

**Gender Guidelines**  
**for the**  
**Italian Development Cooperation activities**  
**in Lebanon**  
**2008-2010**



**Final version**

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

<b>AHDR</b>	Arab Human Development Report
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of all Types of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CSOs</b>	Civil Society Organizations
<b>GAD</b>	Gender and Development
<b>GBV</b>	Gender Based Violence
<b>GFPs</b>	Gender Focal Points
<b>HDR</b>	Human Development Reports
<b>LEDAs</b>	Local Economic Development Agencies
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>NCLW</b>	National Commission for Lebanese Women
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>ROSS</b>	Support to Rehabilitation, Employment, Services and Development
<b>SDCs</b>	Social and Development Centres
<b>SMEs</b>	Small and Medium Enterprises
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Program
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNIFIL</b>	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council Resolution
<b>UTL</b>	Italian Development Cooperation Office
<b>VAW</b>	Violence Against Women

## Overview of the current Italian Development Cooperation Office activities in Lebanon

Following the ceasefire ending the summer 2006 conflict with Israel and the adoption of UNSCR 1701, Italy expressed its willingness to further increase its commitment towards Lebanon and the Lebanese population and to play an active role in Lebanon's post-conflict economic, social and infrastructural recovery. Confirmed in the two donors' conferences held in Stockholm (2006) and Paris (2007), such a commitment rests on two fundamental tools: a robust emergency program and a wider development one, which required in parallel the opening of a permanent Development Cooperation Office (UTL) within the Embassy of Italy in Beirut<sup>1</sup>.

Started in 2007 – and lasting until 2009 – the **ROSS Emergency Program**<sup>2</sup> is financed with approximately 24 million Euros. Its interventions focus on the south of Lebanon and on the Bekaa valley, without overlooking major poverty pockets located elsewhere in the Country, with a view to ensure a balanced distribution of cooperation activities among the various regions of Lebanon. In this respect, resources have also been dedicated to addressing the difficult humanitarian situation in the Palestinian refugee camps and in the neighbouring Lebanese municipalities, particularly in the aftermath of the summer 2007 crisis of Nahr el Bared, whose dire effects endure up-to-day.

The program finances and partners with a wide spectrum of Italian NGOs, which throughout the years have developed strong relationships with Lebanese civil society organizations (CSOs), as well as local governments and municipalities. Moreover, it interacts with and supports the direct involvement of Italian decentralized cooperation stakeholders – local authorities, universities, third sector – who are not only partnering in financing for development, but who are more importantly contributing in the international exchange of innovative experiences and expertise. Nevertheless, the program envisages the collaboration with Lebanese line ministries in the implementation of specific actions, as well as its direct responsibility in the implementation of specific projects. Finally, it also maintains a level of coordination with the CIMIC Unit (Civil Military Cooperation) of the Italian contingent within UNIFIL<sup>3</sup>, sometimes implying the co-financing of some activities.

The Italian Cooperation's adoption of a local human development approach is clearly reflected in the 6 million Euros co-financing of the UNDP ART GOLD Program, which grants supports to territorial thematic networks in order to stimulate local communities' participation in the decision-making processes which affect their lives. In the same time, it fosters the enhancement of local authorities and administrations' skills and capacities in planning, managing, executing, monitoring and evaluating local human development by means of the establishment of a wide ranging partnership embracing both the private sector and CSOs.

The second tool concretely attesting the Italian government's commitment to Lebanon's recovery is the **wider development program** carried out through the expertise of the new Development Cooperation Office (UTL) established within the Italian Embassy in Beirut, whose role is to combine synergies among on-going and planned activities in order to ensure their coordination and continuity. Accordingly, and in collaboration with UN agencies, bilateral donors and line ministries, the UTL partakes in a reconstruction and development program in line with the Lebanese Government's strategy presented at the Paris III Conference. By combining multilateral contributions, soft loans, grants to the Lebanese government and NGO-allocated resources, Italy's commitment in Lebanon reaches **over 200 million euros**. Within this framework, Italy is taking up a significant role in agricultural development, as attested by the

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<sup>1</sup> The main office of the UTL is located in Beirut, whereas a branch office has recently been opened in Tyr.

<sup>2</sup> Support to Rehabilitation, Employment, Services and Development.

<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is the UN peacekeeping mission deployed in southern Lebanon.

creation of an operational task force between the Italian and the Lebanese Ministries of Agriculture. Furthermore, the Italian Cooperation is consistently intervening in the water management sector: actions range from providing drinkable water to remote areas, to the creation of irrigation systems for small farmers' communities, up to wastewater treatment in order to mitigate its negative impact on agriculture and on the environment. In collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Council for Development and Reconstruction, the Italian Cooperation is also active in the socio-sanitary field, i.e. improving vulnerable groups' welfare as well as rehabilitating healthcare structures. Finally, Italy is also playing an important role in the fields of environmental protection, support to the employment sector and cultural heritage restoration.

## **Ongoing Italy-financed gender and development (GAD) initiatives in Lebanon**

Italy-financed development interventions incorporating a gender perspective and/or adopting a women's empowerment approach have been operating at multiple levels.

Within the context of the first phase of the ROSS Emergency Program (March 2006-07), several projects implemented in southern Lebanon, in the valley of the Beqaa and in the southern suburbs of Beirut have been integrating a women's empowerment approach. Premised on the establishment of collaborative partnerships between Italian and Lebanese NGOs and CSOs, women's economic activities have been supported both as livelihood strategies in the post-conflict scenario, as well as avenues to foster their active and publicly acknowledged involvement in local development as individuals, and as women's groups. Nonetheless, the program is financing a number of NGO projects aiming to strengthen the existing provision of services for women and youth in rural villages and in Palestinian refugee camps: from vocational training, to job insertion and job creation, to educational and awareness-raising activities. Finally, a recently concluded pilot initiative on gender-based violence has been the "*Awareness on Women's rights through Social Development Centres (SDCs) in the Southern Suburbs of Beirut*" project, implemented by the Lebanese women's NGO Kafa through the Ministry of Social Affairs' network of SDCs.

Beside the ROSS Program, the UTL is also supporting the second phase<sup>4</sup> of the "*Women Empowerment: Peaceful Action for Security and Stability (WE PASS)*" project, implemented by UNFPA and the National Council of Lebanese Women (NCLW). Recalling UNSCR 1325, and in the acknowledgement of Lebanese women's contribution in the humanitarian response and peace process, the program aims to foster an enabling environment for Lebanese women's empowerment by means of: (a) awareness raising and advocacy activities; (b) strengthening women's machinery institutional capacity; (c) promoting the adoption of policies and programs addressing gender-based violence (GBV); and (d) empowering women as local economic development stakeholders. Cooperation with Lebanese line ministries has also been activated as in the case of the support granted for the establishment of a National Observatory for Women in Agriculture and Rural Areas (NOWARA) within the Ministry of Agriculture.

Finally, in partnership with UNFPA and in collaboration with CRTD\_A, the Italian Development Cooperation Office has recently published a 2008 diary dedicated to gender issues in Lebanon. Its overall objective being the enhancement of readers' gender-sensitivity, the agenda is nonetheless meant to provide reliable data and information concerning Lebanese women's status and living conditions, as well as references of relevant organizations, institutions and agencies active in the promotion of women's rights and gender equality and equity.

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<sup>4</sup> It follows a first phase financed by the Government of Norway.

## Looking ahead: positioning gender and women's empowerment within the framework of Italy-financed development cooperation initiatives in Lebanon

The **mainstreaming of a gender perspective** throughout its overall framework of emergency and development interventions in Lebanon **and the financing for women's economic, social and political empowerment** are two pivotal axis of interventions that the UTL is strategically intentioned to pursue.

On one side, this commitment rests on the Millennium Declaration's firm establishment of the interdependent linkage between good governance, sustainable development and poverty reduction<sup>5</sup>. On the other, it acknowledges how "gender equality and women's empowerment are central to the achievement of each of the MDGs, and the achievement of Goal 3 in turn depends upon the extent to which the other goals address gender-based constraints" (Moser, 2007: 32).

These statements are further reinforced by the strategic vision<sup>6</sup> identified in the 2005 Arab Human Development Report, whereby the rise of women is seen as a necessary – though not sufficient – condition for the achievement of more justice and equality for all Arab women and men. Last but not least, and peculiarly in light of the persisting Lebanon's political-institutional scenario's fragilities, the relevance of UNSCR 1325/2000<sup>7</sup> in the promotion of women's participation and representation in all aspects of conflict prevention, peacekeeping, peace-building, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation cannot be underestimated.

Nonetheless, such a commitment is not exempt from contradictions. In fact, within a global context deeply shaped by the clash of civilizations' rhetoric and politics, Western donor countries' focus on the 'woman question' in the Arab region is sometimes perceived as an attempt to encroach on Arab culture and/or national sovereignty, overall harming "the cause of the rise of women in Arab countries and those who support it" (AHDR, 2005: 62). In the same time, world-wide processes of economic, social, political, cultural globalization have *de facto* erased the possibility of making a clear distinction between what is deemed local/internal and what is deemed foreign/external, thus unveiling a marked male bias shaping 'cultural defense' stances.

Similarly, the concept of 'empowerment' "is not easily defined in concrete terms and means different things to different people" (Moser, 2007: 26). Furthermore, it has been repeatedly contested in women's and developmental circles for the prioritization of its individual versus collective dimension. Indeed, the expansion of individual women's opportunities and possibilities of choice has to be balanced within a wider commitment to alter the dynamics and the structures that produce marginalization and discrimination.

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<sup>5</sup> The Millennium Declaration was adopted by 189 nations and signed by 147 heads of state and governments during the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000. The 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are: Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education; Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women; Goal 4: Reduce child mortality; Goal 5: Improve maternal health; Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability; Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development.

<sup>6</sup> The strategic vision for the rise of women in the Arab world is composed of two wings: (1) the promotion of rights-based societal reforms to bring about attitudinal shifts; (2) "the emergence of a widespread and effective movement of struggle in the Arab civil society [that] will involve women and male supporters in carefully targeted societal reform on the one hand and on the other, empower all Arab women to enjoy the fruits of changes that serve the rise of both women and the region as a whole" (AHDR, 2005: 22)

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was passed unanimously on 31 October 2000. It is the first resolution ever passed by the Security Council that specifically addresses the impact of war on women, and women's contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace.

In Lebanon, tangible improvements have been accomplished in bridging the gender gap at all levels of education. Yet, they have not been translated into comparable women's participation rates into political and economic spheres. In the acknowledgement that throughout their whole life cycle, women and men do not enjoy the same opportunities, as well as that the dynamics which produce gender disadvantages are themselves interlocked, a strategic vision to overcome past, current and future wrongs implies the assumption of responsibility for interventions at two different levels:

1. **removing the barriers to women's full-scale participation in all spheres and levels of engagement in societal life** – this includes, i.e., the elimination of all forms of discrimination embed in the national legal system;
2. **adopting corrective/redistributive measures that would counteract processes underlying the reproduction of gender discrimination dynamics** – this includes, i.e. women's quota for local and national elections. In this respect, it is compelling to .refrain from advocating for affirmative actions on the basis of a 'women-as-victims' argument, but rather on the acknowledgement that entrenched patterns of gender discrimination and disadvantage cannot be overcome by merely erasing the visible barriers to the achievement of formal gender equality.

Within this framework, the relatively stable presence of Italy in donor capacity now allows for a more holistic and integrated approach in planning and financing for development in a Country as rich, diverse and fragmented as Lebanon. In this perspective, the multi-level framework of intervention adopted by the ART GOLD Program seems to be particularly appropriate, insofar as:

- At the **local level**, it is meant to foster inclusive, participatory and democratic processes of local development, enhancing the role of women elected in the local councils as well as women's CSOs and NGOs as key governance stakeholders;
- At the **national level**, it acknowledges the importance of improving the public provision of essential services at the quali-quantitative level, whereby the alleviation of women's traditionally attributed reproductive burden would allow (some of) them to take on a more active role in the formal economic and political spheres. Additionally, it sees the strengthening of networks linking women active within governmental, non-governmental and civil society organizations, as a strategic pathway to advocate successfully for legislative and/or policy changes concerning women's citizenship status;
- At the **international level**, cross-borders cooperation and exchanges between local development stakeholders is conceived of not only as an ad hoc source of technical expertise, but also as a mean to strengthen bridges across divides, thus overall promoting a positive and enabling environment for the peaceful resolution of the interlocked conflicts that harshly characterize the Middle East.

In translating this multi-level framework into a planning matrix, the UTL has opted for a **participatory methodology**, whereby a 'space-and-time' has been provided for the public expression of the numerous differences and complexities that characterize the Country. Building on the relationships and experiences initiated in the first phase of the ROSS Program, as well as on the results of a stakeholders mapping and needs assessment realized through an expert mission in the summer 2007, the UTL has thus organised in Beirut a participatory workshop<sup>8</sup> to identify challenges, priorities and strategies that constitute the core of this document.

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<sup>8</sup> "Positioning gender and women's empowerment within the framework of international cooperation initiatives in Lebanon: challenges, priorities and strategies". The letter of invitation, the detailed program and the list of organizations which participated in the event correspond to annexes I, II and V respectively. If not otherwise specifically stated, references to workshop participants' suggestions and recommendations contained in this document have all been registered in the course of this specific event.

This choice is indicative not only of a pragmatic approach in responding to the developmental challenges ahead, but it also explicitly acknowledges how meeting the MDG 8 would demand merging the mutual responsibilities of 'developing' and 'developed' countries in a shared vision of development – an elusive outcome that can nonetheless best be approximated by consistently practicing participatory and inclusive processes of *concertation*<sup>9</sup> at all levels.

The workshop was attended by over 130 people – an overwhelming majority of whom constituted by Lebanese women, though the presence of some Lebanese men and international participants was also registered. In the challenge of bringing constructively together individuals who are differently positioned in their society (i.e. in terms of class, generation, educational and employment status, religious and/or political affiliation, etc.) in order to share lessons learnt and recommendations for the future, such initiative was also envisioned to contribute facilitating coordination, networking and partnerships-building among different governmental, non-governmental and international stakeholders within a shared framework of intervention, as well as to foster national dialogue and debate on gender issues in Lebanon.

In the afternoon session, participants were asked to divide themselves into three working groups (women and economy, women and welfare, women and governance) in order to brainstorm over constraints, challenges and opportunities for enhancing women's participation into local and national development. Nonetheless, what clearly emerged out of each groups' presentation into plenary session, was the **inextricable interrelation between the social, economic and political dimensions of women's empowerment**: increased opportunities for women to have access to work and income possibly contribute to their self-esteem, to strengthening their bargaining power within the family, as well as to increase potentialities for their active involvement into their community's and society's decision-making processes. Indeed, the AHDR (2005: 10) clearly affirms how "the spread of income poverty generally leads to women's disenfranchisement in the areas of parliamentary participation, professional and technical employment, and control of economic resources. Human poverty results in the wide disempowerment of women and the exclusion of women from upper-level legislative, administrative and organisational jobs as well as from the professional and technical arenas". Thus, enhancing women's presence into local and national politics cannot be conceived of without addressing their persistent marginalization in the economic sphere, which is itself a result of the unequal division of roles, rights and responsibilities between men and women within the domestic sphere.

Accordingly, workshop participants eagerly stressed the **importance of involving men in the promotion of such processes of change**, insofar as their participation is perceived as necessary in order to advance women's status and social, economic and political opportunities: for the benefit of women, of their families and of the society as a whole.

If long term and sustainable changes are to be achieved, steady, focused and transparent commitments from both the donors and their partners are crucial assets. Indeed, workshop participants criticized donors' inconsistencies in financing for gender equality initiatives. Thus, the workshop was welcomed as an important step in the process of establishing a more transparent partnership among differently situated stakeholders whose relative power vis-à-vis the others is deeply shaped by the inequalities embed in the global governance structure of the aid system. Nonetheless, they were firm in demanding a **validation workshop in order to share and give their feedback on the gender guidelines** as systematized, integrated and interpreted by Italy in its donor capacity. This happened in a few weeks' time<sup>10</sup>: after having

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<sup>9</sup> 'Concertation' is a methodology and a practice which envisages participatory decision-making processes among multiple and differently positioned stakeholders to reach consensus (i.e. the negotiation of labour agreements between the government, trade unions and the private sector).

<sup>10</sup> "Gender Guidelines for the Italian Development Cooperation activities in Lebanon for the period 2008-2010 – Validation Workshop", Beirut, 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2008. The letter of invitation, the detailed program and the list of organizations which participated in the event correspond to annexes III and IV respectively.

circulated the Executive Summary of the draft Gender Guidelines among all the different stakeholders who participated to December 2008 workshop, the UTL organized a validation workshop in order to receive their informed feedback upon the proposed intervention priorities, while continuing to foster an inclusive and transparent dialogue. Thus, the present document acknowledges and integrates the suggestions received and is now made available for circulation among those who participated into its making and/or will request it.

### ***Preliminary considerations***

Before moving on to an in-depth analysis of the main challenges and suggested recommendations for development interventions, which are detailed in Section I, II and III, few preliminary considerations need to be highlighted.

First of all, this document does not pretend to be exhaustive in its chosen contents, but rather has to be read as an attempt to identify major priorities and strategic lines to guide Italy-financed gender and development interventions in the Country for a relatively narrow time-frame. While it serves holistic and integrated planning purposes, in the implementation phases it will have to be **combined with appropriate monitoring and evaluation tools based on gender disaggregated data collection, and including both quantitative and qualitative indicators**. In fact, gender mainstreaming is too often prone to 'policy evaporation', as implementation and impact fail to reflect policy commitments – and obviously more so, when results cannot be 'counted'.

Regrettably, the overall political-institutional national and regional scenario's instabilities do not provide an easily enabling environment for the implementation of some of its recommendations, and could rather demand shifting priorities and resources otherwise. Nonetheless, the priorities here highlighted are deemed to be flexible enough to adapt to changing conditions on the ground.

Particularly for what concerns **Palestinian women refugees**, their condition remains particularly severe and precarious with regards to access to education, employment, health, housing and protection from all forms of violence (CEDAW, 2008: 7). Thus, the recommendations contained in Section I and II should also be read and used to support specific initiatives designed to improve Palestinian women refugees' living conditions.

The exploitative conditions to which **women employed as domestic workers** are subjected is also a critical area of concern – though the specificities of the working environment and conditions can make it difficult to be directly tackled. In this perspective, the CEDAW Committee recommends facilitating domestic workers' access to legal services and to rights' awareness opportunities (CEDAW, 2008: 6).

In light of their potential to host different activities conveying messages that would facilitate women's increased participation in all spheres of society, **media** do not figure as a separate sector of intervention but have been dealt with as a cross-cutting issue.

Finally, the basin of potential projects' and programs' partners has been willingly kept as 'general' as possible, and few or no specific governmental or non-governmental organizations have been explicitly named. Indeed, this choice reflects a desire, as well as a need, to further investigate potential partnerships on a case to case basis.

## Section I: Lebanese women's economic participation

Despite being a middle income Country, Lebanon is characterized by significant regional disparities in 'human poverty'<sup>11</sup> levels, whereby deprivation levels are higher in rural areas though significant poverty pockets are also found within cities and suburbs (UNDP, 2003). Analyzed through gender lenses, it is women who rank among the most deprived – a dismaying outcome which stems from a number of social and cultural constraints and institutionalized gender bias limiting their economic participation.

Indeed, gender deeply structures both the institutions regulating the market (government, firms, banks) and the behaviour of economic agents, whose quantitative and qualitative participation is itself strongly influenced by the gendered socialization patterns at play within the family, the educational system and societal norms and values overall. According to the traditional gender division of labour, men are constructed as their family's breadwinners and are thus granted priority in accessing to paid employment; whereas women are naturally charged with the reproductive tasks and are thus overwhelmingly confined within the domestic sphere.

Though having registered a significant increase in the period 1990-2003, women's share in economic activity in the Arab region yet remains the lowest in the world<sup>12</sup>, resulting into the highest dependency ratio accordingly, with each worker supporting more than two non-working people (AHDR, 2005: 92). In Lebanon, estimates of women's economic participation rates vary between 14.7% (UNDP, 2003: 13) and 19.6% (Srouf, 2007), with the age group 25-29 standing as the most active one. Female-run Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) constitute merely the 8% of the total, 75% of which are comprised of 1 to 4 employees and concentrated in the trade sector (Srouf, 2007). Overall, the ratio of estimated female to male earned income is 0.31 (UNDP 2007-08).

Clearly, significant improvements in Lebanese women's educational attainments vis-à-vis men's have not been effectively translated into their increased participation in the labour force. Rather, the labour market presents discernible patterns of gender discrimination and occupational segregation:

- Despite the principle of equal pay for equal work<sup>13</sup>, including the applicability of the minimum wage, women's wages remain consistently inferior to men's (CRTD\_A, 2006: 22).
- Horizontal segregation: women are predominantly active in the service sector (64.7% vs. 33.0% for men); their involvement in commerce reaches approximately 15.9% (vs. 24.1% of men) and only 5% are formally employed in the agricultural sector (vs. 10% of men) (UNDP, 2003: 13);
- Vertical segregation: the traditional association of masculinity with authority/supervision and femininity with docility is reflected in women's low access to positions of responsibility and decision-making: in 1996 only 8.5% of women employees were holding high managerial positions (UNDP, 2003: 13).

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<sup>11</sup> 'Human poverty' is primarily a deprivation of choices and opportunities for living a life one has reason to value. It is measured by a composite index (the human poverty index, HPI) that brings together three different features of deprivation in the quality of life: longevity, knowledge and a decent standard of living.

<sup>12</sup> Women's share in economic activity in the Arab region has registered an increase of 19% against an average world increase of 3%. However, only 33.3 per cent of women aged fifteen years and older are economically active, as compared to a world average of 55.6 %; on the whole, women's participation does not exceed 42% that of men, against a world average of 69% (AHDR, 2005: 88).

<sup>13</sup> Article 26 of Lebanon's Labour Law was amended on May 26, 2000. It now prescribes the principle of non-discrimination according to gender in terms of type of work, salary or wage, employment, promotion, progress, professional rehabilitation and training, or dress code.

Nonetheless, if women's economic participation is to be effectively strengthened, it is imperative to have a closer look at what is (not) traditionally considered as 'work'. Isn't it *work* when a woman looks after her children or elderly, or when she prepares food, cleans the home, etc.? Isn't a teacher performing an *economic activity* when, returning home at the end of the day, she grows vegetables in the family garden? And: aren't these activities attributed a *market value* when they are performed by an economic agent external to the family – i.e. a domestic worker, a baby-sitter? Obviously, the difference does not lie in the nature of the activity performed, but in the (socially constructed) values attached to it. Indeed, most of the goods produced and services provided by women are family-based (care work, domestic chores, work on family land, etc.). Falling within the category of unpaid work, they do not receive a market value and thus remain unaccounted for in the national accounts system. It is precisely from this bias that originates the undervaluation and underestimation of women's participation into economic activities.

Rather, in order to understand and properly assess the multiplicity of the economic activities performed by women, we have to expand our understanding of the words 'economic', 'work' and 'production' to include not only those activities, goods and services that go through market transactions, but the overall use of natural and human resources to satisfy human needs.

Thus, despite the persistently low rates of women's participation into the formal economic sphere, women are already economically active agents. However, their contribution remains considerably invisible due to the different values attached to the performance of economic activities falling within the productive and reproductive spheres. This acknowledgement is key to understanding the reality of the over 200.000 Lebanese women who are economically active in the informal sector and/or do perform unpaid labour - i.e. cultivating their family's agricultural land as a result of male migration to urban areas or of widowhood (CRTD\_A, 2006). And more so, when we consider the time-burden constraints stemming from women's double-day (productive and reproductive tasks) in light of the potentialities for scaling up their participation into the formal economic sphere.

Most legal barriers to Lebanese women's economic participation have been removed, as they have the civil and independent right to monetary possessions, financial management and spending (CRTD\_A 2006: 24)<sup>14</sup>. Though the formal recognition of these rights does not automatically translate into their substantial respect and implementation, workshop participants rather explained their lower economic participation rates with the difficult conciliation of productive and/or community/political engagement roles with the reproductive tasks they are traditionally attributed. Indeed, as acknowledged in the AHDR (2005: 91), the cost of women's reproductive role in the replication of the society being left to the employers rather than to the state to bear, reduces de facto women's job opportunities.

Therefore, in order to make visible as well as to enhance women's economic participation, the **unequal distribution of reproductive roles and responsibilities between men and women** is both a fundamental constraint to be taken into consideration, and a strategic axis of intervention if gender equality is to be effectively pursued. Furthermore, it is important to promote a gendered vision of the economy, whereby the value and dignity of the reproductive work should be equalled to that which is usually exclusively considered as 'productive'.

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<sup>14</sup> In 1994, married women acquire the right to engage in commerce and business with no need for their husband's prior consent; and there are no official barriers for women to own land in their own right.

## **Italy-financed current and potential initiatives in the realm of women's economic participation**

Several ongoing projects financed through the ROSS Program located in the areas affected by the war (South Lebanon, Beqaa, Southern suburbs of Beirut) as well as in Palestinian refugee camps (Sabra and Chatila) focus on strengthening the agricultural production of women who are head of households, women's cooperatives and micro-enterprises. Within this field, women are predominantly engaged in sowing, weeding, harvesting and processing; they are overall responsible for the whole tobacco growing cycle (seed preparation, planting, irrigating, weeding and harvesting) and considerably involved in fruit and olive tree growing and vegetable greenhouses; they are also almost exclusively responsible for all the activities concerning livestock production (ESCWA 2001: 11).

However, women's enterprises, NGOs and cooperatives active in the agricultural and handicraft production sectors tend to be less economically efficient than men's due to a number of different factors, such as: (a) weaker business management and organizational capacities; (b) insufficient access to formal financial services<sup>15</sup> because of high transaction costs, limited education and mobility, social and cultural barriers and their inability to fulfil collateral requirements (i.e. land is generally owned by men<sup>16</sup>); (c) women's workload and double-day (productive and reproductive duties).

Clearly, the relevance of women's economic activities cannot be evaluated merely on an efficiency basis, but also in light of the processes of social, economic and political empowerment they could ignite both in the private and in the public sphere. Indeed, the rationales for such interventions lie not only in supporting agricultural production as a means for ensuring rural communities' livelihood, but more peculiarly in enhancing individual women's as well as women's groups/clubs/cooperatives' active and publicly acknowledged involvement in local economic development, paving the way for the emergence of processes of individual and collective empowerment that could lead to their enhanced involvement in the social and political spheres.

Indeed, and peculiarly in light of the political instabilities as well as of the identity-based societal fractures that characterize the Country, it seems reasonable to share the recommendation that "the strategic way forward to achieving greater gender equality and the well-being of Lebanon's poor is to focus on the realm of women's economic participation and empowerment and identify and sustain sustainable economic opportunities for women" (CRTD\_A, 2006: 12). Integrating workshop participants' suggestions with context-specific grey literature, the following recommendations for enhancing and expanding the scope for women's economic participation can be traced, and aid channels identified accordingly:

### **Specific objective 1.1: Build and/or strengthen women's micro-enterprises, NGOs and cooperatives' capacities in the field of:**

- Business start-up and management, i.e. gaining confidence with the use of market analysis and feasibility studies as tools for business orientation and management; strengthening Project Cycle Management skills;
- Human resources management, i.e. building the capacity to combine team work with individual members' specialization and time constraints; as well as improving internal communication channels;

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<sup>15</sup> Only approx. 20% of the loans are obtained by women, who predominantly invest them in the trade sector (Srour, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Female land owners account for 7% of the total owners; and own only 3.5% of the total useable agricultural area (ESCWA, 2001: 21).

- Quality standards: improve the quality of the production, i.e. by providing ongoing mentoring and accompaniment; as well as by centralizing the highest number of post-harvesting productive activities in a common, easily accessible and properly equipped place;
- Marketability: expanding the products' commercialization basin by: setting up permanent exhibition centres and workshops in urban areas; strengthening networks among women's cooperatives and NGOs; enhancing commercial opportunities involving and/or targeting the Lebanese diaspora;

Suggested aid channel: ROSS Program

Primary stakeholders: Lebanese women's micro-enterprises, NGOs and cooperatives' in partnership with Italian NGOs and decentralised cooperation

### **Specific objective 1.2: expand women's access to formal financial services**

The issue of women's access to credit as an avenue to expand their economic activities has been consistently highlighted by workshop participants, who nonetheless expressed a marked preference for enhancing their access to formal loans rather than compensating gender differentials through donor-backed women's micro grants. Indeed, loans have been associated with more self-dignity, ownership, feeling of responsibility, and with higher motivation for repayment accordingly. However, they are deemed to be excessively narrow in size and requiring too rigid guarantees. Recommendations for action thus include:

- Widen the scope for women's access to the formal financial services as well as to micro-credit and micro-finance initiatives;
- Strengthen non-financial services that would assist women in starting up and developing their economic activities, i.e. by providing training and learning opportunities, mentoring and supervision; as well as ad hoc technical expertise;

Suggested aid channel: ART GOLD Program

Primary stakeholders: Local Economic Development Agencies (LEDAs)<sup>17</sup>; Lebanese women's micro-enterprises, NGOs and cooperatives'; Italian decentralized cooperation

### **Specific objective 1.3: alleviate women's reproductive workload**

In light of the deeply entrenched constraints derived from the unequal gender division of labour, the recommendation in the short to medium term is to provide essential support services that would alleviate their reproductive burden, such as nurseries, kindergartens, and public transportation.

Such provision can be guaranteed whether by strengthening public services or else be conceived of as a third sector service provision - thus constituting itself a job creation and income generation activity.

Suggested aid channel: UTL direct management

Primary stakeholders: Lebanese line ministries and Lebanese women's NGOs and CSOs.

<sup>17</sup> From UNDP's website: "The objectives of LEDA – Local Economic Development Agency – are to harmonize national and local policies to increase the long-term competitiveness of local development actors, and at the same time to encourage them to meet the MDGs: social inclusion, gender equity, access to basic services, environment; and to create an environment that favours economic internationalisation, international partnerships, foreign private investment, and emigrant remittances." <http://www.undp.org/partners/region-local/leda.html>

#### **Specific objective 1.4: challenge the gendered occupational segregation dynamics**

Do women 'prefer' certain types of occupation as these would allow time for child care and to fulfil their traditional role of caregivers? Or do they cope with the existing societal material and immaterial constraints? Clearly there is not a definitive answer to these questions, the most probable of which is merely: both. Nonetheless, gender plays a crucial role in determining unequal outcomes in the distribution of work, roles and responsibilities between men and women both in the home and in the labour market.

Indeed, workshop participants have acknowledged widespread gender stereotypes and prejudices discouraging women from taking up productive works and/or professions which have been traditionally held by men (i.e. the underestimation of women's scientific capacities) as one of the most powerful societal constraints women are faced with. The current horizontal and vertical occupational segregation dynamics characterizing the Lebanese labour market are thus understood in light of the gendered career choices stemming from the family's primary socialization tasks up through the whole educational system (i.e. gender stereotypes in school curricula). Recommendations thus include:

- Encourage and support women's non-traditional economic activities, (i.e. environmental protection, ecotourism);
- Provide opportunities for enhancing women's awareness of their rights, capabilities and self-esteem;
- Encourage diversification of the educational choices (including vocational training) of boys and girls, in order to alter stereotyped gendered career choice patterns;
- Support advocacy initiative to promote needed changes in the labour laws, with specific regards to maternity leaves for working women<sup>18</sup>

Suggested aid channel: All

Primary stakeholders: Lebanese line ministries, Lebanese women's NGOs and CSOs, LEDAs, Italian NGOs and decentralized cooperation

#### **Specific objective 1.5: engendering the economy**

- Strengthen networks among Lebanese women's micro-enterprises, NGOs and cooperatives';
- Promote the vision of women as active economic agents by directly involving them in the processes of planning for local development, and particularly in the structure and decision-making processes of the LEDAs; as well as by fostering their interrelation with male and female members of local councils;
- Support 'engendering the budget' initiatives at the local and national level.

Suggested aid channel: ART GOLD Program

Primary stakeholders: Lebanese women's micro-enterprises, NGOs, CSOs and cooperatives'; Lebanese line ministries, LEDAs, Italian NGOs and decentralized cooperation

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<sup>18</sup> Women in the private sector are entitled to 40 days of maternity leave, whereas female civil servants in the public sector are entitled to 60 days. The maternity leave are paid 100% of their salary by their employer (CRTD\_A, 2006: 24).

## Section II: The status of Lebanese women

The inferior status of women vis-à-vis men's is thoroughly determined by the interplay between (gendered) individuals and (gendered) institutions and social structures, whose outcome is a context-specific web of power relations that produce gender discrimination and disadvantage. Therefore, in order to foster effectively substantial gender equality, interventions have both to breach those institutionalized processes perpetuating women's marginalization, as well as to empower women to become more assertive in their exercise of choice both at the individual and at the collective level.

This section will thus look deeper into those fields which are considered to be strategically relevant in order to advance Lebanese women's status and welfare level: law, health and education.

### LAW

In Lebanon, a number of discriminatory provisions contained in national legislation have progressively been eliminated. In 1996 the Country signed the Convention on the Elimination of all Types of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), though with reservations<sup>19</sup> that yet maintain specific forms of gender discrimination disadvantaging women and limiting their decision making role.

One area which is of critical relevance for advancing Lebanese women's rights and freedoms is certainly related to the 15 personal status codes which differently discipline the issues relating to family, marriage, divorce, child custody, adoption, kinship, lineage, inheritance, and burial. Upon birth, children are affiliated to their father's religious affiliation – though they are allowed to change it at a later age if they so wish – and “in effect, a Lebanese citizen must belong to a religious sect in order to be married, divorced, resolve child custody or inheritance issues. The result is differing legal conditions for Lebanese citizens, depending on their religious affiliation, despite the fact that the Lebanese Constitution asserts equality among all citizens” (CRTD\_A, 2006: 14). Considering the inherently patriarchal nature of all monotheistic religions, personal status codes are embed with a number of discriminatory provisions against women, and no optional civil protocol is yet available.

Another issue of concern relates to the nationality law, Lebanese women are still prevented from passing their nationality to their children and foreign spouses – though with exceptions in very limited circumstances<sup>20</sup>.

For what specifically concerns violence against women, both Muslim and Christian courts in Lebanon recognize a husband's physical abuse of his wife as grounds for divorce or separation. However, the Penal Code still contains a number of discriminatory provisions, the most striking of which are: article nr. 503, which tolerates marital rape; article nr. 522 which allows for charges to be dropped in the event a legal marriage is concluded between the sexual offender and the victim, and article nr. 562, which allows mitigation of the penalty for crimes committed in the name of honour. Nonetheless, recent religious edicts issued by Lebanon's most senior Shiite Muslim cleric on issues of honor killings and wife beating possibly seem to open the way for some of these discriminatory provisions to be changed<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Precisely: Art. 9, par. 2, covering nationality issues; Art. 16 par. 1, covering personal status issues, and Art. 29 on arbitration.

<sup>20</sup> I.e. if the child is illegitimate or if the man dies and his wife is foreign (though Lebanese through marriage).

<sup>21</sup> In August 2007, Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah issued a religious edict denouncing honor killings as repulsive acts which are condemned and prohibited by religion. Later in 2007 he wrote that “a woman can respond to physical violence inflicted on her by a man with counter-violence as a self-defense measure”.

## HEALTH

The impact of neo-liberal economic policies prescribing cuts in social expenditure has contributed to a marked decline in the quality of public social services and a parallel increase in the private service provision accordingly, determining enhanced costs burden for users (Cilloni, 2007). Marked regional disparities in the quality, delivery and accessibility of health services is also an area of concern, insofar as it affects women's and girls' from poor and rural areas, as well as disabled women's capacity to have access to health care. National health insurance covers hardly half of the population (the national average is 44.9%), and it is unequally geographically distributed – i.e. it is highest in Mount Lebanon (53.8%) and lowest in Nabatieh (31.5%) (Charafeddine, 2007).

Families' inability to pay for increased welfare costs is generally absorbed by women, who struggle to provide for their families' unmet welfare needs - which nonetheless grow exponentially in times of crisis and war. Indeed, the impact of the 2006 conflict with Israel showed the shortcomings of the Lebanese public social insurance and safety net systems: they are narrow in scope, scattered, and not effectively targeted to the poor and vulnerable groups. Overall, they fail to fulfil their protection mandate adequately.

Clearly, women's increased reproductive burden affects not only their own well-being, but also their overall capacity to engage more actively into the economic, social and political spheres, as they become time-poorer and poorer.

### **Reproductive health**

Women's reproductive health indicators have significantly improved and life expectancy at birth is higher among females<sup>22</sup>. The average total fertility rate has dropped from 4.8 in the period 1970-75, to 2.3 in the period 2000-05 (UNDP 2007-08), and it is expected to decrease further in the coming years, reaching the replacement level (UNDP, 2003: 20).

Whereas the maternal mortality ratio per 100.000 live births in the period 1990-2004 is still as high as 100, the percentage of women accessing health care during pregnancy increased from 87.1 percent in 1990 to 93.9 percent in 2000, though with significant regional variations<sup>23</sup>. Infant and under-five child mortality rates are also declining (UNDP, 2003: 20).

For what concerns access to family planning, the contraceptive prevalence rate (including traditional contraceptive means) increased from 53% in the period 1987-1994 to 63% in 2000, though with marked regional disparities<sup>24</sup>. Abortion is generally permitted only under specific circumstances in which it is necessary to save the mother's life. According to Article 541 of the Penal Code, self-aborting a foetus or consensually having an abortion is considered a misdemeanour, which can carry a sentence of six months to three years' imprisonment. There are no available statistics neither on the number of abortions that actually take place in Lebanon nor on the health risks involved for women who make recourse to clandestine abortion (Zeina, 2004).

The official HIV prevalence rate in the age group 15-49 is 0.1% (UNDP, 2007-08).

### **Violence against women**

*“The most important step to oppose violence in the Arab world is to fight against its concealment, to remove the cloak of silence surrounding it and to expose it wherever it*

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<sup>22</sup> Life expectancy at birth, 2005 (years): female: 73.7, male: 69.4 (UNDP 2007-2008).

<sup>23</sup> It is 89.1% in the Bekaa, compared to 98.4% in Mount Lebanon. The most noticeable improvement in pre-natal care is in North Lebanon, that passed from 71% in 1996 to 90.4% in 2000 (UNDP, 2003: 19).

<sup>24</sup> It is 58% in Mount Lebanon, 64% in South Lebanon, and 70% in Bekaa and Beirut (UNDP, 2003: 19).

*occurs, whether in public or in private. Continued silence on the subject will incur a heavy cost for individuals, society, and even the state. It is equally important to place forms of violence that many women affected have come to accept as natural in the category of unacceptable behavior” (AHDR 2005: 10).*

Silence is the first and foremost obstacle to be faced if violence against women is to be effectively eradicated, thus allowing for women’s full-scale development of their potentials in the society. Up to day, no reliable statistics capturing the real incidence and magnitude of this phenomena are available, not least because families tend to make recourse to informal process of negotiation and justice – such as kin networks, informal channels, and mediators – before taking a dispute to a court of law ((Zeina, 2004). Such behaviour clearly disadvantages women, whose economically dependent status hinders their capacity to act autonomously for her own well-being.

Effective protection means - such as hotlines, shelters and the provision of legal counseling - are thoroughly lacking; whereas violence against women is itself not yet acknowledged in the national legislation as a criminal offence.

## **EDUCATION**

Educational institutions play a central role in facilitating or hindering women’s advancement. In terms of quantitative access to education, the gender gap in Lebanon has decreased at all levels. Rates of males and females are almost equal up till the age of 13 and then begin to favour females<sup>25</sup>, as dropout rates are higher for boys due to their earlier entry into the labor market. However, there is a significant gender and age gap in the illiteracy rates for the population 15 years old and over<sup>26</sup>, which nonetheless varies regionally.

High enrolment rates are mitigated by concerns regarding the quality of the education received. Women’s presence is higher in the free public schools, whereas it decreases in the private, more expensive and oftentimes confessional-based educational institutions, enrolment to which reflects a clear male preference<sup>27</sup>. In this respect, workshop participants further voiced their concern for the privatization of education as it is perceived to affect national (versus sectarian) belonging, and rather expressed their support for implementing compulsory and free public education for all, and for developing a unified school curricula that would go beyond confessionalism.

For what concerns universities, women’s enrolment rate is higher than men’s, but it follows a marked gender pattern. Indeed, women are overwhelmingly enrolled in humanities and social sciences, insofar as these faculties prepare them to take up those service-oriented professions which are socially and culturally constructed as typically female (i.e. teachers, nurses). The same gendered educational pattern is discernible in girl’s limited enrolment in vocational and technical training programmes, whereas boys gravitate towards industrial, agricultural or vocational education.

Persistent gender stereotypes reflected in school textbooks and curricula do play a major role in determining gendered career choices, thus perpetuating the current unequal gender division of labour, roles and responsibilities between men and women in the family and in the public sphere. Nonetheless, the gendered primary socialization dynamics at play within the family are also partially responsible for these outcomes, as parents continue to privilege sons over daughters in terms of quantitative and qualitative access to education.

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<sup>25</sup> In 2005, the combined gross enrolment ratio for primary, secondary and tertiary schools, was 86% for females and 83% for males (UNDP 2007-08).

<sup>26</sup> Total female illiteracy rate is 17.8%, whereas it is 9.3% for males. The rate is higher in the most deprived regions of the country, with Akkar standing at 30.5% compared to 7.7% of Aley (UNDP 2003: 10).

<sup>27</sup> Boys attending private schools are 52.4%, whereas girls are 48.7%. A higher percentage of private schools are concentrated in Beirut and Mount Lebanon compared to other regions of the country (UNDP, 2003: 10).

Finally, though gender-disaggregated data are not available for what concerns access to Information and Communication Technology<sup>28</sup> (ICT), workshop participants highlighted the need to train and strengthen women's access to it.

## **Italy-financed current and potential initiatives to advance Lebanese women's status**

Up to day, Italy-financed initiatives in this field have primarily focused on small projects to strengthen and/or provide social services for women and youth in rural villages affected by the 2006 war and in Palestinian refugee camps. Additionally, the UTL is currently supporting awareness raising and gender mainstreaming activities related to violence against women.

Integrating workshop participants' suggestions with relevant grey literature, the following recommendations for advancing Lebanese women's status can be traced, and aid channels identified accordingly.

### **Specific objective 2.1: enhance women's access to public and affordable health and social services**

- improve public provision of essential health services for women, children and their families by means of strengthening the network of Social Development Centres (SDCs) and enhance their staff's awareness of gender issues;
- improve poverty targeting mechanisms and social safety nets accordingly;
- establish alliances with women's NGOs and CSOs to provide extension social services in the poorest and marginalized areas of the Country;
- ensure that all health policies and programmes integrate a gender perspective.

Suggested aid channel: UTL direct management.

Primary stakeholders: Lebanese line ministries, Lebanese women's NGOs and CSOs.

### **Specific objective 2.2: eradicate violence against women**

- provision of specialized services (i.e. hotlines, legal counselling and assistance) and places in which to host temporarily women victims of domestic violence (i.e. shelters);
- provide gender sensitization opportunities for doctors, nurses, police officers, particularly focusing on the issue of domestic violence;
- support women's NGOs and CSOs activities aiming to foster women's self-esteem, personal development and awareness of their rights;
- support sensibilization campaigns through media, in order to foster attitudes and behavioural changes;
- disseminate the CEDAW provisions for parliamentarians, government and law enforcement officials, the judiciary, health and social service providers, religious community leaders, CSOs, NGOs, and the general public, through the provision of learning and awareness-raising opportunities, as well as through media;

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<sup>28</sup> In Lebanon, internet users are only 169 people out of 1.000 (UNDP 2007-08).

- mainstream and institutionalize policies and programs addressing the issues of violence against women and gender-based violence;
- enact legislation on violence against women and promote its definition as a criminal offence.

Suggested aid channel: UTL direct management and Multilateral

Primary stakeholders: Lebanese women's NGOs and CSOs, NCLW, UNFPA. Specific forms of partnerships with Italian women's NGOs specialized on issues of violence against women can also be envisaged.

**Specific objective 2.3: facilitate an enabling environment for women's individual and collective empowerment**

- provide and/or strengthen the provision of public spaces for socialization, exchange, discussion, etc. where women and girls can have un-mediated access (i.e. women's centres, sports clubs, internet spots); and strengthen and/or enable the establishment of women's clubs, associations and organizations accordingly;
- encourage young women's active participation into societal life, by fostering personal development and life skills opportunities;
- reinforce the presence and/or outreach capacity of non-confessional women's NGOs towards the urban and rural peripheries, by combining support for essential services provision (i.e. concerning violence against women) with activities related to women's empowerment;
- stimulate exchange and networking opportunities among Lebanese women's NGOs and CSOs, as well as at the regional and international level.

Suggested aid channel: UTL direct management, as well as ART GOLD Program.

Primary stakeholders: Lebanese women's NGOs and CSOs.

**Specific objective 2.4: eliminate gender discrimination at all levels and in all fields of education**

- revise educational textbooks and curricula to eliminate gender stereotypes;
- mainstream gender equality in school curricula, and specifically provide learning opportunities related to reproductive health and violence against women;
- enhance training of teaching staff on gender equality issues;
- encourage diversification of the educational choices of boys and girls in order to alter stereotyped gendered career choice patterns;
- provide girls and women with ICT learning opportunities and support the establishment of internet points they can have un-mediated access to;
- eradicate illiteracy by providing alphabetization opportunities, especially in rural areas.

Suggested aid channel: UTL direct management.

Primary stakeholders: Lebanese line ministries, NCLW and Lebanese women's NGOs and CSOs.

**Specific objective 2.5: raise society's awareness of and support for gender equality**

- promote gender awareness-raising and sensibilization campaigns directed towards men and youth by means of media campaigns, educational programs in schools and cultural centres that would project positive images of women and of the equal status and responsibilities of women and men in the private and public spheres;
- support civil society's advocacy initiatives aiming to eliminate all discriminatory provisions contained in the national legislation.

Suggested aid channel: UTL direct management.

Primary stakeholders: Lebanese line ministries, NCLW and Lebanese women's NGOs and CSOs.

### **Section III: Women's participation into decision-making processes at the local and national level**

Despite having been acknowledged their full political rights since 1953, and the significant improvements registered in terms of educational attainments, Lebanese women's presence in decision-making processes and representative institutions at the local and at the national level remains scant. Several factors contribute to explaining these poor outcomes.

Traditionally, the 'public sphere' has been socially and culturally constructed as a male space, whereas women have been confined into the 'private/domestic one' and marginalized from formal community and national politics. In Lebanon, such entrenched patriarchal prejudices are reflected i.e. in the "clan/family/sect-based election law [...] since women are rarely permitted to represent specific groups when seats are apportioned" (AHDR, 2005: 100); whereas politics at large is thoroughly family-based, whereby fathers transfer their power to sons, and women tend to give loyalty to their men first.

The legacy of women's centuries-old marginalization from the 'public sphere' lies at the roots of their higher levels of human poverty and time poverty vis-à-vis men – as determined by the unequal distribution of the reproductive burden. Gender stereotypes perpetuated through all levels of education and discriminatory provisions which are still contained in the national legislation – first and foremost the confessional-based personal status laws – do also contribute to constrain women's participation into politics, insofar as they perpetuate the image of politics as a male space and of women's inferior status vis-à-vis men. Women's interiorization of such institutionalized gender bias is yet another powerful factor concurring to women's persistently low presence into the higher echelons of the decision-making structures.

Overall, the interplay of these factors determines women's scarce endowment with key material and immaterial resources (knowledge, technical expertise, formal and informal networks, etc.) to engage more actively in representative politics at the local and national level as well as to participate in decision-making processes at all levels.

#### **The national level: the presence of women in representative and administrative institutions**

In line with the regional trend whereby women's presence in Arab parliaments is the lowest in the world<sup>29</sup>, today in Lebanon only 6 out of 128 parliamentarians are women, corresponding to 4.7%. Political parties' leadership is still strongly held by men, and women's avenues for entering national representative politics are thoroughly linked to their familial connections to politicians.

For what concerns the executive sphere, women first accessed ministerial posts only in 2004, when two women have been appointed Ministers. In the same year, the candidacy of a woman to the Presidency of the Republic has first been registered (Baghdadi, 2007). To-date, only one woman seats as Minister in the government (though its formation is expected to change as a result of the pending presidential elections).

Women's presence in top key administrative positions is scarce, whereas their overall presence in the civil sector does not exceed 6.1% (CRTD\_A, 2006: 18).

The National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) is the official body responsible for catalyzing and coordinating national dialogue and action for the advancement of women and

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<sup>29</sup> It is below 10% (AHDR, 2005: 9).

gender equality in Lebanon, and it holds a consultative status to the government and other public institutions. It is endowed with implementation tasks concerning gender mainstreaming in the formulation and monitoring of various plans of action, priority setting, policy and legislative changes formulation, and the undertaking of studies and activities related to women's advancement; and with coordination tasks with government institutions and NGOs at the local level as well as regional and international bodies (Khalaf, 2004: 4).

However, its institutional capacity is weak, and it is severely under-resourced and understaffed, thus reflecting the lack of a strong institutional legitimization for their agency. Overall, "it does not have the authority or capacity to effectively [...] support gender mainstreaming across all sectors and levels of Government to bring about equality for women and men in all fields." (CEDAW, 2008: 4). Finally, it lacks effective communication and coordination with NGOs and with the Lebanese women's movement (Khalaf, 2004: 6).

Up to day, over twenty-four Gender Focal Points (GFPs) from different line ministries and official governmental departments have been established to promote and monitor gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes (Nimah, 2007). However, GFPs could not achieve a significant impact due to a number of different factors: weak collaboration and networking with the NCLW; under-funding; as well as the indifference encountered within their working environment among both men and women colleagues (El-Khoury, 2004, quoted in Khalaf, 2004: 6).

### Women's presence in the local representative institutions

Women's presence in local representative institutions is slightly increasing over time, as it moved from 139 in 1996 to 215 in 2004<sup>30</sup>, and currently there are 16 women mayors. The table below illustrates the gender-disaggregated results of the latest municipal elections (2004):

*Table 1 - Females and males prospective candidates and elected in 2004 municipal elections<sup>31</sup>*

	Women		Men		Total
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
Prospective candidates	552	3.0%	18.054	97.0%	18.606
Elected	215	2.4%	8817	97.6%	9.032
Ratio of elected to prospective candidates (%)	38.9%		48.8%		48.5%

The overarching disparity in the absolute numbers of women's and men's candidacies notwithstanding, the gender gap in the ratio of elected to prospective candidates is not similarly severe, thus highlighting how the bottleneck is unlikely to be found in people's unwillingness to vote for women, but rather in the low rate of women who actually stand for local elections. Indeed, the selection of prospective candidates tends to happen on a family basis, whose entrenched patriarchal structure results in a marked male preference. Therefore, individual charisma, merit and popularity is far more crucial for women than for men in gaining access to local elections. Additionally, there are significant regional disparities in the number of women standing for elections and in their success rate, as shown in the following table, ordered by percentage of women elected in the 2004 municipal elections:

<sup>30</sup> though the number of the municipalities itself has passed from 755 to 900 Nrs of municipalities varies, as well as precise nrs of women effectively elected (from 215 to 230).

<sup>31</sup> Adapted from: CRTD\_A and Friederich Ebert Stiftung, 2006, Table 1, p.18

Table 2: Women elected in local councils in 2004 and in 1996 by governorate<sup>32</sup>

By governorate	Nr. of women prospective candidates (2004)	Nr. of women elected (2004)	% of women elected <sup>33</sup> (2004)	Nr. of women prospective candidates (1996)	Nr. of women elected (1996)	% of women elected (1996)
Bekka	37	18	48.6	25	13	52
Baalbek/Hermel	18	8	44.4	--	--	--
Mount Lebanon	170	75	44.1	142	94	34
South	52	21	40.4	23	5	12
North	131	50	38.2	130	63	48.5
Akkar	68	25	36.8	--	--	--
Nabatieh	67	17	25.4	16	9	68
Beirut	9	1	11.1	17	1	5.8
Total	552	215	38.9	353	139	

Moving on to the level of actual participation into local councils' decision-making processes, elected members' lack of any salary nor reimbursement for their attendance implies that their participation is pendant upon their availability of extra sources of income/wealth and time to dedicate to their involvement into politics. This determines clearly discernible patterns of class and gender discrimination, whereby women result as the most disadvantaged insofar as they're poorer than men with regards to access to income and time availability. Furthermore, women elected are oftentimes faced with their male colleagues' resistance, as they are usually attributed the direction of unimportant municipal committees, or else, meetings are fixed at inconvenient times for them to partake. Their widespread lack of experience in managing local community's affairs has not received sufficient attention nor support by women's governmental and non-governmental organizations, nor are they organized in any supra-political affiliation network. In the face of these significant structural constraints, their capacity to function within local councils is thus left to their own individual agency.

Nonetheless, both elected women's and their male colleagues' capacity is affected by the weaknesses of the process of state decentralization, whereby Law 118/1977 still maintains consistent discretionary powers in the hands of governmental officers (Cilloni, 2007: 10). Municipalities are under-staffed and underfinanced, receive irregular fund transfers from the state and budgets are generally absorbed by infrastructural works. Therefore, elected members' capacity to act on the territory largely depends on the networks and extra-budgetary resources they are capable to mobilise otherwise.

### Lebanese women's non-governmental organizations

When we turn our attention towards the civil society sphere, we are faced with a marked division between women's organizations which predominantly base their activities in Beirut, and those which are localized in the urban and rural 'peripheries'.

For what concerns the first, they are predominantly active in research, awareness-raising, lobbying and advocacy activities to promote needed legislative and administrative changes to foster gender equality; from the promotion of the nationality campaign, to advocating for an optional and/or unified secular personal status code as well as to establish a women's quota for national and local elections and to promote 'engendering the national budget' initiatives.

<sup>32</sup> Adapted from: CRTD\_A and Friederich Ebert Stiftung, 2006, Table 1, p.18 and from: CRTD\_A, 2006: 17.

<sup>33</sup> It means the percentage of women elected out of the total number of women who stood for election.

Due to their overwhelmingly secular standpoint, their impact is severely affected by the decrease in national versus sectarian sense of belonging and by the overall political and security instabilities which take precedence over women's demands. Nonetheless, their scarce rooting outside the capital limits their mobilization and representative capacity, which is further hindered by their lack of coordination and team work, as well as by discernible patterns of generational and class bias. Overall, they are failing to increase the critical mass needed to foster changes at the national and local level to breach in the system that perpetuates women's marginalization from the public sphere.

Outside Beirut, both in urban and rural areas, there are conspicuous numbers of women's associations, clubs, organizations. However, they are mostly welfare-oriented and identity/confessional-based. Whereas their activities are relevant and sometimes crucial in meeting certain women's and their families' practical needs, their welfare-oriented nature does not enable the emergence of more active local stakeholders that could actively engage in the processes of local and national development.

## **Italy-financed current and potential initiatives in the realm of women's participation into local and national politics**

Up to day, and peculiarly in light of the initial post-conflict recovery intervention phase, few Italian sponsored initiatives have been actively supporting Lebanese women's engagement into local and national governance. Indeed - as workshop's participants aptly voiced – women's enhanced, effective and sustained participation cannot be achieved without addressing the gender dynamics of discrimination which lie at the roots of their persistent marginalization from the public sphere. Thus, the recommendations related to women's economic and social empowerment contained in the previous sections will not be here repeated, but have to be considered as intrinsically interrelated to those under mentioned.

### **Specific objective 3.1: Strengthen women's capacity to participate effectively in local representative politics and in planning for local development**

In light of the entrenched political instabilities of the Country and their repercussions in terms of confessional-based politics – which severely affect women's capacity to enter the higher echelons of representative politics – focusing on the local level seems to provide a porous context for change to happen on the ground. Recommendations for actions thus include

- strengthen current women elected members' capacities in planning for local development, as well as their leadership and communication skills; as well as provide similar opportunities for prospective women candidates in the next round of municipal elections;
- facilitate exchanging and networking opportunities among women elected in the municipalities throughout the Country through the organization of workshops, seminars and capacity-building opportunities;
- provide opportunities for women elected in local councils to meet and dialogue with women's CSOs and NGOs, women parliamentarians and the NCLW, so as to set the ground and build constituencies for the advancement of gender-sensitive agendas and platforms at all levels;
- project positive images of women who are successfully engaging into local and national politics.

Suggested aid channel: ART GOLD Program and Multilateral

Primary stakeholders: women elected in local councils, NCLW, Lebanese women's NGOs and CSOs, women parliamentarians.

### **Specific objective 3.2: Build the capacities for women and women's NGOs to become active and acknowledged stakeholders in local and national governance**

The capacity-building of Lebanese women's NGOs and CSOs is one of the strategic axis that the UTL will be consistently addressing throughout its overall framework of emergency and development interventions in the Country. Indeed, women's organizations are considered to be potentially key governance stakeholders, whose strengthening could strategically foster improvements in advancing gender equality at all levels. Peculiarly for what concerns enhancing women's political participation, recommendations include:

- reinforce the presence and/or outreach capacity of urban-based non-governmental secular/non-confessional organizations towards the urban and rural peripheries;

- enable the emergence of autonomous women's clubs, associations and organizations in the urban and rural peripheries by providing them i.e. with public spaces in which to meet and organize their activities; as well as with capacity-building and exchanging opportunities with other women's organizations; while facilitating an enabling environment for young women to become actively engaged into societal life;
- strengthen women's organizations' advocacy capacity and effectiveness in the promotion of the legislative and administrative changes necessary to achieve full and substantial gender equality for all women and men.

Suggested aid channel: UTL direct management and Multilateral

Primary stakeholders: Lebanese women's NGOs and CSOs, NCLW.

**Specific objective 3.3: Strengthen and enhance the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming mechanisms at the national level**

- strengthen NCLW's capacity to support gender mainstreaming across all sectors and levels of Government;
- institute a system of collaboration and networking between the national machinery and the GFPs so as to mutually strengthen and multiply the impact of their agency;
- enhance NCLW's communication, coordination and networking capacities towards Lebanese women's NGOs and CSOs in order to strengthen its legitimacy and accountability both downwards (i.e. towards rural women) and upwards (i.e. towards the government);

Suggested aid channel: UTL direct management and Multilateral

Primary stakeholders: NCLW, GFPs within Lebanese line ministries.

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## Annex I: Workshop's letter of invitation



### **“Positioning gender and women’s empowerment within the framework of international cooperation initiatives in Lebanon : - challenges, priorities and strategies”**

***Participatory workshop to discuss future gender guide lines for the Italian Cooperation interventions in Lebanon for the period 2008-2011***

**Le Meridien Commodore Hotel, Beirut**  
**Saturday the 8<sup>th</sup> of December, 2007**  
*Development Cooperation Office of the Italian Embassy*

In the framework of the commitment expressed by the Italian Government in Stockholm (2006) and Paris III (2007) Conferences, the Italian Development Cooperation Office in Lebanon (UTL) is currently implementing a number of development cooperation initiatives at different levels, aiming to facilitate the economic, social and infrastructural recovery of Lebanon.

Specifically for what concerns gender issues and women's empowerment initiatives, the interventions so far supported by the IC have included Italian NGOs projects focusing on Lebanese women's economic and social empowerment; multilateral interventions and actions to fight gender-based violence within the framework of UNSCR 1325; as well as wider initiatives aiming to improve local governance through the enhancement of women's participation in the public sphere, while raising local communities' awareness on gender-related issues. .

Nonetheless, and in line with the UNDP 2005 Arab Human Development Report, the IC is firmly intentioned to deepen and widen such ongoing initiatives, starting from mainstreaming gender throughout its overall framework of emergency and development interventions in Lebanon, up to envisioning specific women's empowerment initiatives at the local and national level.

In order to do this, the UTL strongly believes that it is utmost necessary to initiate a **participatory programming phase** whereby Italian and Lebanese governmental and non-governmental stakeholders together with representatives of international organizations and donor countries would jointly **brainstorm over strategies, priorities and appropriate methodologies of intervention to support Lebanese women's social, economic and political empowerment and to mainstream a gender perspective in the national development plans and strategy.**

The workshop will be articulated over **three main axes of interventions**, namely:

- a. women in economy: agricultural development, micro enterprises, micro credit, vocational training, Local Economic Development Agencies, et al.;
- b. women in welfare: social services provided by women internally and externally to their families; primary education; health and reproductive health; domestic violence;

- c. women and governance: women's presence, role and participation in politics at the local and national level; strengths and weaknesses of Lebanese women's organizations as local and national governance stakeholders; role of line institutions and ministries, et. al.

For each of the topics here suggested, the overall discussion framework will be set through brief introductory talks whereby a country-wide view will be enriched with local development perspectives. Upon conclusion of the morning session, and according to each own interest and/or expertise, participants will be asked to join one of **three thematic working groups**, whereby inputs, suggestions, recommendations will be developed and presented during the plenary concluding session. A detailed workshop program will follow this communication shortly.

In terms of expected output, the UTL hopes that this participatory workshop will prove useful to **identify relevant suggestions that would be integrated in the gender guidelines that the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is currently developing as a tool to for holistic Country strategy planning**. Furthermore, it is envisioned that this opportunity will contribute to **facilitating coordination, networking and partnerships-building among different governmental, non-governmental and international stakeholders** within a shared framework of intervention. Finally, it is expected that the workshop and its proceedings will overall **contribute to foster national dialogue and debate on gender issues in Lebanon**.

It is thus with great pleasure that we wish to invite the **Italian and Lebanese NGOs, CSOs and experts, national line ministries and local authorities, women academics, major international agencies and institutions, donor countries representatives, international organizations and United Nations agencies** working on gender issues in Lebanon to take part to this workshop, that will take place at **Le Meridien Commodore Hotel on Saturday the 8h of December 2007, from 9.00 a.m. to 16.30 p.m.** English/Arabic simultaneous translation will be provided to all participants.

Please refer to the Italian Cooperation Office in Beirut for any request of additional information, asking of dr.ssa Giorgia De Paoli, Italian Gender Expert.  
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Email: [giorgia.depaoli.est@esteri.it](mailto:giorgia.depaoli.est@esteri.it)

## Annex II: Workshop's program



### Positioning gender and women's empowerment within the framework of international cooperation initiatives in Lebanon: challenges, priorities and strategies

#### **Participatory workshop to discuss future gender guide lines for the Italian Cooperation interventions in Lebanon for the period 2008-2011**

Development Cooperation Office of the Italian Embassy

**Le Meridien Commodore Hotel, Beirut  
Saturday the 8<sup>th</sup> of December, 2007**

9.00 - 9.30	Registration of the workshop participants
9.30 - 9.40	Welcoming word <i>H. E. Gabriele Checchia, Italian Ambassador in Lebanon</i>
9.40 - 9.55	Presentation of the workshop programme and overall framework <i>Fabio Melloni, Director of the Italian Development Cooperation Office in Lebanon</i>
9.55 - 10.10	Women's visible and unrecognized contributions to the national economy <i>Ms. Ilina Srour, Consultation and Research Institute (CRI)</i>
10.10 – 10.25	Women's economic empowerment: local development perspectives and challenges <i>Ms. Lina Abou-Habib, Executive Director of CRTD_A</i>
10.25 – 10.40	Women and welfare: national priorities, strategies and challenges <i>Ms. Salam Chreim, Chief Department of Juvenile Protection at the Ministry of Social Affairs</i>
10.40 – 10.55	The status of Lebanese women: Avenues for a holistic conception of empowerment <i>Dr. Fahima Charafeddine, Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Vice-President of the National Committee to Follow-up on Women Affairs</i>
10.55 – 11.20	Coffee Break
11.20 – 11.35	Women participation in local governance: avenues for political empowerment <i>Ms. Samira Baghdadi, Councilor of the municipality of Tripoli</i>
11.35 – 11.50	Women's machineries and gender mainstreaming: institutional perspectives <i>Dr. Leila Nimah, Secretary General of the National Commission for Lebanese Women</i>
11.50 – 12.30	Questions and answers from the audience
12.30 – 14.00	Lunch break
14.00 – 15.30	Participation into the three thematic working groups: (1) Women and Economy; (2) Women and Welfare; (3) Women and Governance
15.30 – 16.15	Reports into plenary session from each of the three working groups
16.15 – 16.30	Concluding remarks

## Annex III: Validation Workshop's letter of invitation



**Gender guidelines  
for the Italian Development Cooperation interventions in Lebanon  
for the period 2008-2010**

**Validation Workshop**  
**Crowne Plaza Hotel, Hamra Street, Beirut**  
**Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> of March, 2008**  
*Development Cooperation Office of the Italian Embassy*

Dearest,

As you might know, the Italian Cooperation Office (UTL) is currently undergoing a process of reviewing its Country strategy, with a particular emphasis on the identification of potential gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment initiatives for the period 2008-2010.

On December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007 the UTL organized in Beirut a participatory workshop that was attended by over 130 women and men working in Lebanese ministries, governmental organizations and local councils; Lebanese and International NGOs and CSOs; Lebanese Universities and Media; Multilateral Agencies and Donor organizations.

The proposals, suggestions and recommendations received in that occasion, now constitute the core of the **Gender Guidelines** that we are willing to share with the different stakeholders who participated in this process, not least to receive your feedback. Therefore, the UTL has set to organize a **validation workshop**, which will take place on **Thursday, the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2008**, at the **Crowne Plaza Hotel, Beirut**.

On that occasion, we will have a brief presentation of each of the different areas that we are planning to be involved in, commented by a Lebanese speaker, and followed by some time for discussion in plenary session. Accordingly, please give us an email of yours if you wish to receive the executive summary of the Gender Guidelines prior to the event, so that you might be able to share it with your organization and possibly prepare comments on it.

The workshop will last approximately from 9.00 a.m. until 13.00 – please find attached the detailed program in Arabic. English/Arabic simultaneous translation will be provided to all participants.

Prompt confirmation of your participation to the event will be highly appreciated.

Please refer to the Italian Cooperation Office in Beirut for any request of additional information, asking of dr.ssa Giorgia De Paoli, or of dr.ssa Elena Zambelli, Italian Gender Experts.

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## Annex IV: Validation Workshop's program



### Gender guidelines for the Italian Development Cooperation activities in Lebanon for the period 2008-2010

**Validation Workshop**  
**Crowne Plaza Hotel, Hamra Street, Beirut**  
**Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> of March, 2008**  
*Development Cooperation Office of the Italian Embassy*

#### Workshop programme

8.30 – 9.00	Registration of the participants
9.00 – 9.20	Welcoming word <i>Daniela Tonon, First Secretary, Embassy of Italy in Lebanon</i>
9.20 – 9.30	Presentation of the gender guidelines <i>Fabio Melloni, Director of the Italian Development Cooperation Office in Lebanon</i>
9.30 – 10.00	Lebanese women's economic participation: prospective priorities for interventions Guidelines presented by: <i>Giorgia Depaoli, Gender Expert, Italian Development Cooperation Office</i> Commented by: <i>May Mezher, Technical Expert of the National Observatory for Women in Agriculture and Rural Areas (NOWARA) – TERCOM Project, Ministry of Agriculture</i>
10.00 – 10.30	Questions and answers from the audience
10.30 – 10.50	<i>Coffee Break</i>
10.50 – 11.20	The status of Lebanese women: prospective priorities for interventions Guidelines presented by: <i>Chiara Coletti, Programme Officer, Italian Development Cooperation Office</i> Commented by: <i>Zeina Mezher, WE PASS Project Manager</i>
11.20 – 11.50	Questions and answers from the audience
11.50 – 12.20	Women's participation into decision-making processes at the local and national level: prospective priorities for interventions Guidelines presented by: <i>Elena Zambelli, Gender Expert, Italian Development Cooperation Office</i> Commented by: <i>Wisam Arja, member of the Municipality of Raas Baalbeck</i>
12.20 – 12.50	Questions and answers from the audience
12.50 – 13.10	Concluding remarks

## **Annex V: Workshops' participant organizations' list<sup>34</sup>**

### **Lebanese Ministries and Governmental Organizations**

Central Administration of Statistics      Ministry of Social Affairs  
Council for Development and Reconstruction      Ministry of Education and Higher Education  
Ministry of Agriculture      National Commission for Lebanese Women  
Ministry of Health

### **Lebanese and foreign Municipalities' members**

Municipality of Abbassyeh      Municipality of Tripoli  
Municipalità di Raas Balbeck      Municipalità of Kweikh  
Municipality of Rome

### **Lebanese Non Governmental Organizations, Associations, Cooperatives**

Ain Ebel Women's Cooperative  
Al Batoul Cooperative  
Al Mabarrat Association  
Al Majmoua Lebanese Association for Development  
Al Moasat  
Aley Women's Association  
Amel Association  
Assindiyan Cooperative  
Association of Civic Responsibility  
Batool  
Caritas - Lebanon  
Collective for Research and Training on Development- Action (CRTD\_A)  
Communauté Maryam et Martha  
Cultural Association of Hermel  
Deir el Ahmar Women's Association  
Development for People and Nature  
Association (DPNA)  
Development Studies Association (DSA)  
Halloussyeh Women's Cooperative  
Hariri Foundation  
Imam Sadr Foundation  
Jibaluna Cooperative  
KAFA  
Lebanese Council to resist violence against women (LECORVAW)  
Lebanese Council of Women (LCW)  
Lebanese Women's Affairs Association  
Lebanon Family Planning Association  
Mada  
Mouvement Social  
Nabaa  
Najdeh Association  
Nidaa al Ard  
Organization for the development of mankind  
Palestinian Arab Women League (PAWL)  
Qana Women's Association  
Ras Al Matn Women's Society  
Renè Moawad Foundation  
Social Advancement Association  
Tayyibat  
Women's Committees of the WEPASS project

### **Lebanese Universities**

American University of Beirut (AUB)

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<sup>34</sup> Please note that we have listed here only the organizations who actually participated in one of the two workshops and whose members registered at the reception desk. Please communicate us any mistake and/or omission.

**Lebanese Media**

Byblos Rama Magazine  
Future Newspaper

Orange TV

**International Non-Governmental Organizations**

Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED)  
Africa 70  
Amnesty International  
ARCI Culture and Development (ARCS)  
AVSI  
Centre for Sanitary Education and Appropriate Technologies (CESTAS)  
Civil Volunteer Group (GVC)  
CTM – Lecce  
Danish Refugee Council (DRC)  
Institute for University Cooperation (ICU)  
International Co-operation South-South (CISS)  
INTERSOS  
Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari (IAM-Bari)  
Movimondo  
Regional Intervention Centre for Cooperation (CRIC)  
Research and Cooperation (RC)  
Unity and Cooperation for People's Development (UCODEP)  
Young Women Christian Association (YWCA)

**Multilateral Agencies and Donor Organizations**

German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ)  
International Organization for Migration (IOM)  
Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development  
Swiss Agency for Development  
United Nations Development Program (UNDP)  
UNDP- ART GOLD Program  
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)  
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)  
UNFPA – WE PASS Project  
UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)  
UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)