

Working with Men and Boys:

A Strategic Choice in the MENA Region to End Gender-Based Violence

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Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is defined as violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender or sex (UNFPA). It includes acts that inflict physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and deprivation of liberty. While women, men, boys, and girls can be victims/survivors of gender-based violence, women and girls are the main victims/survivors.

In its physical, psychological, and emotional forms, GBV is exercised in the household, community, and public institutions. GBV stands as an obstacle in the way towards the realization of a wide range of development goals, from the elimination of poverty to the fulfillment of human rights. Globally, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action have provided the appropriate frameworks that women's organizations and activists can use to fight for the promotion of gender equality and remove all forms of discrimination against women.

For decades the UN agencies have doubled efforts and secured resources to promote women's rights, working with governments and civil society organizations. Structures have evolved to include a UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women (VAW) among others. Special funds have been pledged to help combat VAW such as the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women.

In the MENA region, women's organizations have been taking the lead in addressing violence against women. Women's issues and gender equality are handled by women themselves, where they see change happening only through their continuous

demand and pressure on governments to respect and achieve gender equality. In fact, women's issues are addressed by women and for women, with limited exposure to men in women's institutions.

Women's organizations in the region carry out multiple interventions such as counseling victims of violence, raising public awareness on the effects of GBV, educating women about their legal rights, sheltering victims, providing legal services and advice, and lobbying for bills that criminalize violence against women.

Some of the national organizations in the region that are working on these issues include: Kafa (Enough) Violence & Exploitation, Young Women Christian Association, Rassemblement Democratique des Femmes Libanaises (RDFL), the Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Women (LECORVAW), and the Ministry of Social Affairs in Lebanon; Mizan Association, the National Women's Committee, and the Jordanian Women's Union in Jordan; and CEWLA, Al Nadim Center, and the Women's Forum in Egypt. The Yemeni Women's Union and the National Women Committee are both working on Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW), and have conducted campaigns against early age marriage in Yemen. At a regional level, several networks such as ANGAD, AISHA, SALMA and KARAMA coordinate work around EVAW.

Despite the fact that some organizations carry out activities and initiatives that bring men on board in the fight to end violence against women, these initiatives are still very weak. Moreover, they are far from being an integral part of a strategic program that aims at addressing this issue through adopting this new approach of engaging men in ending violence against women. The rationale for including

men is that men are part of the problem and should also be part of the solution.

Oxfam GB is a rights-based organization. It is committed to ending violence against women by exploring various strategies and approaches and learning from best practices to help national and regional organizations to address the issue. Promoting working with men and boys in order to end violence against women is a thematic focus at Oxfam GB.

This paper attempts to shed light on the experience of Oxfam and the lessons learned through Oxfam's intervention and action in the MENA region to promote working with men and boys among women's organizations and to address GBV. It also provides an overview of violence against women in the region as well as a review and analysis of the process established by Oxfam GB to promote working with men and boys to end violence against women.

Combating Violence Against Women in the Middle East North African Region: An Overview

Despite its reputation for wealth from oil revenues, the Middle East region is generally described as deeply divided by politics and torn by conflict. Among other issues, the geographic inequality in the distribution of natural resources has led to poverty, inequality, and political violence (Palestine/Israel conflict, Iraq conflict, and Israel/Lebanon conflict in 2006) in many parts of the region. These conflicts continuously compromise the rights of women and expose their vulnerabilities. In the male dominant societies of the region, traditions and culture justify the continuous gender inequality that denies women their rights in the private and public spheres. Arab states and societies have failed to fulfill their commitment to reduce gender inequality, as stipulated in CEDAW and the Beijing Platform of Action.

The 2005 Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) identified gender inequality as one of the most significant obstacles to human development in the Arab region. Despite the legal guarantees for women's right with respect to political and economic participation, stereotypical gender roles are deeply entrenched and limit women's employment and

decision-making opportunities which are still the lowest in the world. Despite substantial efforts by civil society organizations advocating for women's political rights, women still lag behind men in terms of political representation.

Domestic violence is the most common type of violence in the Arab region, similar to other parts of the world. The wide range of physical and psychological consequences of domestic violence has been well documented in many areas of the world. Furthermore, some countries have done an adequate job when estimating rates of domestic violence within their population, despite the fact that domestic violence, as a social phenomenon, is difficult to study. It is believed that actual domestic violence rates in the Middle East are higher than those currently known due to the shame, guilt, and fear that many victims experience when reporting domestic violence (Usta, 2002).

The obstacles in researching domestic violence are even greater in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The male dominated, patriarchal nature of this region is evident in the social, political, and legal policies that are prevalent in the region. In Syria, in 56 percent of the domestic violence cases recorded, women were mistreated and cursed by the male head of the household for "mistakes" they had committed according to a UNIFEM study on Violence Against Women (2005). In Lebanon, there is no law that specifically prohibits domestic violence. There is only one article in the penal code that prohibits violence.

Although domestic violence and women's issues in general are given little attention in these societies, some research on domestic violence rates does exist. As reported by the Ministry of Interior in Yemen in 2007, as many as 130 Yemeni women were killed in 2,694 incidences of violence and sexual assaults. In Lebanon, of the sample studied in 2000, it is estimated that 35 percent of women admitted to four different primary care centers had a history of exposure to several types of domestic violence. In a study investigating domestic violence during pregnancy in a refugee camp in Sidon, Lebanon, 207 of the 349 women interviewed had experienced some form of

domestic violence during their lifetime. Forty women of the 207 reported experiencing at least one incident of domestic violence while they were pregnant and 31 of those incidents occurred within the year.

Exploring Approaches to Engaging Men in Ending Violence Against Women: Regional Exploratory Case Studies

Yemen is one of the least developed countries in the region where the conservative culture and traditions limit women's access to public life. Yemeni society is a segregated society. Socially, women interact only with other women and they have their own space in social gatherings. Only working women can interact with men in the workplace. The struggle of women's organizations is tremendous given that they strive to bring about gender equality in a country consisting of an exclusively male dominated society. While Yemen is a signatory to CEDAW since 1984 and has expressed its commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action, the implementation, as is the case in other countries, is lagging behind. Domestic violence is a main concern of the United Nations and can be evidenced by the section discussed in the UN Committee Against Torture forty third session.

In 2000, Oxfam GB supported a program for "Ending Violence Against Women" in Yemen in partnership with 13 civil society organizations and the Women National Committee, which is a governmental body mandated to promote women's rights. Understanding that ending violence against women can be only attained when men and boys are also targeted as part of the program, Oxfam GB invited a number of women's organizations to articulate the root causes of violence against women. The framework that the partners adopted focused on the socialization process of women and men in a conservative society. The women's group discussed common social constructions that exacerbate gender inequalities and agreed that boys and girls are socialized differently within the family and are raised according to expected gender roles. Males are socialized within a restricted "masculinity" framework that requires them to be strong, dominating, and breadwinners. Boys are treated as superior to girls. Boys' education is given preference over girls' education. Moreover, men are not allowed to perform domestic work

(cooking, cleaning, etc). Men and boys have full freedom of movement in public life (boys come home late without being questioned). Men are socialized into being decision makers and controlling women. By contrast, girls are socialized into being inferior, obedient, and "honorable" in their behavior in order not to bring shame to the family. They have to be good future mothers and wives, and avoid taking part in public life. Men are the guardians of their female counterparts (mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, and female relatives). Unequal power relations characterize the community at large and the government institutions, as reflected in existing policies and practices.

The novel approach adopted by Oxfam GB was to engage women by asking them to outline or identify "what is good about men". Oxfam's approach in this context created a tense atmosphere as women had never been challenged in this way. However, after the initial reaction the reflection produced positive male images where women started highlighting the merits of men. Answers included: men have strong fatherhood feelings towards their daughters; men protect the women in the families; fathers and brothers protect their daughters and sisters when treated badly by their husbands; some men support girls' education and women's employment; good male role models are found in society; marital violence is often resolved and addressed within the families where male relatives play a main role in putting an end to it; and some tribal and religious leaders don't accept wife battering and often threaten the husbands who abuse their wives.

As a result of the new perception developed towards men by women's organizations, initiatives of engaging with men in the program to end violence against women were accepted by women's organizations, as illustrated below.

The Yemeni Women Union, an exclusively women-managed organization with membership open only to women and programs directed only at women, took part in experimenting with engaging men in their program on ending violence against women. One of the main components of the program was to provide free legal services for women in prison or women

seeking divorce and requesting alimony, among other services. Since there are few female lawyers in Yemen, the Union started recruiting young male lawyers as volunteers to provide free legal services for women. This was a structural shift for an organization that, since its establishment in 1960, had no male members. Considering the fact that the young male lawyers are part of the Yemeni society, the Union invested time in positively changing their attitudes regarding women's issues. These male lawyers were trained on issues related to human rights, women's rights, CEDAW, etc. To date there are 23 male lawyers fully dedicated to the Union and to women seeking legal assistance. With the support of Oxfam GB, the Union also took a proactive step by establishing advocacy groups that recruited influential male decision makers who could strategically challenge violence against women. Accepting that good men who believe in supporting women do exist, the Union's leadership identified, based on their personal experiences, men whom they believed had the respect of their society and were willing to support ending violence against women. The male partners in the advocacy group were composed of lawyers, judges, policemen, prison officers, and academics. The change in the Union's position is illustrated in the below quotation:

We cannot work on ending violence against women by focusing only on women without relating to men. Men in the Advocacy Group have been of great help in raising the awareness of men, in particular police officers. Key men in society who joined us have helped in increasing the role of both women and men in combating violence. Men know by now the types of violence that women experience, which helps society acknowledge that violence against women exists. (Interview with Soad and Ishraq, Yemeni Women Union, Taiz, September 2003)

Another aspect of success with engaging men in the Yemeni Women's Union (YWU) is their work with women in prisons, courts, and police stations where the Union provided legal services and advocacy to women who had been apprehended or incarcerated. In Aden, South Yemen, women who are taken to police stations are sometimes exposed to harassment

by policemen. The Union decided not to work on awareness raising among policemen, since changing the attitudes of male police officers requires more institutional changes, long term interventions, and resources to raise awareness and monitor impact. Instead, due to the immediate need to protect women in detention, the Union successfully invested its efforts in lobbying the Ministry of Interior to allocate one police station for women. The police station would be run by women and managed by female police officers. The first women - staffed detention facility was opened following an agreement with Aden's Security Director in 2005.

While the Union's work with young male lawyers in combating violence against women can be seen as a productive approach to engaging men, the Union could not go beyond the traditional gendered boundaries and open up its membership to male lawyers, feeling that this would affect the organization's identity as a women's organization. Based on the experience of Yemen, and given the similar context of the region, Oxfam GB decided to move the strategy of working with men and boys to end violence against women to a regional level. Twenty-three organizations were identified and invited to a workshop held in Cairo in 2008. The workshop stimulated discussions by asking the participants whether they have ever worked with men to end violence against women. The initial reaction of the workshop participants was that they had never been asked this question before, but they were willing to answer it based on their practical experiences. Learning through case studies shed light on the ways women's organizations engaged with men in their attempt to end GBV. Mizan, a well established Jordanian NGO specialized in ending GBV informed us that it engages widely with men by framing its work on ending GBV within a human rights context that it finds to be more appealing and inclusive than other approaches. Mizan believes male human rights activists are the best to collaborate with for ending GBV. Another strategy that Mizan used to combat GBV was to link up with the government officials since the government established a Unit for Family Protection. They worked with the Ministry of Social Affairs and male activists to prepare a draft law which was submitted to the King of Jordan

for approval. As a result, collaborative efforts were established between Mizan and male government administrators.

While Mizan had no clear and developed strategy for working with men at different levels, they slowly developed ways for working with men and have identified potential alliances with some of them. For instance, many workshops were organized during which many participants argued for the importance of working with religious leaders and government officials as a key strategy for change.

Another issue which became evident during the workshop is that women do engage with men at different levels, since men hold power in society. Most of the women's organizations engage with policy makers to influence them on issues related to gender equality and violence against women. In the last decade, women's organizations have also started engaging with religious leaders due to the spread of radical religious discourses. One statement by a religious leader could change public opinion regarding women. In Yemen, the Women's National Committee developed a manual on religious codes that challenges radical interpretations of Islam. Future efforts to engage religious leaders in combating violence against women remain crucial to work on ending VAW in the region.

During the discussion amongst the workshop participants on their experience with government actors there were three main challenges highlighted and discussed. First, they deplored the absence of gender equality in the institutional structures which makes women's organizations unable to identify potential male collaborators or allies who are in decision making positions. Second, the lengthy process of lobbying for effective change was coupled with the turnover of potential allies at the state level. For example by the time activists finally succeed in engaging with some enlightened decision makers, the latter are replaced or finish their term. Women's organizations then have to re-start the process of advocating and influencing the new decision makers. Finally, violence perpetrated by state institutions remains an impediment to effective collaboration with government actors in some countries. For

example, where some institutions are characterized by violence, such as in Egypt, female field workers completely avoid engaging with police officers for fear of harassment and abuse. Therefore, any framework established to combat violence against women in collaboration with the state and engaging men needs to take the above mentioned challenges into consideration.

Despite the challenges associated with working with men, women acknowledged that they engage with men, driven mostly by the need to affect policy change. However, this was done on an ad hoc basis and not as a strategic part of their agenda. Most of the women's organizations who target men in their programs as beneficiaries for change do not do it in a systematic way that allows the monitoring of the impact of interventions and changes in the attitudes and practices of men.

However, the future vision of women's organizations working on ending violence against women emphasizes the need to learn more and to work strategically with different groups of men; to invest in youth through awareness raising and campaigns; and to build alliances with enlightened men from the different sectors of society (e.g. politicians, celebrities, and religious leaders) who can stand up and fight to end violence against women.

Why do men behave the way they do? The Role of Men in Ending GBV

For most women's organizations working on ending GBV, there have been limited efforts to understand the social perceptions and expectations of men. Most of the women's organizations interventions and programs focused on providing services to women survivors of violence, raising awareness among women about reporting violence, and empowering them with knowledge of their legal rights. Awareness raising in some cases has been carried out in relevant state institutions by interacting with policemen, judges, lawyers, etc. with the aim of achieving better protection for women.

In terms of services, some good practices have been identified, such as the experience of the Yemeni Women's Union, where the Union talks to perpetrators

when the wives reach out to them for counseling. However, the practice is limited as they don't provide counseling for men.

In the previous sections, the paper reflected on how to use the socialization process and men's role in shifting the thinking of women's organizations to start looking positively towards engaging and working with men in order to induce positive change in ending violence against women. As a result of the fruitfulness of that activity another workshop was held in Beirut in 2009 with 13 women's organizations, in which we elaborated on the gender roles of men and the social expectations in order for men to be accepted as "good men". The participants agreed on the following: men are socialized to control their emotions and not to cry; they will be ashamed if they don't find a job to feed the family; they are often dragged into wars and become emotionally and physically affected without receiving the proper care needed; young men are the target of drug dealers; if young men don't act aggressively they will be mocked by their peers; poverty and unemployment expose them to criminal acts; society requires them to protect the honor of the family so they are forced to be violent against their wish etc. This information can help Lebanon and other countries begin to strategize about how to incorporate men into their struggle to end GBV.

The discussions around the socialization of men and their gendered roles created new ways of looking at men as elaborated in the below quotations from the participants in the workshop:

Men are indirect victims of violence and discrimination against women.

We need to look at the needs of both men and women and find common ground on which to focus so that we can present our work as being part of working on human rights issues rather than solely on women's issues.

We need to talk about women's rights as being gains for men.

We need to be clear that inequality is not the problem of women but of society.
We need to speak to society not to women only.

We want to establish an association to protect men's rights because we do not specify the rights of men.

Men commit suicide because they cannot find jobs, and they are supposed to be the head of the family. They are our brothers, fathers, and husbands.

There are two worlds, the man's and the woman's. Women talk about the men's world and men talk about the women's world. Till today we do not know about the needs of men.

We need to look at where men and women's worlds meet and where they do not meet. We need to complement each other.

Shifting the thinking of women's organizations towards the role that men can play in combating violence against women was an entry point that allowed the participants to think about new possible mechanisms to incorporate men in their programs. The need to understand men from a gendered perspective was deemed to be necessary for most of the participants to better target men in their interventions. The need to see how men and women can complement each other was an awakening that the time has come for changing women's organizations approaches by shifting from exclusively women focused activities - to women and men - focused activities.

Based on the accumulated experience of Oxfam GB around getting women's organizations to work with men and boys, Oxfam GB submitted a proposal to the UN Trust Fund to design a module through which women's organizations can integrate working with men and boys in their programs which are aimed at ending violence against women. There was a need at the time to identify a potential partner working exclusively on ending violence against women who was also willing to integrate men into its program agenda.

The organization selected as partner was KAFA (Enough) Violence and Exploitation. The organization was established on March 8, 2005 by a

group of activists and professional women who have many years of experience working on women issues, specifically on gender-based violence. KAFA is a Lebanese non-profit, non-political, non-confessional civil society organization that seeks to mitigate the causes and results of violence and exploitation of women and children through advocacy and lobbying, raising awareness, and offering social and legal services to battered women. KAFA's overall strategic goal is to contribute to the eradication of all sorts of domestic violence and exploitation of women and children. It focuses its strategies and efforts on three major areas: gender-based violence, child sexual exploitation, and trafficking in women. KAFA uses a variety of interventions including counseling for women survivors of violence, awareness-raising sessions offered to various stakeholders from government, in addition to advocacy aimed at endorsing a law on domestic violence.

KAFA's expertise made it the perfect candidate for partnership with Oxfam GB. The organization had to design and apply the module related to working with men. KAFA's implementation of this new module could be used as a model for future programs in the region and could help train other NGOs from the region. KAFA can be a leader in engaging men and boys in ERAW for the Middle East.

The motivation behind KAFA's interest in experimenting in a project focused on working with men and boys stems from its belief that despite the huge funding allocated to combating violence against women in the region, little has been achieved to reduce the incidence of VAW in Lebanon and the Middle East. The funding has had almost no impact on amending or introducing laws that protect the rights of women. The act of engaging men and boys in ending violence against women will, according to KAFA, bring much added value to the work on women's rights in the male-dominated Middle East. For KAFA, the men were previously seen as an obstacle to ending GBV, but now they see working with men as an approach that provides new opportunities for their mission. As discovered by KAFA, since men are part of the problem, it is necessary that they be part of the solution.

KAFA indeed started by recruiting a male employee in the capacity of technical advisor, which was a turning point in the structure of an organization which has been, up until then, led and managed by women. In the counseling sessions, KAFA integrated counseling for male perpetrators in order to help them overcome their violent behavior. One year after the project started, KAFA developed a program specifically for working with men and boys to end violence against women. During the 16 days of ending GBV, KAFA mobilized celebrities in Lebanon who were seen on billboards all over Lebanon and who demanded a law to protect women who are subjected to violence. Moreover, together with Oxfam, KAFA developed a very unique manual on strategies and approaches on working with men and boys in the MENA region. The manual was developed to help establish the trend of working with men and boys in the region with respect to women's rights issues.

Experimenting with modules of working with men and boys to end violence against women requires women's organizations that are flexible and open to change. This means including gender mainstreaming at the institutional and structural levels, not only at the program level.

Conclusion

This paper has provided an overview of the efforts of women's organizations and networks in the MENA region to broaden their approach when combating violence against women. The paper explored the importance of working with men and boys and argued that in the predominantly male-dominated societies of the region it is a necessity to do so when working on the elimination of violence against women.

Based on its experience in promoting working with men and boys to end violence against women in the Middle East, Oxfam GB realized that ending violence against women can only happen when men are targeted for change by changing their perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs. This approach has represented a challenge for Oxfam GB since women's organizations continue to see change through their own, women-centered struggle to pressure governments. Shifting these organizations' thinking towards working with men and viewing them from

a different perspective was the focus of this paper. The lessons learned from the Yemeni Women's Union case suggest a framework built around a discussion with women's organizations about what is good about men. The success of this approach helped the Yemeni Women's Union to incorporate men in the struggle to eliminate GBV by working with male lawyers and advocacy groups which included men.

The second case study in the form of a regional workshop about sharing experiences and learning frameworks allowed women's organizations to learn from best practices of working with men and boys. One of the many critical areas explored in this workshop included the regional challenges and limitations such as the spread of radical Islamic movements, the difficulty in identifying allies within state institutions, and the lengthy process of lobbying and advocating for change. The success of the workshop was demonstrated by the acknowledgement by all women's organizations that it is time to consolidate working with men, and the recognition that there are many motivated men who could be mobilized as advocates for ending GBV.

The final case study addressed the underlying causes for gender inequality and violence in general: Women's organizations were challenged to reconsider their work to eliminate violence against women and to shift their activities to incorporate an examination of the socialization of men. This approach allowed women's organizations to look at men as victims of violence and in turn perpetrators who need to be helped. With this approach, activists can understand how the patriarchal system and laws perpetuate a

form of structural violence which harms both males and females.

Finally, with the case of KAFA and the module developed about engaging men and boys to eliminate violence against women, the suggestion was to incorporate gender mainstreaming in women NGOs both within their programs and within their structure/institutional framework.

These case studies have been validated by Oxfam GB and proven to be successful. However, women's organizations fear that men could hijack their issues or take away resources needed to support women survivors of violence are valid concerns.

The main challenge facing women's organizations is to find the right balance that allows for working with men and boys without compromising their agenda. The other challenge is to continue to monitor their interventions with men to prove that working with men is an effective approach to ending GBV. This requires efforts from women's organization to show that both men and women will benefit when violence is ended, and that only zero tolerance to violence is acceptable.

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