

About Us

Acknowledging the importance of the family in society, the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) was established in 2006 by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation (QF). It was then known as the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development (DIIFSD).

DIFI's mandate is based on the Doha Declaration on the family. This Declaration resulted from the Doha International Conference of the Family, which was organized by the State of Qatar to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the International Year of the Family. The Declaration was noted in a United Nations General Assembly resolution. DIFI has a Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN ARAB COUNTRIES



SUMMARY

The Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) in collaboration with the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI) at the United Nations (UN) organized a colloquium on the Empowerment of Women in Arab countries in Tunis on 5 and 6 October 2010.

The primary objective of the colloquium was to provide UN member states with expert opinion and recommendations regarding policies to empower women in the political, economic, and social fields.

The conference addressed key issues, including gender empowerment and socio-economic development of society, the main impediments in the region, the adoption of appropriate policy responses and legal reforms, the role of the state and the ways and means to join forces with civil society to empower women.

During two days, experts, UN representatives and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dealing with social development from different regions of the world discussed achievements and challenges facing women in the world, particularly Arab women, and explored empowerment of women in multiple contexts, promoting an exchange of ideas and experiences.

The participants identified effective policy responses as well as best practices, taking into account the region's political, social, economic, and cultural aspects and provided policy recommendations that should be implemented by the state and other stakeholders.

FINDINGS

- The problems facing Arab women are not unique and are common to other societies. Therefore the solution requires a constructive intercultural dialogue, international cooperation, and a culturally sensitive approach to promote empowerment;
- The current political turmoil and economic crisis in the Arab world has a negative impact on the status of women;
- Islam as a religion guarantees equal rights and duties to women; it is the misinterpretation of the

religion and some cultural beliefs that lead to discriminatory practices;

- The last decade has witnessed irreversible improvement in the status of Arab women. However a lot of effort is needed to ensure social and economic participation and the political rights of women;
- Legal reforms are necessary in many countries in order to ensure the implementation of laws that secure women rights;
- There is a need to rectify the image of Arab women in the media through a constructive partnership that will promote a positive image and role models of women;
- Women have a primary responsibility to empower themselves by building their own self-confidence through participation in all spheres of life;
- To empower Arab women, there is a need to enhance their education, encourage their political participation, economic involvement, and institutionalize their rights;
- Issues affecting specific groups of women, including disabled persons and older women, should be addressed;
- There is a need to support and encourage civil society and other stakeholders, including religious leaders and the family to actively cooperate at all levels to secure women's rights and to prevent all forms of violence against women;
- The role of Arab women organizations is essential for the empowerment of women; they constitute a forum for discussion and exchange of views and a tool for implementing various programs in the region;
- Empowerment is a complex and relative notion, its promotion needs to take into account a holistic approach;

RECOMMENDATIONS

Women's participation at the national level: what could be done to overcome existing impediments?

- Ensure access to education. Education is a key priority and an effective instrument in the empowerment of women in Arab countries;
- States should design and implement policies to guarantee at least 12 years of mandatory quality education to girls. It is essential to target resources at increasing girls' enrollment, decreasing their dropout rates, and to design curricula that are meaningful and encouraging for girls. Women themselves should be involved in curriculum development. The rights and opportunities of vulnerable groups (e.g. ethnic minorities, migrants, and girls with disabilities) should be given specific attention;
- Promote women's employment. Governments have a central role in improving equal opportunities for women in the labor market through legislation. Legislation relevant to labor market participation of women should be reviewed and governments should adopt and implement an equal opportunity 'open door' policy in regard to the employment and career development of women. It is important to exchange good practices in the region;
- Enhance political participation and leadership. The current low proportion of women in political institutions and in leadership positions in various sectors calls for special measures, such as quotas. In the long run, measures such as creating opportunities for career development, providing encouragement, role models, and leadership training should be used to open pathways for women to take up leadership positions;
- Innovative approaches to partnerships should be used. Partnerships with the media, civil society organizations, and other agents in the region should be developed to promote the exchange of best practices in the empowerment of women. There is a need to promote positive images of women and to ensure that good role models for women exist;
- Establish forums or platforms for sharing through partnerships that facilitate dialogue and that involve

all stakeholders, civil society, academic institutions, state agencies, the private sector, cultural and religious leaders. Men and women should work together to create better awareness, joint understanding, and cooperation to promote the empowerment of women;

- Involve women's organizations to support the building of self-confidence in women and to promote self-development of girls and in schools in particular.
- Use a twin-track approach to address the gender gap effectively. On gender equality, non-discrimination and women's empowerment need to be included holistically in all policies, plans, and practices, while targeted measures to advance the status of women are also needed to promote their empowerment and to produce immediate effects.
- Support civil society to build institutional capacity for gender empowerment. Civil society, including NGOs, the private sector, academia, religious communities/leaders, and community-based organizations, women's groups and families should be seen as resources to be mobilized for facilitating women's empowerment at local and national levels. More interaction, discussion, and collaboration is needed to sensitize all stakeholders;
- Create umbrella organizations or networks of women's organizations or community centers to enable women to share experiences and to strengthen their voice in local and national decisionmaking forums;
- Organize gender sensitivity training for managers and employees as well as government staff as part of gender mainstreaming efforts;
- Increase the collection and use of gender and age sensitive data and research. Involve academia in order to generate the relevant data and to develop evidence-based policy design and decisionmaking;
- Establish or strengthen institutional structures aimed at gender policy and program implementation and monitoring. Design ways to increase coordination and collaboration, for

example between government agencies, to mainstream gender issues;

- Improve institutional structures that are responsible for ensuring women's equal access to justice, property rights, decent work, and independent resources;
- Promote the use of modern information technology, including the internet, for sharing information good practices on the empowerment of women;
- Strengthen the production and sharing of information on women's empowerment in Arabic and between Arab countries. The UN and other organizations should improve and enhance the access to documentation in Arabic;
- Strengthen laws and institutions that are responsible for preventing and handling cases of violence against women. States and religious leaders should endorse and enforce zero tolerance policies against all forms of violence against women, including cases of domestic violence;
- Involve men as allies to change the mindsets of men and reverse the discriminating and disempowering aspects in the traditional male dominant culture. There is a need for an open dialogue that combines men's and women's interest groups **with the view** to establish alternative interpretations of men's roles and their involvement in the process of empowering women.

Making policy responses more effective

- Foster the development of political will to support empowerment of women and ensure that policy goals are gender sensitive with concrete goals, targets, timelines, and budget allocations;
- Adapt existing and introduce new practical tools, such as Gender Impact Assessment and Gender Budgeting as well as appropriate evaluation strategies and techniques to assess policy outcomes;
- Involve academia in the production of gender relevant research to provide evidence for policy design and follow-up, including analysis of public

information on gender sensitive issues, such as violence against women;

- Encourage Arab countries, to develop **Arab index (Arab gender matrix)** to monitor empowerment of women. Support research institutes in the Arab region to undertake research on this subject;
- Involve responsible media to inform and engage the public in policy dialogue and follow-up.

Issues affecting specific groups need to be addressed

- Promote intergenerational solidarity and dialogue by ensuring age and gender representation in public policy forums;
- Promote universal, affordable healthcare at community and local level as an instrument to foster the health and well-being of girls and the health and dignity of older women;
- Adopt a life course approach that provides targeted programs for groups with special needs, for example prevention of violence against women, the impact of disability on children and older women, and other vulnerable groups;
- Address the specific situation of the most vulnerable women and girls. Low income women's groups in rural and urban marginal areas should have access to grassroots skills education and training, **coops**, internships, and overall good quality education;
- Increase the minimum age of the marriage to 18 in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Concept of Empowerment from a Gender Perspective – Political, Socio-Economic, and Cultural Dimensions

- Collaboration between all societal sectors is needed to promote the conditions that allow women to empower themselves;
- Gender equality and empowerment needs to be included in policies and practices of all sectors and at levels (mainstreaming) in addition to actions

targeted at women and girls. These should be seen as essential components of the same strategy;

- Actions targeted directly to empower women and girls remain necessary as they are the effective strategy to get immediate results;
- Empowerment and other related concepts, such as gender equality and mainstreaming, should be defined and used in ways that can be operational in various contexts.