



GENDER EQUALITY 4 ALL

Social Protection 4 All is a transformative agenda: Non-profit Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and representatives of labour movement organisations play a key role in promoting transformative measures which seek to address concerns such as *social equity* and exclusion through actions for workers' rights and promote respect of international labour standards; changes to the regulatory framework to combat discrimination and abuse against marginalised or vulnerable groups (e.g. people with disabilities, elderly people, children), as well as awareness raising campaigns to transform public attitudes and behaviour (e. g. on genital mutilation and women rights). This newsletter is dedicated to the work of SOLIDAR and its Members to promote women rights.

PROMOTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS & GENDER EQUALITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



How can we revitalise the women's civil society and political movements be it cross-party, cross-generations, cross-sectorial, cross-religion or cross-social status?

How we can overcome the hurdles in front of them, to find synergies and continue in a positive progressive way forward and ensure women's economic, social and political empowerment as part of the fight for social justice?

How can women's rights movements, with new and young women activists/ feminists, address today's issues in order for rights to be adopted and implemented and women's role and situation be improved?

These were some of the questions discussed at last week's workshop organized by the Global Progressive Forum, in cooperation with SOLIDAR, AWID, CGIL, UGTT and the FGTB in the framework of the World Social Forum that took place in Tunis.

In the framework of its programme **Social Justice in the MENA Region**, SOLIDAR considers that while women's involvement was clearly recognised during the Arab spring, the uprisings were followed by big disappointments in terms of enhancing women's rights and inducing a change in gender roles. In particular women in the MENA region still have limited access to economic and political decision-making processes in their families, nations, or international institutions. Women's associations and movements in the region have been suffering from growing pressures for decades.

To draw attention to the issue, in 2014 a call for academic papers was launched leading to a publication titled '[Promoting Women's Rights & Gender Equality in the Middle East and North Africa](#)' which contains a collection of articles on women's rights and gender equality in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Palestine in cooperation with the FEPS gender equality research programme 'Woman up!'.

MOVEMENT FOR PEACE (MPDL): BREAKING FGM TABOO IN MALI

According to UNICEF, over 125 million women and girls in 29 countries have undergone female genital mutilation-cutting (FGM-C). FGM-C prevalence rates, that is, the proportion of women having been mutilated, reach in some countries alarming levels -98% in Somalia, 96% in Guinea, 91% in Egypt, to mention only the most extreme cases-. FGM-C constitutes a flagrant violation of the fundamental rights of women and girls, who are deprived through the practice of the right of deciding over their own bodies.



Mali (89% of prevalence rate) is one of the countries with a highest level of social acceptance of FGM-C -73% of women and 69% of men support the continuation of the FGM-C in their communities-. Movement for Peace (MPDL) intervenes in Mali since 2012 with the purpose of decreasing the FGM-C prevalence and acceptance rates. Our action takes place in rural communities of the Kayes region, which is the one among the 8 Malian regions showing the highest prevalence rate.

The approach, implemented in collaboration with our local partner SiniSanumam, seeks to transmit to the population relevant information about the negative consequences of the practice. This has to be done in a subtle and diplomatic way, so as not to create reluctance among the populations, who generally perceive FGM-C as part of their cultural heritage. The specific techniques used are focus group discussions, community level talks delivered by specialized development agents, thematic alphabetizations, and the implication of prominent people with a high level of social influence within the communities, such as village chefs, religious leaders, teachers and health workers.

MPDL also supports local health centers in diminishing the incidence of the practice and mitigating its consequences, through sensitization and training on how to treat health problems associated with FGM-C.

Combating FGM-C requires a long term perspective and continuous efforts based on effective methods to promote public discussion and critical reflection among the populations. FGM-C has traditionally been a taboo topic, which impedes the dissemination of accurate information on the practice, in particular its negative consequences. Therefore, **MPDL has focused on installing a public and open debate on FGM-C in 20 villages of the Kayes Region, with the aim of lifting this taboo. This has been achieved in all these villages, where today populations speak openly on**

the matter. These public deliberations have paved the way for a declaration of abandonment of the practice in two villages, and it is expected that at least 3 more will follow in the future.

EUROPEAID, who is one of the donors who has supported financially the intervention, selected it as an example of good practice in the framework of the EIDHR annual forum (European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights).

In the words of a woman from Marena “*The issue of FGM had always been a taboo in the village: no one wanted to hear about it. But gradually we began to talk about the consequences of FGM on women’s health in general as well as in pregnancy or childbirth. We managed to create discussion groups on the subject, with men and women talking openly about the problems caused by FGM. It is now more than years that FGM is not practiced in our village. It is a firm decision cannot be reversed. We realized that, as women, we have a place within our community.*”

BETWEEN VIOLENCE AND HOPE: KIVU’S WOMEN SPEAK UP!

‘**Between Violence and Hope is a web-documentary**’ directed by Socialist Solidarity and Graphoui Workshop in collaboration with the Diobass association, a partner organization in South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo.

The documentary addresses the very harsh reality of women victims of sexual violence perpetrated by the armed forces in eastern Congo. Over 20,000 women per year are concerned, and these numbers do not include those women that do not dare to speak.

The documentary portraits Kivu’s women and their struggle to win back their dignity and regain a place in society.

SAMARITAN AUSTRIA ACTION AGAINST FGM IN KENYA



FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) is recognized internationally as a violation of human rights perpetuated against girls and women. It reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women. It is nearly always carried out on minors and is a violation of the rights of children. The practice also violates a person's rights to health, security and physical integrity, the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and the right to life when the

procedure results in death. This procedure can cause severe problems infections, infertility as well as complications in childbirth and increased risk of new-born deaths.

Nevertheless, more than 125 million girls and women alive today have been cut in 29 countries in Africa and Middle East.

In Kenya, Samaritan Austria has cooperated with local partner organisations to create awareness on the health implications of FGM as well as on the national legislation that, since 2011, clearly forbids this traditional practice. For this purpose, they organised sensitization meetings, high level conferences and trainings for different groups within the pastoralist society in Maikona, Northern Kenya. The cooperation with the local government institutions and religious leaders was of tremendous help to spread and emphasise the message.

The primary reason why FGM is practised in the region is because it is a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, from being a girl to a woman. Therefore, Samaritan Austria is preparing to introduce an alternative ritual, whereby the bloodshed is omitted. Additionally it is crucial to support the circumcisers to find other fields of activity and sources of income. Both will take time and patience because of the deeply rooted beliefs associated requiring a long-term engagement.

“I have already thought about why we practise FGM but nobody would talk about it. I have 3 girls, all of them were cut and they all had complications when giving birth. They were very exhausted and sick afterwards. I really think we should stop this practise!”
(Nuria, 50 years old)

The representative of the national Anti-FGM Board reported in one of the stakeholder meetings that she had run away from FGM as a child and had been considered as a coward while today she is admired for her courage.

In the words of Dhoko, 21 years old, “... women used to stay at home without education. Now we understand that education is important to us and we want our children to be educated. With FGM it is similar, we need change, we need a new perspective on this topic”.

Samaritan Austria will keep supporting women and to push for behavioural changes.

ARCS: BUILDING PEACE IN COLOMBIA



Women play an essential and active role in local conflict transformation and peacebuilding. With this in mind, since 2003, ARCS – Arci Cultura e Sviluppo works in Colombia to support the equitable involvement of women in politics and in the government of the.

Together with the local partner “Corporación Viva la Ciudadanía” and other local Organizations, ARCS is running the “School of democratic leadership and advocacy to the public policy formulated by citizens” that provides training in human rights,

gender equality, democracy, community development and public policy to representatives of women’s local organizations.

The main goal of this on-going project is to strengthen the role of women in peacebuilding, promoting and supporting negotiation talks between women’s civil society organizations and local governments.

In the last few years, ARCS worked with more than 7000 leaders of civil society organizations and established at least 14 spaces of negotiation talks between women leaders and local governments.



SOCIAL PROTECTION 4 ALL
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