

MINUTES

Steering Committee Meeting, no. 4

July 10, 2019

Virtual connections included WBG offices in
Baghdad, Iraq; Amman, Jordan; Beirut, Lebanon
Washington DC, Cairo



Chair: Saroj Kumar Jha, Regional Director World Bank

Discussion Points:

- It was noted that having delegations from all three countries and the development partners come together for a fourth Steering Committee meeting to discuss issues pertaining to enhancing women's economic opportunities in the region is an achievement in and of itself. Jha also mentioned that he has noticed an increasing focus on women as a political priority across the three countries.
- Dr. Ibtissam presented the detailed, costed **Iraq country work plan**, emphasizing that it was developed within the context of Iraq, inclusive of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and in consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society and academia. The MGF Iraq work plan focuses on strengthening implementation of legal aspects related to women's economic inclusion and on addressing specific constraints in collaboration with the private sector, such as child care and safe, family friendly work environment. Women's access to property and land ownership will also be addressed. In this first period, there will be a strong focus on capacity building: of government on gender sensitive budgeting, among other; of female entrepreneurs through incubators; of rural women through targeted vocational training; and, of NGOs to fully participate in activities on women's economic empowerment and the implementation of the MGF. Restrictive social norms will be worked on across the plan, by leveraging other projects to operationalize activities. The SC commended the work plan but noted that it is ambitious in scope and timeline, suggesting that the team consider clarifying what is feasible to achieve within the 18-month period, and what may be activities that could continue into subsequent years. The Iraq MGF team was also urged to be careful when implementing the activity on preferential agreements to ensure that there is no backlash.
- The newly appointed National Coordinator of the MGF in Lebanon, Frances Abouzeid, presented the detailed, costed **Lebanon country work plan**. It was emphasized that the Ministry of State for Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth (EEWAY) just took over the leadership of the MGF on behalf of the Government of Lebanon about a month ago and that therefore, for some of the activities, the team has not yet had a chance to discuss details with corresponding government entities, something that is planned for the coming weeks. The MGF Lebanon work plan adopts a "dual-track approach", balancing national-level strategic interventions with selective activity-level pilots. Under this first period, the plan will create the building blocks for change by focusing on building the evidence base on issues such as labor market and care economy; instituting coordination mechanisms for increased collaboration on women's economic empowerment; initiating legal reforms with a focus on sexual harassment; and developing capacity among relevant public and private sectors. Several activities work directly with the private sector related to, for example, leadership, technology and overall adoption of family friendly practices. Communications and outreach activities aim to address cultural barriers and promote rights to incentivize behavioral change. The SC was pleased to see the more focused approach with well-defined activities and costing but expressed

concerns with what seemed to be a lack of broader government ownership of the plan and the lack of identification of key government entities to lead and be involved in the different activities, as well as some examples of private sector partners. The SC urged the Lebanon MGF team to meet with the relevant partners to specifically discuss the different activities and update the work plan based on the identification of lead government entities for the activities that are currently under EEWAY as temporary custodian. The Lebanon Team was also urged to identify private sector counterparts in the revised plan.

- The changes to the **Regional Work Plan** – based on the suggestions presented in the previous Steering Committee meeting- were presented. The revised plan includes a more detailed budget breakdown and a mapping of linkages between the country and regional priorities. The regional plan focuses on the core activities such as making the MGF Secretariat operational, the Mashreq Gender Conference, the State of the Mashreq Women report and a refugee component. It further introduces thematic deep dives on issues that are of relevance across the three countries as a means to provide information sharing, the generation of knowledge and specific guidance to country teams based on local and international evidence and good practices. The first suggested thematic area is the care economy (with a focus on child care). The Report includes activities that engage local research expertise on women’s economic opportunities. The refugee component will be further developed, and a Concept Note will be shared with the Steering Committee for virtual endorsement before any implementation is started. In the discussion, the importance of learning and knowledge management was raised, and the communications strategy will be instrumental in defining activities in support of this.
- Dr. Ibtissam voiced a concern of the MGF Iraq delegation regarding the fact that all countries receive the same amount of funding and suggested that given the larger population of Iraq it be considered that a larger amount be allocated to Iraq.
- It was suggested to **create a mechanism for making MGF work plans (with budgets), Steering Committee minutes, progress publicly available**, including financial information. The Secretariat will inform SC members of potential mechanisms to be put in place as soon as possible for virtual consideration, to make sure it is up and running by the next SC meeting in October.

Decisions and next steps:

1. The minutes of the last SC meeting (June 13, 2019) were adopted.
2. The Iraq work plan was endorsed.
3. The Lebanon work plan was given interim endorsement. While the Steering Committee agrees in principle with the activities and budget (subject to adjustments based on conversations with key partners), before providing its full endorsement required to start implementing, the Lebanon MGF team will need to submit an updated work plan in which the stakeholders are identified accompanied by a technical note on implementation arrangements to the MGF Secretariat. The Secretariat will circulate these documents for virtual review and endorsement of the Steering Committee on an absence of objection basis.
4. Canada, Lebanon and Iraq will share written comments to the Regional Work Plan by Monday July 15.
5. The Regional Work Plan was endorsed but will be updated based on written comments to be received. The final version will be shared by Friday July 19.
6. The next Steering Committee meeting is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday October 9, 2pm to 4pm.

ANNEX 1. List of Participants and Observers

Participants:

- Government of Lebanon: **Dia Captan**, Advisor to Minister of State for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth (delegated SC member)
Chantal Bou Akl, Projects coordinator, National Commission for Lebanese Women (delegated SC member)
Frances Abouzeid, Ministry of State for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth (National Coordinator)
- Government of Jordan: **Boshra Mashour Ben Tareef**, Head of the Gender Division, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (delegated SC member)
Huda Ayesh, Jordan National Commission for Women (National Coordinator and delegated SC member)
- Government of Iraq: **Thikra Alwash**, Mayor of Baghdad, Chairperson of Permanent High Committee of the Advancement of Iraqi Women
Oqoud Hussain Salman, Director General, Human Development Directorate, Ministry of Planning (delegated SC member)
Ibtisam Aziz, Women Empowerment Directorate, General Secretariat of Council of Ministers (National Coordinator)
- Government of Canada: **Gavin Buchan**, Executive Director, Middle East Development Programming, Global Affairs Canada
- Government of Norway: **Raghda Allouche**, Royal Norwegian Embassy in Beirut (delegated SC member)
- UN Women: **Rachel Dore-Weeks**, Special Representative of UN Women's Regional Director in Lebanon
- World Bank: **Saroj Kumar Jha**, Regional Director, Middle East Department
- IFC: **Dalia Wahba**, Country Manager (delegated SC member)
- MGF Secretariat: **Benu Bidani**, Practice Manager, Poverty and Equity MENA
Haneen Sayed, Lead Social Protection, Jobs and Gender Specialist, World Bank
Jonna Lundwall, Social Scientist, World Bank

Observers:

- Iraq: **Salam Shahab**, Technical & Operational Officer (Consultant)
- Lebanon: **Samar Boulos**, Ministry of State for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth
Maha Quol, Technical & Operational Officer (Consultant)
- Government of Canada: **Elizabeth Geagea**, Embassy of Canada (Jordan/Regional)
Aly-Khan Rajani, Embassy of Canada (Lebanon)
Aicha Mouchref, Embassy of Canada (Lebanon)
- UN Women: **Faten Tibi**, Lebanon
- World Bank Group: **Sammar Essmat**, IFC (Regional)
Yasmin Mohamed, IFC Mashreq Lead
Angela Elzir Assy, Lebanon WBG Lead
Gharam Dexter Alkastelani, Iraq WBG Lead
Shereen Abbady, Consultant (Jordan)