



SUPPORTING NGOs FOR WOMEN IN TIMES OF THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

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Introduction:

There is no doubt that the spread of the global COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected many aspects of our lives, not just at the health level, but also encompassing all levels.

Pandemics are one of the most challenging crises, as they reveal the existing problems and deepen them further, and the COVID-19 pandemic is the most serious pandemic from what it had caused in global closure and brought about huge loss and risk for marginalized groups, especially women. With the onset of the crisis, many indicators pointed to the issue of increasing violence against women, and the United Nations Secretary-General (Antonio Guterres) announced an appeal to confront violence against women and the importance of governmental efforts as well as civil society.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is different for women and men, despite the fact that it has led to the suffering of everyone. However, women are more affected by crises, pandemics and disasters, because women constitute the largest share of workers in the health sector and the informal sector, adding to the fact that they are the caretakers of families and support them during times of crisis.

Along with the precautionary measures that the government imposed by reducing the numbers of workers and working from home, as well as suspending schools, the woman found herself under a great challenge, trying to balance between working at home and caring for her children throughout the day, and caring for her husband who now stays longer hours inside the house.

She assumed all the necessary social roles in just under one month, in parallel with her concern for hygiene and sterilization of the home and all family members for fear of transmitting the virus to any of them. The burden exponentially increased on her, and the violence against her also increased.

Did the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affect the capabilities of non-governmental associations to support women?!

Given the important role NGOs play in empowering women, the question has become: how has the epidemic affected NGOs and their ability to support women and marginalized groups?

Therefore, the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights conducted a survey of 100 civil societies to identify the impact of the virus on its work and its ability to support women, where Egyptian NGOs' roles vary between relief and urgent needs, and monitoring the impact of the disaster to plan for the existing reality and the future. On top of that, working to maintain development rates for the benefit of society, and analyzing the crisis and its impact to come up with creative solutions and lessons to learn for the future.

The results of the survey revealed the size of the impact of the virus on the private sector, especially NGOs, starting with the spread of the virus and the consequent

closing procedures. It was revealed that 67.2% of the societies under study reported that field activities had ceased, and 47.4% reported that the funding was partially or completely lost, while 44% of their workers were forced to work from home.

However, NGOs did not hesitate to play an important role in limiting the effects of the pandemic and facing the crisis. The loss of funding was not a hindrance, and the organizations resorted to local financing and collecting donations to provide the necessary financial resources to carry out activities. The associations relied on the contributions of the board of directors by 66.4%, then on donations by 56.9%, then annual membership contributions by 30.2%, and government and international financing came at the lowest percentages, where government funding came 6.9%, and international financing 5.2%.

Associations were able to play many roles in the light of this crisis, and the activities provided by NGOs varied between relief and by providing direct support, including what is dedicated to sustainable development, helping families to create alternatives and providing psychological and legal support. Furthermore, it also includes participating in dialogue with the authorities to propose policies for change.

It was also revealed that 77.6% of civil societies in the study confirmed spreading awareness among citizens by providing information about the virus and how to avoid infection, followed by providing material support with 69%, then providing psychological support with 42.2%.

After the crisis and the changing measures taken by the government, it was predicted that many associations will emerge from the crisis stronger, as the associations in the study saw that the pandemic and the effects of it are very difficult, but the reality bears hope for NGOs, as 78.2% of associations confirmed that it created new ways to work, and 69.3% of the associations stated that the pandemic opened horizons for them to work in new areas in which they did not work. It was noted that the crisis was a great opportunity for networking between NGOs, in which 70.7% of the NGOs in the study confirmed that they networked with other associations in many cases, including providing awareness about the virus and ways to avoid infection by 63.9%, sharing information by 43.4%, and collecting data by 41%.

This development came as a result of the flexibility enjoyed by NGOs in adding new areas of work, and in finding broader areas of work through networking with other NGOs, as carrying out any work independently was not considered a possibility especially in light of this crisis. The effect of COVID-19 on women and their challenges was monitored by the civil society organizations, with 80.8% noting financial problems, 65.4% noting health problems, followed by their exposure to family violence from the husband or parents by 50%, and job losses by 49%.

Women were also affected by the weak and ineffective health services related to family planning and reproductive health services, as a result of the health sector's approach to prioritizing the virus. It was noted that 45.2% of the NGOs in the study

stated that those services are difficult to provide, and 15.4% noted that they are not available.

Women were also affected by the weak response measures by protection agencies, legal authorities, and courts, especially when exposed to violence. For instance, 52.9% of the NGOs in the study confirmed that those services faced difficulties responding to women exposed to violence, and 32.7% noted that they were not a priority.

Recommendations:

After analyzing the survey, the center ended with several recommendations that can be mentioned, the most important of which are as follows:

Recommendations for NGOs:

- Contribute to supporting networking among all NGOs, especially that 62.9% of the associations in the study work at a national level.
- The importance of partnership between NGOs and different companies and the social responsibility of those companies, especially those that produce sterilization and disinfection tools that are necessary in the face of the pandemic, as NGOs are the ones who can reach the groups most affected by the pandemic.

Recommendations on protecting women from violence:

- The necessity of considering the qualitative dimension in all the procedures and decisions taken by the government, especially the decisions related to work in courts, employment, compensation, social and health services, and the provision of safe havens for abuses.
- The speed of litigation procedures in family cases, especially alimony, and the suspension of the work of the courts for a long time, and how most men resorted to stop paying alimony to the divorced woman.