, women and workers, as well as improving their lives and working conditions. LMO operates a community center that houses the organization's headquarters, a food cooperative, a newspaper and cultural activities (Gittell et al.1999).



Afghanistan's quota system led to the election of 68 women to the National Assembly in 2005. A group of these newly-elected parliamentarians created the Parliamentary Women's Network to help women gain the basic resources, skills and experience to become effective political advocates and leaders. The network, a multi-party women's caucus that includes representatives from civil society and government, is dedicated to shaping legislation on issues of importance to women. With NDI support, the network's project includes work on a draft law to eliminate violence against women and advocacy efforts to allow women to participate in all aspects of Afghanistan's political, social, economic and cultural life (National Democratic Institute 2011).

## Leadership Resources

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is a global policymaking body of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It is the principal global policymaking body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and advancement of women. Representatives of member states and civil society counterparts gather annually at the UN headquarters to evaluate progress on gender equality, identify challenges, set global standards and formulate concrete policies to promote gender equality and advancement of women worldwide. More information is available at: [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw).

The Council of Women World Leaders is a network of current and former women prime ministers and presidents. It was established in 1996 by Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, president of Iceland (1980-1996) and first woman in the world to be a democratically-elected president, and Laura Liswood, U.S. secretary general. The council's mission is to mobilize the highest-level women leaders globally for collective action on issues of critical importance to women. Through its networks, summits and partnerships, the council promotes good governance and gender equality and enhances the experience of democracy

globally by increasing the number, effectiveness and visibility of women who lead their countries. Tarja Halonen, president of Finland (2000-present), serves as chair of the council. The council is a policy program of the Aspen Institute in the United States. More information is available at [www.cwwl.org](http://www.cwwl.org).

The Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership is a website developed by a Danish journalist Martin K.I. Christensen. The website provides comprehensive, historical listing of women in leadership position by country and within countries. More information is available at [www.guide2womenleaders.com/index.html](http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/index.html).

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