

Hibaaq Osman
Expert Group Meeting on SDG 5
May 2017

- **What are good practices and lessons learnt in the elimination of all forms of violence and harmful practices against women and girls?**

From a civil society perspective, coalition building has been the most effective means of working on ending violence. The specific issues that activists in the region want to address are often more-or-less the same or thematically similar - for example, we want to address violence against women as a broad issue, or within that, particular problems like street harassment, and issues like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), or specific discriminatory laws. In contrast, most countries in the region contain multiple communities and divisions within society, so we see big differences between urban and rural communities, different ethnicities, religious groups, or geographic and political divisions. Campaigns that bring together different parts of society behind a unified message are more likely to cut through to wider society. They already have an internal momentum and have more credibility through inclusion of established voices from across society.

Resource and political will are absolutely fundamental to sustainable and lasting change. This is true for every level - from the promise of UNSCR 1325 to local campaigns, it is the ability to carry out a plan and see it through that makes the difference. Far too often we see ambitious plans that aren't followed through because the required resources are not made available, or decision-makers are not prepared to drive the work through to conclusion.

- **How have governments effectively engaged all stakeholders at local and national levels towards the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spaces and the elimination of harmful practices against women and girls? What are successful approaches that involve, among others, communities, men and boys, women's and other civil society organizations, youth-led organizations, faith-based groups, traditional leaders and employers in these efforts? How are such efforts monitored?**

The main problem we have seen from governments in the Arab region has been in an unwillingness to see changes through beyond initial stages. For example, we have secured new laws and constitutional articles on violence against women in many countries in the region in recent years. However, the protections these were meant to secure have not followed because they have stalled at the implementation stage. Beyond changing legal frameworks, in order to deal with violence against women we must also address cultural factors in the wider public, especially when it comes to attitudes in enforcement authorities.

This question points precisely to the issue we have seen in the Arab region, where we have not really seen governments engage with civil society in order to change attitudes. There have been examples of civil society-led campaigns that have tried to build awareness of and support for legal protections for women. In Egypt, we have seen the 19 Articles campaign. The Egyptian government has recently been involved in launching the "[Taa Marbouta](#)" campaign on women's social, political and economic empowerment. This has involved large-scale advertising campaigns in print and broadcast media and online on the issue of sexual harassment and

violence against women. It has been led by the National Council for Women, with endorsement from civil society. We have welcomed the resource that has been put into this campaign, but it must be a start and not simply a one-off campaign.

- **Which interventions have successfully addressed gender stereotypes and negative social norms?**

We have seen a number of successful campaigns led by civil society organisations and coalitions in the region against laws that allow rapists escape punishment if they agree to marry their victims. Two countries in the region - Lebanon and Jordan - are now in the advanced stages of abolishing such laws. In order to succeed, these campaigns have had to deal not only with legal frameworks, but have had to appeal to popular support, bringing people on board by challenging social norms.

Lebanon - ABAAD's campaign #Undress511

Our colleagues in ABAAD launched their multimedia campaign #Undress522 in December 2016 with the following aims and messages:

- *Push for the abolition of article 522;*
- *Stress on the right of women survivors of rape to refuse to marry their rapist, and put an end to their stigmatization and shaming;*
- *Encourage people to join our cause, through the clear differentiation between the act of rape as a crime, and what society considers as the women's honor;*
- *Emphasize that forcing women to marry their rapist is a repressive act that legitimizes rape against women on a daily basis. Parents should therefore be convinced that the marriage of the victim to her rapist is not the solution and does not protect women;*
- *Rape is a crime, and the rapist should be punished.*

The campaign included billboards, large-scale street protests, celebrity endorsements, direct engagement with policymakers, public opinion research and other techniques. Following the efforts of the campaign, the justice committee of the Lebanese parliament met in February 2017 and recommended the law be abolished, with parliament set to vote on the matter imminently.

More information can be found on the campaign website and facebook page:

<http://www.abaadmena.org/programmes/advocacy-and-policy-development/project-58748b6fa56f85-59472059>

https://www.facebook.com/pg/abaadmena/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1332734810117894